



Chris Fonseca
Acting Mayor
Councillor, Ward 3
City of Mississauga

The Honourable Marc Miller

Minister of Immigration Refugees and Citizenship
House of Commons Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

November 17, 2023

Re: Urgent Need to Release Peel IHAP Funding

Dear Minister Miller,

By now you will have heard the heartbreaking news that an adult male in his early forties who was forced to camp outside the Dundas Street Shelter in Mississauga sadly lost his life earlier this week. With up to 150 asylum seekers camping outside this shelter every day, this is undignified and unacceptable in a country as prosperous as Canada. One life lost is one too many.

The issue of asylum seekers in our shelters has reached a critical breaking point – this is a humanitarian emergency and it must be treated like one.

I wanted to take the opportunity to follow up on several letters that have been sent to the federal government regarding this matter, urging additional supports for cities across Ontario to deal with this crisis. This includes letters sent by the Ontario Big City Mayors, GTHA Mayors and the Peel Region Mayors and Chair. This is in addition to the call you had with Mayor Crombie in September, where she requested an update on Peel Region's \$19.3 million Interim Housing Assistance Program application. Lastly, I was proud to table a motion at Peel Regional Council earlier this month that passed unanimously urging the federal government to flow this funding immediately. I've included a copy for your review.

With over 1,100 asylum seekers in our shelters, we are operating at a 320% occupancy rate. This number only continues to grow daily since we first started welcoming East African asylum seekers into our shelters in June and is simply unsustainable. Since then, we have seen an over 60% growth in refugees in our shelter system and are sadly no longer able to honour our long-standing "no turn away" policy. As you know, our shelter system is not designed to support refugees and asylum seekers from a capacity perspective, but also in terms of wrap-around supports and services. Cities are simply not equipped to handle these pressures.

As Acting Mayor, it breaks my heart that this is the first impression of Mississauga or Canada that our newcomers see. Sleeping on the streets, outside shelters and in temporary accommodations in churches is no way to welcome them to our country. It's simply unacceptable.

Our staff at the Region of Peel and Black community and faith organizations across the GTHA have been stepping up in a big way to provide those in need with shelter and food and I thank them for their efforts. But they are not equipped to deal with this issue, nor should this be expected of them.

It's important to note that Peel Region has heavily invested in helping those in need secure affordable housing and shelter. Only 24% of our operating revenues for emergency housing flow from provincial and federal transfers, the rest is covered by Peel Region property taxpayers. Despite these investments, we are

spending approximately \$3.5 million a month on overflow accommodations in hotels to support the recent wave of refugees. On top of this, we've earmarked an additional \$25 million in next year's budget for housing support. While we are happy to help, I think you will agree, that the property tax is not the best way to raise funds for these needs.

As you are aware, the Region of Peel has applied for \$19.3 million in funding for the Interim Housing Assistance Program and is patiently waiting to hear back from your ministry. With winter just around the corner and our shelters bursting at the seams, we need emergency funding from the federal and provincial governments to house these vulnerable people today. I'm afraid there will be more deaths if immediate action is not taken.

In addition to releasing IHAP funds immediately, I encourage the federal government to work with the provincial government to match funds through the Canada Ontario Housing Benefit. To match the reality on the ground, we need at least \$10 million in a streamlined housing subsidy, and ask that our provincial and federal partners work with us to meet the rising demand.

We will also continue to advocate with neighbouring GTHA cities to establish a dedicated welcome centre near Pearson Airport to ensure those arriving receive federal support immediately, which will help offset the pressure on our shelters.

Welcoming refugees - people who've given up everything they know to flee to a new place for salvation and to escape violence and harm - is something we pride ourselves on as Canadians and Mississaugans. But welcoming has to be more than simply saying you can stay here for a while. Whatever we invest in them now will be paid back many times over as they make our country their home. We are Canadians. We need to and we can do better.

We need to work together – across all levels of government – and with community partners to ensure that those arriving in Canada find success in their new home. As a City and a Region, we will continue to make investments and we will continue to do everything possible to ensure that those arriving here in Mississauga and across the Region are set up for success in their new home.

With Canada set to welcome 500,000 immigrants every year by 2025, your leadership will be integral in ensuring that newcomers have the supports they need to not only settle in our country but to grow and thrive. The dozens of people arriving at our doorstep each day cannot afford to wait any longer. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Farnecy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Acting Mayor of Mississauga
Councillor, Ward 3

CC:
Mississauga MPs
Mississauga MPPs
Peel Region Mayors
Nando Iannicca, Chair of the Region of Peel
OBCM

**Resolution
Regional Council Meeting**

Agenda Number: 8.2
Date: October 26, 2023

Moved by **Councillor Fonseca**

Seconded by **Councillor Tedjo**

Whereas the Region of Peel has a no turn away policy in our shelter system;

And whereas, Peel has played an important role in supporting hundreds of asylum claimants seeking refuge by providing housing, financial assistance, medical and social supports and services;

And whereas, there are 1041 asylum claimants currently in our Peel shelter system, as well as 100 plus unsheltered outside the Dundas shelter and other shelters;

And whereas, Peel has seen a 307 per cent occupancy in our shelter system including operating ten overflow hotels, and five specifically dedicated for asylum claimants;

And whereas, 66 per cent of the shelter population are asylum claimants;

And whereas, there are 128 known encampments in Peel;

And whereas, Peel has seen a 167 per cent increase in encampments since 2022;

And whereas, Peel has seen unbudgeted and escalating costs in Peel totaling approximately \$3.5 million per month investing in our shelter system and wrap around services in 2023, which is simply not sustainable;

And whereas, Peel plays a unique role as a “gateway” to the country for asylum seekers and refugees, having the busiest airport, Toronto Pearson International Airport, and Peel continues to see an influx of asylum claimants arriving to our shelters daily;

And whereas, on September 28, 2023 Region of Peel Chair Nando Iannicca, Mayor of Brampton Patrick Brown, Mayor of Caledon Annette Groves and Mayor of Mississauga Bonnie Crombie sent a letter to the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, and the Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, outlining the crisis situation and requesting the immediate assistance required for asylum claimants;

And whereas, on October 26, 2023, Region of Peel Council unanimously supported the report “Homelessness Policy Programs” outlining Peel’s commitment to address the housing and homeless crisis in Peel including and specific to addressing our Emergency Shelter Systems:

1. 2023 shelter overflow costs estimated at \$26.9 million, of which approximately \$15 million is attributed to asylum claimants.
2. 2023 Housing Support operating budget includes \$3.2 million HPP funding.
3. \$3.5 million Reaching Home and \$0.8 million Regional funding for shelter overflow costs.
4. If the anticipated \$16.5 million gap is not reimbursed through Peel’s IHAP 2023 funding claim, shelter overflow costs could drive a deficit in the 2023 Housing Support operating service.
5. Shelter overflow costs for 2024 are anticipated to reach approximately \$42 million (currently estimated at \$3.5M per month).
6. A 2024 Housing Support operating budget includes \$4.9 million HPP funding, \$6.7 million Reaching Home, and \$0.8 million Regional funding for shelter overflow costs.

And whereas, as of October 26, 2023, external funding from Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP) and Peel's Reaching Home for 2024/2025 has not yet been announced;

And whereas, without confirmation of external Homelessness Policy and Programs funding, shelter overflow costs could drive an operating deficit in the 2024 Housing Support program;

Therefore be it resolved that:

1. Peel Regional Council call on the Federal Government for immediate assistance for asylum claimants through the IHAP funding allocation of at least \$15 million to recoup costs for 2023 and up to \$42 million into 2024; and
2. Request that the Federal Government move towards an allocation-based approach to disbursing the IHAP funding based on number of asylum claimants served, rather than an application based process in order to be consistent amongst service managers; and
3. At a minimum, match the Provincial contribution of \$2.11 million announced for Peel through the Canada Ontario Housing Benefit on September 18, 2023; and
4. Request that the Federal Government create a dedicated support program for In-Land and Point of Entry asylum claimants similar to the Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) Program to prevent homelessness for asylum seekers and the need to rely on the severely constrained and the already under funded emergency shelter and community housing systems programs in Peel; and
5. Request that the Federal Government create a Dedicated Asylum Claimant Program, separate and apart from the community housing and homelessness system to include Regional Reception Centres where individuals can access community amenities, services and supports and temporary emergency beds to ensure successful integration into employment and the community; and
6. Encourage the Federal Government to work with all levels of government including Peel, City of Mississauga, City of Brampton and Town of Caledon, Province of Ontario and partners such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and the Canadian Council of Refugees to establish an Intergovernmental Strategy that will outline roles and responsibilities to support and care for our most vulnerable and those who come to Canada for a safe and better life.



Regional Chair