

**MARCH 14, 2025**

Honourable Nathaniel Erskine-Smith, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities  
180 Kent Street, Suite 1100  
Ottawa, ON K1P 5P5

Honourable Ravi Kahlon, M.L.A.  
Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs  
501 Belleville Street,  
Victoria, BC V8V 2H2

By email: [minister-ministre@inf.gc.ca](mailto:minister-ministre@inf.gc.ca), [HMA.minister@gov.bc.ca](mailto:HMA.minister@gov.bc.ca)

Dear Minister Kahlon and Minister Erskine-Smith,

In our capacity as the Canadian Federal Housing Advocate and British Columbia's Human Rights Commissioner, we are writing to express our shared recommendation for the Province's allocation of funding to address homelessness.

Our joint recommendation is motivated by City of Vancouver's recent motion to pause efforts to build new supportive housing. This decision put the rights of people without homes at risk, especially following on the heels of other recent decisions by the City such as the Hastings and Crab Park decampments and bylaw amendments that further restrict where homeless people can shelter in public spaces.

The City of Vancouver's motion appears to be directly oppositional to the provincial strategy to increase supportive housing, as well as the mandate directive for the Ministry to enhance the delivery of complex and supportive housing to keep communities safe. It also directly implicates all neighbouring municipalities and, as the most populated city in the province, sets an example for others who have even fewer resources.

Acting in compliance with human rights protections is a legal obligation for every municipality in Canada. It is not a choice. In a time of economic uncertainty, this becomes all the more pressing. A human rights-based approach is the best way to resolve complex

issues related to housing precarity, as is reflected in many of your policies and funding programs.

A human rights-based approach includes:

- clear commitments to human rights and consistent human rights language from all political leaders, alongside actual compliance with human rights law;
- urgent measures to protect the life, dignity and human rights of people who are living in encampments;
- a commitment to repealing laws (including by-laws) which contribute to the criminalization and insecurity of encampment residents;
- meaningful engagement of Indigenous governments and organizations; and,
- meaningful engagement of encampment residents.

In light of these principles, we believe greater leadership and transparency from higher levels of government are needed to ensure that all communities receiving funding, services, or infrastructure from your ministries are compliant with human rights laws.

The federal government and the Government of British Columbia recently announced that an agreement to support people experiencing homelessness, including sheltering in encampments, has been signed as part of the Unsheltered Homelessness and Encampments Initiative (UHEI) targeting three municipalities, including Vancouver. We note that this initiative, included in Canada's Housing Plan (April 2024), was announced to "support human rights-based community action plans that commit to a housing-first approach to ending encampments, and include supportive and transitional housing, housing-focused services, and rent supplements specifically dedicated to individuals living in encampments or experiencing homelessness."

As it relates to the UHEI and funding for the Community Encampment Response Plans (CERP), Homeless Encampment Action Response Team (HEART) and Homeless Encampment Action Response Temporary Housing (HEARTH) program, we are hoping you can advise:

- How you plan to ensure the integrity of these programs and funds, including how you will be reviewing them for effectiveness, fiscal responsibility and compliance with law?
- How you plan to evaluate if they are taking human rights-based approach and document lessons learned?
- How you plan to intervene if it is found that human rights are being disrespected during the delivery of services or programming?

Our strong recommendation is to ensure that local governments commit to taking a human rights-based approach to addressing homelessness, including through the provision of



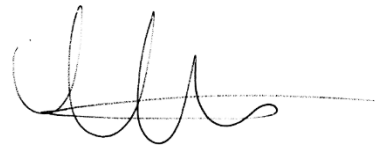
specific and actionable plans, in order to be eligible to receive these funds. These new resources are an opportunity to meaningfully improve the lives of people of British Columbia. However, more money does not guarantee success. A human rights-based approach is not only the best way to address issues related to homelessness and encampments, it is the only way to do so effectively without causing further harm. Addressing homelessness in a way that undermines human rights can put the lives and wellbeing of unhoused people at risk and make our communities less safe. It should not be accepted as an effective or adequate solution to the complex problems of homelessness.

Your governments have a critical role to play to ensure this funding makes a lasting difference in communities. We must work to ensure that everyone has access to permanent, affordable, and adequate housing. Until that is a reality for all, there is an urgent need to protect the lives, dignity, and human rights of people living without a home. To support our commitment to public accountability and responsibility to serve the people of British Columbia, this letter may also be made public.

Sincerely,



Kasari Govender  
Human Rights Commissioner



Marie-Josée Houle  
Federal Housing Advocate

cc: Sandra Singh, Deputy City Manager, City of Vancouver  
[Sandra.Singh@vancouver.ca](mailto:Sandra.Singh@vancouver.ca)

