

## Legislation Text

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File #: 22-A-061, Version: 2

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### **DEPUTATION CONCERNING MOTION 22-G-119, BARRIE POLICE SERVICES BOARD - PAN HANDLING AND CRIMINAL ACTIVITY**

**Councillor, G. Harvey declared that to remain in compliance with his statutory obligations under Section 17(3) of the *Police Services Act* he was unable to participate in the discussions or vote on the foregoing matter. He left the Council Chambers during discussion and voting on the matter.**

The following individuals provided Deputations concerning motion 22-G-119:

1. Sarah Tilley, on behalf of the Gilbert Centre and as a citizen of Barrie explained that the issue is lack of affordable housing, not any of the resulting behaviors or activities such as pan handling or sleeping on City property. She emphasized that unless people have places to live that there may not be a solution for homelessness, nor curbing what people may do to survive living on the streets.

Ms. Tilley felt that having the police respond and enforce incidents such as pan handling and sleeping on City streets is not considered the best option and could potentially decrease the safety of those unhoused in the Community.

She discussed the importance of shelters which should be prioritized and recommended that funding be continued for the hotel model pilot program that had been implemented during the pandemic. Ms. Tilley advised that shelters are meant to be a space of transition from one situation to another and they do not have the resources to help individuals locate affordable accessible housing units as there are not enough accommodations in Barrie.

Ms. Tilley provided an overview of the average rental rates in Barrie. She explained that renting in Barrie is often unattainable for individuals receiving Ontario Works and Ontario Works Study Program payments and this may result in shared accommodations that may be considered unliveable and unsafe and have a potential impact on their mental health and well-being.

Ms. Tilley advised creating encampments reduces the potential risks of violence for unhoused individuals and may provide a safer environment. Ms. Tilley felt that motion 22-G-119 should be amended to remove paragraph 1 to 3 and that garbage receptacles be placed at encampment locations. She advised that instead of having police respond to incidents, that the focus should be on social development and trying to reduce the social stigma surrounding homelessness.

Ms. Tilley suggested working with other levels of governments to ensure that shelters have enough funding to keep their beds open, advocate for better housing solutions and prioritizing funding to social services to create a healthy community. She recommended that financial support programs such Ontario Works and Ontario Works Study Payments be increased.

2. Mary Ann Denny Lusk, Chair of the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness and Chief Executive Officer of Barrie Housing explained how the crime rate in Barrie is low and the City is ranked as one of the safest cities in Ontario. She described the vulnerability of pan handling individuals and those that are unhoused.



She advised that SCATEH are in favour of paragraphs 4 to 7 of motion 22-G-119. She advised that SCATEH is named one of the main action partners for Barrie's Community Safety Well-Being Plan 2021 to 2024 but that no one has contacted them to discuss implementation of the fifteen actions items since the plan was adopted.

Ms. Denny-Lusk discussed concerns related to paragraphs 1 to 3 of motion 22-G-119 concerning the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, the intent of the plan to support vulnerable and marginalized populations, including those experiencing homelessness poverty, mental health issues and those substance use disorders, to improve their safety and well being. She explained that increased efforts to displace those living in encampments are in direct violation of their human rights and without housing options the safety and well-being of those living in encampments could be negatively impacted.

Ms. Denny-Lusk advised that SCATEH has observed negative impacts with encampments evictions, such as the loss of necessities for survival and quality of life and essentials for living and is not aligned with the stated purpose of the Community Safety Well-Being Plan. She also feels that the Barrie Police Service is not the best option to address homelessness, mental health crisis or addiction.

Ms. Denny-Lusk discussed concerns related to the interpretation of paragraph 3 of motion 22-G-119 and the request for the Ontario Provincial Police to address safety on the Highway 400 Ramps.

3. Suzanna McCarthy, Executive Director of the John Howard Society of Simcoe Muskoka discussed concerns related to motion 22-G-119 and she advised that many of the issues are included in Barrie's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan. She highlighted that Barrie has seen rapid growth over the years but that the crime rate has remained low. She emphasized that it seems to be a sudden focus on the marginalized members of the City. She advised that many of the behaviors being penalized are not unique to unsheltered individuals and people who are housed also break the laws. Ms. McCarthy explained that resources are being used to penalize the unhoused individuals which should be directed elsewhere. She noted the fact that many of these individual lack the ability to pay fines and makes it more difficult to exit out of poverty and creating more barriers.

She explained that the eviction of unsheltered individuals from encampments and panhandlers being penalized is not the right solution to address concerns and often impacts individuals who are forced to take belongings they can carry leaving personal items behind for clean up by the City of Barrie. She questioned whether using the Barrie Police Service to respond to a social issue is the best direction.

Ms. McCarthy discussed concerns related to the shelters hotel pilot program ending and citizens being evicted. She asked that members of Council place their trust in the service providers to participate in developing effective responses to the issues of Community Safety and that criminalization of poverty and survival is not the answer.

4. Daisy Oliveros explained that the City of Barrie has a long history of supporting those less fortunate, has passionate volunteers and organizations and have earned a reputation of caring, through feeding and clothing and sheltering the homeless. She explained the importance of protecting the needs and safety of all citizens of Barrie.

Ms. Oliveros suggested a stronger police presence in the downtown area would keep everyone safe and potentially mitigate any incidents, restore and preserve the enjoyment of Barrie's beautiful downtown. She advised that as a taxpayer she would like to feel safe downtown. She commented that downtown businesses have been adjusting their hours or availability to cope with pan handling and those who may take shelters in doorways.