



Councillor Paul W. Ainslie
City of Toronto Councillor
Ward 24 Scarborough-Guildwood

Chair, General Government Committee
Chair, Scarborough Community Council
Chair, Board of Management of the Toronto Zoo
Chair, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
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 [Councillor Paul Ainslie Scarborough-Guildwood](#)

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September 18, 2023

Honourable John McKay, MP Scarborough-Guildwood
3785 Kingston Rd. Unit 10
Toronto, ON M1J 3M4

Immediate Federal Government Support Required for Refugee Claimant Arrivals in Toronto

Dear MP McKay:

I am writing today as a member of Toronto City Council and on behalf of our residents in Scarborough-Guildwood on immediate Federal support required to shelter refugee claimant arrivals in Toronto.

The growing pressures on Toronto's shelter system far exceed anything experienced previously. Demand is at an all-time high. As we head into the fall and winter, and with appropriate Federal funding, the City is ready to work with our Federal counterparts, support refugee claimants, and prevent an escalating humanitarian crisis.

A snapshot of what we are seeing in Toronto:

- Toronto is sheltering more than 9,000 people in its emergency shelter system plus more than 1,200 outside the shelter system.
- On average since July, more than 250 people per night (both refugees and non-refugees) could not be matched to a bed because City shelters are full.
- There are more than 3,300 refugees in Toronto's shelter system now. At the current rate of growth and without immediate Federal support, there could be 4,500 refugee claimants in the City's shelter system by the end of the year.
- Toronto has partnered with the Canadian Red Cross to shelter people. This is a local municipality contracting with an International Humanitarian Organization to provide essential support for people that should be helped by our Federal Government.
- There is no space in the shelter system despite the City adding more than 1,000 new spaces over the past year to respond to the surge.

The City of Toronto has taken significant actions to address this crisis, including: expanding capacity by 250 spaces at local hotels; cost sharing with the provincial government to expand the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) for up to 1,350 households; activating the Refugee Capacity Plan to coordinate City staff, resources, community partnerships, and an updated DonateTO Website; strengthening intergovernmental advocacy and regional engagement; and, providing \$150,000 in funding and other supports to Black-led community churches that have provided temporary shelter, food, clothing, and a sense of community to many refugee claimants from African countries.

Despite these actions, current demand for shelter space is so high that every night the City is unable to shelter hundreds of people requesting a space. While the City continues to do all it can to provide refugee claimants the dignified welcome they deserve, Toronto is experiencing a worsening humanitarian crisis.

The City of Toronto has identified options that could be immediately actioned by the Federal government to assist refugee claimants with shelter and housing needs. As adopted by City Council ([CC10.2](#)) on [September 6, 2023](#), City Council urges the Federal Government to fund and implement a regional response in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, including:

1. Respond to the City Manager by September 18, 2023, that it will provide the funding to reimburse up to \$750,000 to churches or community organizations
2. Fully reimburse the City of Toronto for the estimated \$200 million in expected 2023 costs to support the 3,300 refugee claimants in Toronto's shelter system, inclusive of the \$97 million in funding already announced through the Interim Housing Assistance Program;
3. Commit to ongoing Interim Housing Assistance Program funding to address the estimated \$250 million annual costs for refugees in 2024 and commit to future funding until the demand for shelter returns to sustainable levels;
4. Increase the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit allocations in municipalities across Ontario to improve refugee claimant access to housing throughout the province, including \$6.67 million to Toronto and a prorated amount to other municipalities;
5. Fund the Canadian Red Cross and Toronto-based representatives of the Ontario Coalition for Refugee Claimants to establish and manage a reception centre for refugee claimants who arrive in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area;
6. Secure and fund the operation of all-season mobile health units to create capacity for up to 200 spaces; and
7. Identify and purchase/retrofit existing hotels and other suitable buildings to provide accommodation to refugees.

The Government of Canada has responsibilities to protect refugee claimants that are rooted in international laws. Canada also has responsibilities related to the right of claimants to seek asylum. It is time for the Federal government to take action and assist refugee claimants in their immediate shelter and housing needs.

We will continue to engage you and staff at your respective departments and ministries and appreciate the ongoing opportunity to discuss the issues that are critical to supporting refugee claimants in Toronto. I look forward to your response and our ongoing collaboration.

Sincerely,



Paul W. Ainslie
City of Toronto, Councillor
Ward 24 Scarborough-Guildwood

C: Hon. Marc Miller, MP, Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship
Hon. Sean Fraser, MP, Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities
Christiane Fox, Deputy Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
Kelly Gillis, Deputy Minister of Infrastructure and Communities
Paul Johnson, City Manager
Jean Abou Saab, Deputy Chief of Staff, Intergovernmental Affairs