



BRITISH
COLUMBIA

VIA EMAIL

Ref. 58009

April 21, 2023

Veronica Martisius
Staff Counsel, Litigation Department
BC Civil Liberties Association
306 – 268 Keefer Street
Vancouver BC V6A 1X5
Email: veronica@bccla.org

Dear Veronica Martisius:

Thank you for your email of April 4, 2023, addressed to Premier David Eby, the Honourable Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, the Honourable Niki Sharma, Attorney General, and me, regarding the joint submission from Pivot Legal Society and the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association to the federal Housing Advocate regarding the review of encampments across Canada and the actions in response to encampments along Hastings Street in Vancouver.

As the Minister of Housing for British Columbia, I know the importance of ensuring people sheltering in encampments are safe, healthy and treated with dignity; and that they are able to access the housing and supports they need. Encampments are not a safe or suitable form of long-term housing. Everyone deserves a secure place to call home and feel welcomed. This is the foundation of our newly launched Homelessness Plan: Belonging in BC, which aims to make experiences of homelessness rare and brief through a focus on prevention, immediate response, and systemic change across ministries.

The Plan is supported by \$1.4 billion in Budget 2023 to add hundreds of new units of supportive housing, enhanced health, social and cultural supports, complex care housing and new interdisciplinary teams and temporary housing to ensure support for people in encampments is quick and leads to housing.

Belonging in BC builds on \$633 million in funding through Budget 2022, which includes hundreds of new supportive housing units and a new supported rent supplement program for 3,000 people over three years.

.../2

Veronica Martisius
Page 2

Belonging in BC is one part of the Province's broader Homes for People action plan that will build more homes faster and build out the housing ecosystem to better prevent homelessness and ensure people have the choice and support to live in their communities. For more information on Home for People and Belonging in BC, please visit:
<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2023HOUS0019-000436>

Regarding the Downtown Eastside, we are committed to helping people experiencing homelessness stay safe, healthy and connected to supports. We are helping people move inside with access to dignified emergency shelter, while we work urgently on providing them with long-term housing options. We have indoor shelter space available, and roughly 100 units of housing opening each month over the next three months. We are working with BC Housing, the City of Vancouver, and across ministry and service providers to ensure outreach-based and community supports are available to meet people where they are at.

Since July 2022, we have been working across ministries, with local, federal and Indigenous governments, as well as community partners, to support people impacted by the fire order issued by Vancouver Fire Rescue Services to the City of Vancouver regarding conditions along Hastings Street. The Province has also committed to playing a key role in the creation of a healthier and safer Downtown Eastside for everyone in the community, including people who may be marginalized, low-income and in need of supports in the area.

In March 2023, we released the Supporting the Downtown Eastside Provincial Partnership Plan and remain committed to the principles of people-centred, inclusive and dignified responses in the immediate and long-term. We also remain committed to bringing shelter, housing, and integrated supports together to support those most in need. We have spoken with the federal government about the urgent need to improve housing in the Downtown Eastside and to provide more supports to help people move indoors, and we will continue to urge them to partner with us. For more information on the Downtown Eastside Plan, please visit:
<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2023HOUS0022-000392>

We thank you for sharing your submission to the federal advocate and I welcome any further discussions to better support people sheltering in encampments to move to stable homes. We need all partners at the table.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ravi Kahlon', written in a cursive style.

Ravi Kahlon
Minister of Housing

pc: The Honourable David Eby, KC
The Honourable Niki Sharma, KC
The Honourable Jennifer Whiteside