

Solicitor General

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132-2020-2908

By email

October 8, 2020

His Worship Graydon Smith
Mayor, Town of Bracebridge
President, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
801 - 200 University Avenue
Toronto ON M5H 3C6
c/o amopresident@amo.on.ca

Dear Mayor Smith:

Thank you for the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) letter sent to me by former AMO President James McGarvey, regarding AMO's continued concerns with inmates being released from provincial custody into homelessness.

I appreciate your concerns and recognize that homelessness and housing insecurity are serious issues in many communities in Ontario and can assure you that these issues remain a priority for our government. I also acknowledge that these issues were raised and discussed with delegations during the AMO conference held virtually on August 17, 2020.

I recognize the relationship between homelessness and involvement in the criminal justice system. The Ministry of the Solicitor General's correctional staff have been working with community service providers, municipalities, Indigenous communities, and Indigenous organizations to support inmates who are preparing for release and community reintegration. This includes helping inmates continue to access needed supports upon release. Designated correctional staff including discharge planners, classification staff, social workers and probation and parole officers will continue to assist inmates to prepare for release and support community reintegration during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Some of the individuals being released may not have a fixed address or a means to travel home or may require assistance to access local community services.

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To support the safety of those released into communities, ministry staff will, where operationally feasible, assist with supporting inmates to:

- Travel to their home community, for example, arrange transportation to the bus station, purchase a bus ticket.
- Find housing, for example, asking an inmate if they have a friend/family member who can assist with housing and/or transportation, connect them with available third-party supports.
- Take medication and continue with programming and/or treatment in the community.
- Provide health teaching and resources on COVID-19 symptoms, self-isolation, social distancing, hand hygiene and when to wear a mask.

The Ontario government is investing more than \$500 million over five years to transform correctional facilities across the province. This major investment will support the hiring of more than 500 new staff to help address challenges within the correctional system such as mental health and addiction issues. New construction and building upgrades across multiple institutions will update facilities, address issues of overcrowding, and create new spaces to support the delivery of mental health services, inmate programming and staff training. The ministry is reviewing the needs of each institution. More information on this major investment is available here:

<https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/57233/ontario-investing-in-frontline-corrections-workers>.

I can also advise you that we will continue to explore further measures that the ministry can take to assist those being released back into the community and who are at risk of homelessness. The ministry continues to work with its justice partners, including MAG and MMAH, to support successful community reintegration of inmates leaving custody.

After consultation with representatives from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH), both the Ministry of the Solicitor General and MMAH agree on the importance of collaboration in order to have a comprehensive approach that addresses homelessness. We are working together to foster greater coordination between the justice, correctional, and local housing and homelessness systems so that, together, we can help prevent and address homelessness resulting from correctional discharge.

I can advise you that MMAH provides funding to local Municipal Service Managers and Indigenous Program Administrators who deliver housing and homelessness services in their neighbourhoods, and implement many practical collaborations based on local need and priority, including with providers that serve justice-involved individuals.

Programs such as the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) provide Service Managers with significant flexibility to fund a wide range of services and supports for diverse populations experiencing or at risk of homelessness in their community. CHPI funding for 2020-21 is projected to be \$338.7 million.

MMAH has been working closely with Service Managers and Indigenous Program Administrators throughout the COVID-19 pandemic so that local housing and homelessness systems receive the support and resources they need.

The government has announced a range of measures that will help Ontarians get through these unprecedented times, including the Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF). In March, the government launched the SSRF with an initial \$148 million investment to provide immediate financial relief. Those funds were crucial in slowing the spread of COVID-19. In July, an additional \$150 million was committed to help improve shelters and create opportunities for longer-term housing.

On August 12, 2020, MMAH announced an additional \$212 million in SSRF funding. As a result, the SSRF is now providing \$510 million, including additional funding under the Safe Restart Agreement, to municipal Service Managers and Indigenous Program Administrators. This additional funding will help Service Managers and Indigenous Program Administrators protect homeless shelter staff and residents, expand rent support programming, create longer-term housing solutions and provide the support the sector needs to safely and successfully transition to recovery. Service Managers and Indigenous Program Administrators were notified of their initial planning allocations and associated program guidelines on August 12, 2020.

Prior to funds being provided, Service Managers and Indigenous Program Administrators will be required to submit a business case to MMAH to demonstrate how initial planning allocations will be used. MMAH staff will review all business cases received by the September 11, 2020 deadline with colleagues from this ministry, and the following ministries: Attorney General; Government and Consumer Services; Children, Community, and Social Services; Health; Indigenous Affairs; and Infrastructure Ontario. This inter-ministerial approach aims to encourage a diversity of perspectives and to encourage reflection of the needs of various diverse groups in local approaches, including individuals being released from provincial institutions such as correctional facilities.

Thank you again for bringing your concerns to my attention.

Sincerely,



Sylvia Jones
Solicitor General

c: The Honourable Doug Downey
Attorney General of Ontario

Mayor Graydon Smith
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The Honourable Steve Clark
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Dr. David Williams
Chief Medical Officer of Health

Dan McCormick
President, Ontario Municipal Services Association (OMSSA)

Janet Gawne
Chair, Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA)