



February 2, 2023

OPEN LETTER TO MAYOR TORY AND MEMBERS OF COUNCIL
MAKE TORONTO SAFER FOR EVERYONE WITH SERVICE THAT MEETS DEMAND

Dear Mayor Tory and Members of Council,

As presidents of two major municipal unions, we submit this open letter for your consideration as you move toward final approval of the 2023 City Budget on February 14.

It seems like nearly every day there's a [report of violence on the TTC](#), on our [streets](#), in our parks, our [schools](#), or in our libraries. Violence in these spaces is violence in our members' workplaces. Our members are often witnesses or the first on the scene to call for help or take care of injured people. And, since the start of the pandemic, we are nearly twice as likely to be victims of an attack ourselves.

Like every other Torontonians, these conflicts are happening on our way to work, in our kids' recreation and hangout spots, our parents' trips to the grocery store. These are our daily routes, our happy places. When a violent incident or other crisis situation occurs in our most frequented spaces, whether affecting us directly or a member of our community, it shakes the foundation of what is a safe place.

Things are tense right now. For library workers, transit workers, and other frontline public servants, the frequency of these incidents is causing fear, worry, and burnout. As leaders of over 14,000 workers combined, we speak for their concerns as stakeholders in this city—not only as public servants, but also as residents.

Transit and library workers want to be able to do the work we were hired to do, which we are skilled at, and which many of us love. We want to serve our community, return home safely, and live a good quality of life with our families. We want respect for our contributions from our government. And what we want for ourselves, we want for all.

But the promise of Toronto—the promise of a good quality of life and a city that takes care of its residents—is at risk. From the rising incidence of violence to cuts to transit service, to rapid inflation and a crushing housing and rental market, from long waitlists for recreation programs to a vastly insufficient shelter system, the city we've got can't—or won't—keep pace with the needs of its residents.

This is the ramification of decades of underinvestment in city services and infrastructure coming to bear. In budget after city budget, municipal leaders have demonstrated unwillingness to pay for the city we all deserve. Rather than building a public infrastructure to meet the community's needs, the leadership's desire to keep costs down dictates the level of available service.

The very purpose of public infrastructure is to meet the needs of a city. When there is inadequate public infrastructure to meet demand, the demand doesn't disappear. Instead, it shows up in places that are ill-suited to handle it. It is inappropriate for TTC vehicles and libraries to act as shelters. The street is not an appropriate substitute for a public washroom. A bench is not a bed. A coffee shop is

not a respite centre.

Young people, seniors, low-income and socially isolated community members depend on free and low-cost public spaces to connect with other people, stay active, and participate in society. That's why the city's youth engagement strategy includes youth hubs, and why, when they aren't accessible, young people are more susceptible to harm. When there is no dedicated place for marginalized and vulnerable people to simply exist, they are forced to use spaces that are not so safe and not so welcoming.

It's no surprise that altercations between community members are increasing in public spaces.

Our systems are strained, and the public is strained. Frontline workers have been thrust in to fill the service gap. It is unfair to workers, and unfair to residents. It's unsafe, by design.

This is all avoidable. We can make this city safer and more supportive for vulnerable people.

First, realize that community violence is occurring in a broader social context, and that it's the government's job to shape that context. All orders of government have a role to play here.

Second, recognize that frontline public workers actively contribute to creating the culture of our city. Jane Jacobs called it "eyes on the street": we're all safer when more of us are around to look out for each other. Even [TTC Chair Jon Burnside has said that more staff presence can help prevent crisis situations](#). We hope he and other members of Council will keep this in mind when staff cuts are on the table.

Third, fund and appropriately resource the first-rate public services we already have. Our library and transit systems are envied around the world. Let them shine the way they were designed to. Ensure that staffing levels are maintained so that workers can do the jobs they were hired for.

Fourth, commit to building for the long term. Shelters are a stop-gap measure where permanent affordable housing is needed. Additional police and transit constables may make some people feel safer right now, but faster and more reliable TTC service would help move people along. Youth hubs are needed, but so are public parks, basketball courts, art programs, and good entry-level jobs.

To our civic leaders: We are the eyes and ears on the street and in the system. We know what the problems are. So above all, what we want is for management and our political leaders to listen to us and work with us. Respect and value us not only for the services we deliver, but also for our contributions to shaping our society as members of it. And hear us when we say: we want a city that works for all of us. Let's commit to building *that* Toronto.

Sincerely,



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