



Social Development Centre
— WATERLOO REGION —

**SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE
WATERLOO REGION**

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Media Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE WATERLOO REGION CALLS ON ALL LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS TO JOIN THE RANKS OF PRINCIPLED MUNICIPAL COUNCILLORS TAKING A STAND AGAINST THE BRUTALIZATION OF ENCAMPMENT RESIDENTS

Social Development Centre Waterloo Region (SDC) is encouraged that a growing group of local Councillors is voicing their opposition to the 15 Ontario mayors requesting the use of the notwithstanding clause, a powerful constitutional tool that can override the Charter-protected rights of unhoused community members living in encampments – and we call on all elected officials in Waterloo Region to join this principled action.

It has been barely two years since an Ontario Superior Court judge ruled in January 2023 that it would be a Charter violation for the Region of Waterloo to prevent unhoused community members from living in encampments “when the number of homeless persons exceeds the number of available accessible shelter beds in the Region.” Also, it has been less than eight months since our Regional Council voted in April 2024 to officially adopt the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, a framework with 30 recommendations for preventing, addressing, and ending chronic homelessness, created with extensive input from lived experts, local researchers, and service providers.

In the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, the Region of Waterloo commits to a human rights-based approach to housing. “Advocates and lived experts have been working with regional staff for two years now to embed human rights into encampment policies and protocols,” says David Alton, Facilitator of Lived Expertise at SDC. “We can see a progressive shift towards more human rights-compliant approaches by the Region, progress that the notwithstanding clause knowingly violates.”

“SDC has been studying trends in evictions and displacement since 2019 and alerting our municipal governments of their responsibility for mitigation, for example through bylaws that protect tenants against evictions,” says Aleksandra Petrovic Graonic, Executive Director at SDC. “Staff in our Eviction Prevention program continue to witness how marginalized residents – those who are impoverished, living with disabilities and health challenges, and those facing discrimination and racism – fall through the cracks every day while we lose affordable dwellings at a rampant rate.”

Invoking the notwithstanding clause would override the January 2023 court proceeding and undermine the Regional Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. Without adequate shelter beds or housing options for people who are homeless, encampment evictions do nothing more than forcibly disperse or incarcerate people who have nowhere to go, upheave their social support systems, disrupt their connection to programs and services, increase their exposure to the risk of serious injury or death, and make it inevitable and necessary for another encampment to take shape in yet another location.

SDC echoes the [Unsheltered Campaign](#) and [Citizens for Cambridge](#) in acknowledging and applauding a newly formed coalition of principled elected officials – among them, Regional Councillors Doug Craig, Rob Deutschmann, Colleen James, Chantal Huinink, Kari Williams, and Pam Wolf, as well as Cambridge City Councillors Ross Earnshaw, Scott Hamilton, and Sheri Roberts; and Kitchener City Councillors Debbie Chapman and Stephanie Stretch – for openly voicing their opposition to the invocation of the notwithstanding clause to clear homeless encampments; and we urge all remaining elected officials in Waterloo Region to do the same.

Strong and vocal opposition is needed to stop the brutalization of residents living in encampments under the guise of addressing homelessness. Community members who wish to help can:

1. Join the [Homes, Not Handcuffs campaign](#), started by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) and promoted locally by Supportive Housing Advocacy Waterloo Region (SHAWR), to urge your mayor and City/Township councillors to stand in opposition to the 15 big city mayors seeking the use of the notwithstanding clause to clear encampments.
2. [Sign this petition](#), started by Toronto-based crisis worker Diana Chan McNally, to add your voice to the chorus of over 5,000 concerned citizens.

About Social Development Centre Waterloo Region

The Social Development Centre Waterloo Region (SDC) was incorporated in 1967 and, in the decades since, has incubated countless community projects, grassroots groups, and sibling non-profits. Today our primary pillars are Housing & Homelessness, Grassroots Supports, and Lived Expertise. Our programs include Eviction Prevention, CivicHub Waterloo Region, Lived Expertise Consultancy, and Festival of Neighbourhoods. Learn about our work at www.waterlooregion.org.

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