



November 20, 2018

His Worship Jim Watson  
Mayor of the City of Ottawa  
110 Laurier Ave West  
Ottawa, ON K1P 1J1

**RE: Closure of Forward Family Shelter**

Dear Mayor Watson,

We are writing in concern for the 14 families living in the Forward Family Shelter who were only recently given notice of its imminent closure on December 15. This sudden closure will have a significant impact on vulnerable shelter residents who will have to uproot their families within the month.

Right now, the overriding feeling among the shelter residents is of confusion and fear. There is uncertainty about safety, transportation and a higher cost of living associated with the move.

Somerset West Community Health Centre (SWCHC) has been providing wraparound supports to the families at the Forward Family Shelter for the last 18 years, including after school programs, playgroups, a school liaison support for children from kindergarten to high school age, and ongoing connections and referrals to other community services. A nurse practitioner also provides regular and ongoing outreach to shelter residents. Being removed from these resources means that families will have to once again navigate and access new services.

This move will disrupt critical support networks and ultimately create more costs for the City. Due to the temporary housing that is being proposed, residents will be moved multiple times, forcing them to relocate twice in a matter of months while also searching for permanent housing.

Taking children and youth out of these communities mid-year will also have a significant impact on their studies and social networks. For post-secondary students, a Dec. 15 move would conflict with the exam period, adding additional pressure and stress.

The disruptions caused by these moves will put additional strain on families who are already under a significant level of stress and increases the likelihood that they may become homeless again.

**We ask that the City defer the closure of the shelter to the end of the school year. Deferring the closure would decrease stress on already vulnerable families, provide needed time for families to find permanent housing, and allow children to finish their school year.**

In addition to the impact on vulnerable families, the closure of the Forward Family Shelter highlights the housing and homelessness crisis in our city. As noted by

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Health Centres  
Les centres de santé  
communautaire  
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the Alliance to End Homelessness (ATEH) Ottawa's Progress Report, shelter use by families increased by 33% between 2014 and 2017. The City needs a long term plan for family shelter space with the closure of the Forward Family Shelter.

As a community-based organization, we are seeing the growing inequality in our neighbourhoods and the dire need for more affordable housing for those living on low income. **If the Forward Family Shelter will be closing, it is critical that the property be retained by the City and not sold to a developer. This retention will permit a new affordable housing development to house people in highest need.**

We urge the City to halt any decisions on the Forward Family Shelter site until there has been an open and transparent discussion. We support Councillors Jeff Leiper and Catherine McKenney's request that more information on the closure of the shelter, including the plan for the Forward shelter property, be brought to the next Community and Protective Services (CPS) Committee meeting for full discussion in an open forum.

We look forward to your response on the deferral of the shelter closure, the plan for the Forward Family Shelter property, and the discussion of the closure and next steps at the next CPS Committee meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Frojmovic".

Michel Frojmovic  
Chair, Board of Directors

cc.  
Councillor Catherine McKenney  
Councillor Jeff Leiper