

To the Members of London City Council,

I am writing to you as a volunteer with 519 Pursuit, but more importantly, as someone who has witnessed firsthand what happens when people are left without support in our city.

London currently has over 2,000 unhoused individuals, and across Canada, more than 235,000 people experience homelessness each year. These numbers are not just statistics—they represent real people who are struggling to survive in conditions most of us could not imagine. Rising housing costs, combined with inadequate social assistance from programs like Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), have made it nearly impossible for many individuals to secure even the most basic housing. For some, living in a tent or a car is not a choice, it is the only option left.

Through outreach, we meet people who are elderly and sleeping in vehicles, individuals who are paralyzed and exposed to the elements, and far too many who have suffered amputations due to untreated frostbite due to lack of resources available to them. These are extreme, preventable outcomes that continue to happen because the system is overwhelmed and under-resourced.

519 Pursuit fills a critical gap. Our volunteers are out every single day, in all conditions—extreme heat, pouring rain, and freezing temperatures to deliver food, water, clothing, tents, and blankets. We also provide wellness checks and connect individuals to urgent medical care, often before it is too late. This kind of proactive outreach reduces reliance on emergency services, hospital admissions, and crisis interventions, ultimately saving public resources while saving lives.

But beyond the statistics and services, there is a human reality that cannot be ignored.

Two years ago, while delivering supplies, a friend and I heard a man crying for help from an encampment. We found him trapped inside a collapsed tent, in excruciating pain. His feet were completely frozen, and the smell of decaying tissue was overwhelming. No one else had come. No one had checked on him. He was completely alone.

We called for help, and emergency responders, along with London Cares, arrived. I firmly believe that if we had not been there at that moment, he would have died. Sometimes, one small act is the reason someone survives.

That is what outreach does—it reaches people before they become another statistic.

Now imagine that moment never happened.

Without outreach, there is no one walking through the encampment areas, no one finding people before infection turns fatal, before hunger turns desperate, before hope disappears completely. Programs like 519 Pursuit are not optional, they are paramount.

Many individuals we (519 Pursuit) serve have experienced years of stigma and rejection. They are often treated as if they are invisible or undeserving of care. Yet something as small as a kind conversation or a handmade bracelet can remind them that they matter and people do care. These moments build trust, and that trust is what allows us to support people in so many meaningful ways.

Shelters alone cannot meet the need. They are frequently at capacity, and when there are no available beds, people are turned back outside into unsafe and often life-threatening conditions. Without outreach programs like 519 Pursuit, there is no consistent safety net.

If funding for 519 Pursuit is withdrawn, the consequences will be immediate and severe. There will be fewer wellness checks, fewer interventions, and more people suffering without support. Emergency services will face increased strain, and preventable medical crises will rise. Most importantly, lives will be lost, quietly and unnecessarily.

This is not simply a budget decision. It is a decision about what kind of city London chooses to be.

Do we accept a reality where people freeze, go untreated, unfed, and die alone? Or do we choose to support the organizations that are actively preventing that outcome every single day?

519 Pursuit is not an optional service, it is a vital service for people who have nowhere else to turn.

And I ask you to sit with this for a moment: if that man in the collapsed tent had been your father, your brother, your friend—would you have wanted someone to walk past him, or someone to stop? Because that is the choice in front of you now. Funding 519 Pursuit means choosing to stop. Choosing to see. Choosing to save lives. Please, do not look away.

City Council, this is a direct plea: approve the one-year contract extension through the reserved social service funds. Removing this indispensable service will not just create gaps, it will cost lives. People will go unseen, untreated, unfed. They will suffer, and some will die, alone and unnoticed. The cost of losing this funding will be measured not just in dollars, but in human lives.

You have the power to prevent that.

Please choose to extend funding for the lives that depend on this decision.

In service of dignity and human life,

Michelle Ferguson