



10 Trinity Square, Toronto, Ontario M5G 1B1 · T: 416-795-5402 · www.mfateh.ca · E: coordinator@mfateh.ca

November 18, 2009

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Housing Policy Branch
777 Bay St. – 14th floor
Toronto, ON M5G 2E5

**RE: Ontario Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy Consultation
Comments from the MultiFaith Alliance to End Homelessness (MFATEH)**

This submission summarizes the views which MFATEH members expressed at Minister Watson's consultation sessions in Toronto and Scarborough.

MFATEH is the common voice of members from a broad spectrum of faith groups and organizations in the Toronto area. We believe that governments representing all Ontarians share in that responsibility and have an obligation to allocate sufficient resources to meet people's need for adequate, secure, and affordable housing.

Faith groups have made significant contributions over many years to emergency meal and overnight shelter programs. Some with great perseverance through the lengthy and often frustrating process have partnered in the development of non-profit housing.

While these efforts will continue, we look to our government to exercise its authority and take decisive and enduring action on the scale necessary to deal with the continuing housing crisis.

We propose the following:

- The Ontario long-term housing strategy should begin with a statement that recognizes adequate housing as a basic human need and right. This is in line with Canada's adherence to the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

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- Commitment to housing equality should also be affirmed: that government policies and programs will support the protections in the Ontario Human Rights Code against discrimination and harassment of vulnerable groups and that these protections will be strongly enforced.
- The strategy should be a comprehensive framework for meeting needs across the full range of housing situations: from emergency shelter to home ownership for low-income households.
- As in the case of the poverty reduction strategy, the housing strategy should establish targets, timelines, and indicators to measure success, and should include periodic public reporting and reviews to promote accountability.
- The strategy should have the flexibility that allows policies and programs to be adapted and responsive to local needs. Local communities should have more authority in the design and delivery of housing and housing service programs.
- The multiple ministries with homelessness and housing-related programs should collaborate to consolidate or align programs so that municipalities and community-based partners can deliver them more efficiently.
- Non-profit and community-based housing proponents should have better access to land, pre-development funding and financing for projects.
- Housing solutions are affordable for governments whatever the economic climate. Considering the health, social, justice system and lost productivity costs of homelessness and poor housing, provision of adequate housing is always cost-effective.

.../3

- The strategy should be accompanied by financial commitments including enhanced funding for the federal/provincial affordable housing program. Financial investment must be long-term and stable to achieve maximum participation by federal, municipal, non-profit and private partners.
- The municipal share of the operating costs of social housing should be up-loaded to the Province.
- Municipalities should be provided with sufficient recurring funding to preserve and renovate existing social housing, and to maintain it in a state of good repair.
- A universal housing benefit for low-income households should be implemented to address the affordability gap. The current housing allowance program is time-limited and benefits are restricted to families with children. The shelter portion of Ontario Works is inadequate and restricted to those on social assistance.
- Housing “affordability” should reflect real incomes in relation to real housing costs. Only about one third of “affordable” housing developed in Toronto in recent years has been affordable for very low income and marginalized people. An objective of the strategy should be to reduce significantly the municipal social housing waiting lists.
- Housing-related support services for people living with developmental disabilities, both physically and mentally related health challenges, require increased funding.
- The housing strategy should adopt a “housing first” approach for chronically homeless people. This requires more supportive housing and support services to ensure that those newly housed can maintain their housing.

.../4



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- Municipalities should be given clear legal authority to implement mandatory inclusionary housing development regulations which will ensure that beneficiaries of new developments will include low and modest income households.

Thank you for conveying our views to the Minister and others responsible for developing the long-term affordable housing strategy.

Sincerely,

Jack Panozzo
CHAIR
MultiFaith Alliance to End Homelessness
MFATEH