

Dear Municipal Council Members,

Subject: Support for a Human-Rights and Housing-Focused Approach to Encampment Response

On behalf of the John Howard Society of Kawartha Lakes & Haliburton, I am writing to express our strong support for the adoption of a human-rights based and housing-focused approach to addressing encampments in our community. As an organization that advocates for social justice and works with individuals who are marginalized, we firmly believe that a more compassionate and equitable response to homelessness is not only necessary, but long overdue.

The challenges of homelessness are deeply intertwined with broader systemic issues, including poverty, mental illness, substance use, and a lack of affordable housing. Responding to encampments with a focus on enforcement or displacement fails to address these root causes, and often exacerbates the vulnerability of those already facing significant barriers. A human-rights based approach ensures that individuals are treated with dignity, respect, and empathy, while also acknowledging their rights to safety, security, and access to essential services.

However, it is equally important that this approach is combined with a clear, housing-focused response. The lack of safe, affordable housing is one of the key drivers of homelessness, and therefore, any long-term strategy must prioritize the provision of stable housing. A housing-first model recognizes that individuals need secure housing in order to address the underlying factors that contribute to their homelessness. By ensuring access to permanent, supportive housing, we create an opportunity for people to rebuild their lives in a secure environment, rather than cycling through temporary shelters or remaining in unsafe encampments.

At the John Howard Society, we are committed to advocating for policies and practices that address the systemic issues at the root of homelessness, and we believe that a human-rights and housing-focused approach is both the moral and practical solution. This approach will not only help individuals experiencing homelessness find stable housing, but it will also contribute to a healthier and more just community overall, reducing the long-term costs associated with chronic homelessness, emergency services, and criminal justice system involvement.

We urge the Municipal Council to adopt policies that embrace both human rights and housing-first principles in responding to encampments. We believe that this approach will create better outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness, reduce harm, and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable community for everyone.

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The John Howard Society is ready and willing to work alongside the Municipal Council, social service agencies, law enforcement, and other community organizations to ensure that our collective response to homelessness is grounded in justice, dignity, and compassion.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. We look forward to working together toward a safer, fairer, and more supportive community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dana Hetherton". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Dana Hetherton
Chief Executive Officer