



Ombudsman Toronto

Listening. Investigating. Improving City Services.

Kwame Addo
Ombudsman

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Sent by email

The Honourable Lena Metlege Diab, P.C., K.C., M.P.
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
Email: lenametlege.diab@parl.gc.ca

The Honourable Gregor Robertson, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Housing and Infrastructure
Minister responsible for Pacific Economic Development Canada
Email: gregor.robertson@parl.gc.ca

Dear Ministers Diab and Robertson,

In light of your government's proposed budget, we are writing about your intent to reduce federal funding for sheltering refugee claimants under the Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP). While the number of refugee claimants has declined, the City's shelters continue to house those who are already here and unable to find permanent stable housing. We understand the federal funding reduction will leave Toronto with a \$143.1 million shortfall—representing the loss of approximately 1,800 shelter beds.

As an independent accountability office, we are tasked with holding the City of Toronto accountable for advancing the right to adequate housing. That means we regularly serve people who have been negatively impacted by government failure to uphold that right.

Toronto is the main arrival point in Canada for people fleeing war, occupation and human rights abuses; currently the City's shelters house more than 3,500 refugee claimants, about 40% of the people in the shelter system. Cuts of the scale proposed by the federal government will force both refugee claimants, and anyone else trying to access shelter beds, into further precarious forms of homelessness. They will be forced to seek shelter in community centres, libraries, on public transit and in public parks. The proposed IHAP cuts will lead to an even heavier burden on municipal government services.

The cuts are inconsistent with Canada's domestic and international legal obligations. Failing to provide shelter to refugee claimants breaches Canada's obligations under human rights law. *The National Housing Strategy Act*, 2019, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights state that Canadian governments must use the maximum available resources possible to progressively realize the right to adequate housing.

As Ministers holding complementary mandates related to this issue, your leadership is critical. We urge you both to ensure that the IHAP funding provided for Toronto covers the actual municipal costs for sheltering refugee claimants.

Canada's commitments—to human rights, to international refugee protection, and to our own reputation as a safe and welcoming country—are on the line. Anything less will end in far greater human costs and expense to our governments.

Yours sincerely,



Kwame Addo
Ombudsman, City of Toronto



Reema Patel
Deputy Ombudsman (Housing), City of Toronto

CC: Her Worship Olivia Chow, Mayor of Toronto