



**Canadian Union of
Public Employees**

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Nancy Murphy
Don Styles
Charles VanVliet

Bargaining Units:

Bridgepoint Hospital
- Nurses & Paramedical
Units
- Service Units

City of Toronto
- Full-Time
- Long-Term Care Homes
& Services Part-Time
- Recreation Workers
Part-Time
- Unit B Part-Time

*Toronto Community
Housing Corporation*

**SERVING OUR
MEMBERS
SINCE
1942**

July 24, 2020

Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild
10th Floor East Tower, 100 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5H 2N2

Dear members of the Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild (TORR),

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 79 represents 20,000 municipal staff in City administration, public health, child care, shelters and supportive housing, and a number of other critical City services. On their behalf, we are writing to you in anticipation of the City of Toronto's plan for economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Responding to the City of Toronto's deficit in a responsible way

We would like to put forth our concerns about how the City of Toronto will respond to operational shortfalls in the 2020 and 2021 budgets as a result of increased costs of delivering services and lost revenue sources during the pandemic. We are fully aware of the City's financial crisis, and that the City is not permitted to operate under a deficit, but we urge the administration to *avert any possibilities of imposing austerity measures*, such as mass layoffs of staff or significant reductions to services—these measures would greatly compromise the delivery of world-class, essential City services that residents rely on.

In order to respond to the City's dire financial need, CUPE Ontario and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) have jointly called for a federal-provincial cost shared emergency financial relief plan for municipalities. We hope that any new funding from higher levels of government will go to the preservation of essential City services and the staffing resources needed to provide such services. Our members have shown a great sense of bravery during the pandemic by continuing to come into work at a time of fear and uncertainty. Instead of going on emergency leave many staff volunteered to be redeployed into City services such as in long-term care homes, shelters and community agencies. In addition, our colleagues in Toronto Public Libraries set up temporary food distribution centres. We would like the City to give publicly recognition of their efforts by establishing an employee recognition program to recognize the dedication of City workers during the pandemic and thereafter.

There is no need to cut or contract out public services

We also realize that during times of financial strain governments may turn to contracting out services or selling off public assets to try to 'find savings'; but we highly oppose privatizing measures as it would mean the loss of public accountability, deteriorating the quality of services, higher costs to the City or residents, or diminishing services altogether. From the selling off public assets like Hydro One to the privatization of long-term care homes, we know that private operators and financiers are more interested in placing profit-making over the delivery of high-quality public services.

Related to that, we would like also to point out that the current 'virtual' status quo or online delivery for some City services is understandable as a temporary measure in response to COVID-19, but certainly not all City services can be delivered online. We are concerned that the City may use online services as a cost-cutting measure to City staffing, but this would again come at the cost of providing high-quality, public services. Often City residents need to be served by a trained professional who can fully respond to and meet their needs via in-person interactions and communication.

Adapting to a ‘new reality’

We are also concerned about changing work conditions as Ontario moves into Stage 3 of re-opening and with respect to the circumstances of the Fall. With child care centres operating at a reduced capacity, and without a clear plan to have children return to schools in September, we would like to discuss how to best accommodate our members’ working schedules around the care of dependents. As well, working from home has some efficiencies but also immense challenges when caring for dependents. We would like the City to consult us to seek detailed information into the challenges of working from home. Equally important is assessing the health and safety needs of staff whose work does not permit them to work from home. If the City plans to significantly redesign workplaces for our members who have continued working, or who will return to work in the months to come, we would like to be consulted about plans for physical distancing, screening, enhanced cleaning, emergency management, and so on.

We would also like the opportunity to further discuss an agreement with the City for options to work home (where appropriate) ahead of September, so that we do not have to rush to come up with plans if members need to unexpectedly take care of their children on a part-time or full-time basis. It is important to consider situations such as an emergency closure of a child care centres, school, or other places with affect care of dependents. CUPE Ontario is advocating to the Provincial Government to prioritize child care and provide the funding necessary to sector as part of economic recovery—we welcome your partnership in that endeavour.

While we cannot predict the severity of COVID-19 cases in the Fall, we are nervous as public health officials issue warnings of a ‘second wave’ of the pandemic, which could lead to another shutdown and thus another closure of schools and workplaces. These predictions make the discussion of our changing work conditions ever more urgent.

If possible, we would like opportunity to be able to comment on your proposals and recommendations before they go to the City Manager and City Council for consideration. We thank you for reading our concerns and we look forward to hearing back from your committee.

Sincerely,



Dave Mitchell
President
CUPE Local 79