

Dear Mayor and London City Councilors,

My name is Gal Harper and I'm writing this letter as a concerned Londoner. I'm a local business owner, an activist, and a father of two beautiful young children. I am also a black man who has witnessed discrimination in health care, which resulted in the untimely passing of my father.

There is a narrative that we can segregate our way out of a pandemic. Omicron has proven that is not true, so please do not normalize this kind of thinking. There is no place for discrimination in health care and it should not appear just because a pandemic is declared.

We know that some races have greater susceptibility to some diseases. If this becomes the case for a COVID variant, will people's cry for "safety" follow a similar path of segregating the unvaccinated and return us to race based segregation?

Did you say, "It could never happen in Canada?" Well, I disagree. Growing up Black in Ontario provided me with an unfortunate number of experiences where discrimination and even segregation were apparent. I've also spent much of my adult life studying history, and I can assure you that the segregational tactics being used today have no place in modern society.

If I had to explain to a white Londoner what it's like to be Black in a racist city, I would tell them to go to a local grocery store without a mask and make note of the looks and treatment received. You would experience strangers looking at you as if you don't belong, avoiding you as if disgusted by your very existence, and acting threatened and scared by your presence. There would be store employees treating you like a second-class citizen, sometimes even refusing you service or giving you different levels of service. This is what is happening now to our communities. People are being taught and conditioned to fear their neighbours, their friends, and even their family. It's not how we ought to treat each other and it's definitely not the type of behaviour that should be enshrined in policy.

A councillor said that many strategies are being used to combat COVID. If that is true then, please, why not rely on those and leave off discrimination which may do more harm than good.

Sincerely,

Gal Harper