

May 21, 2008

Housing Minister Rich Coleman
PO Box 9049
Victoria, British Columbia

VIA FAX: 250-387-1040

Dear Minister Coleman:

Re: Shelter turn away statistics April 2007 to January 2008

I write to you on behalf of Pivot Legal Society in your capacity as Minister responsible for housing in British Columbia.

I am writing concerning a very alarming document that was recently provided to Pivot Legal Society indicating that on over 40,000 occasions between April 2007 and January 2008, individuals were denied access to emergency shelter in the GVRD. These statistics are an undercount, as a number of facilities did not report.

Unfortunately, on further inquiry we have discovered that B.C. Housing is unable to say how many homeless individuals are reflected in these 40,000 attempts to seek shelter in Metro Vancouver, as one individual may have sought housing at several shelters in a single day, or may have sought shelter at one location and given up. We simply don't know.

Pivot is respectfully asks that you immediately launch an investigation into the question of whether our shelter system is overwhelmed with the current demands placed on it. You may be aware that the recently completed Metro Vancouver homelessness count suggests that there are now over 2,500 homeless people in Metro Vancouver. We currently have only 1,028 emergency shelter beds serving that population.

There are surely policies that B.C. Housing, as the agency responsible for many of the listed shelters, could put in place to ensure that individuals seeking shelter can find it on their first attempt if it is available. Depending on the outcome of your investigation, we may, regretfully, be in a situation where more emergency shelter beds need to be opened on an urgent basis.

Your Ministry has brought in new initiatives aimed at getting individuals out of shelters and into housing; however, those most in need of housing may not be able to access these programs if they can't get into a shelter in the first place. This issue must be addressed immediately, and your Ministry is in the best position to investigate and amend policies as required. We look forward to hearing from you shortly on this urgent matter.

Yours truly,



David Eby

His Worship, Mayor Sam Sullivan
453 West 12th Avenue
Vancouver, British Columbia

VIA FAX: 604-873-7685

Dear Mayor Sullivan:

Re: Shelter turn away statistics April 2007 to January 2008

I write to you on behalf of Pivot Legal Society in your capacity both as Mayor of the City of Vancouver and as Chair of the Police Board of the City of Vancouver.

I am writing concerning a very alarming document that was recently provided to Pivot Legal Society indicating that on over 40,000 occasions between April 2007 and January 2008, individuals were denied access to emergency shelter in the GVRD. The statistics suggest that Vancouver's turnaways were highest, with over 67% of the turnaways occurring in our city, despite some major shelters like Triage not reporting.

You may be aware that the recently completed Metro Vancouver homelessness count suggests that there are now over 1,500 homeless people in Vancouver. We currently have only 738 emergency shelter beds in the city.

Given the Metro Vancouver count numbers and the turnaway statistics, Pivot is respectfully requesting that you place a moratorium on bylaw enforcement tickets being issued to people sleeping outside for obstructing sidewalks or constructing shelter on city-owned property.

We are also asking you, in your role as Chair of the Police Board to cancel that part of the 2008 VPD business plan that calls for a 20% increase in *Trespass Act* tickets given to the homeless and crackdowns on individuals sleeping outside. We would ask that *Trespass Act* tickets only be issued where individual landowners have made a complaint, and an individual returns to the property after being asked to leave.

These moratoriums should remain in place until the City has confirmed that individuals have safe, legal shelter available to them, but choose not to access that shelter. Until then, issuing tickets to individuals who have no choice but to sleep outside appears to our eyes to be cruel and unusual treatment of the most vulnerable members of our society.

We look forward to hearing from you soon on this urgent situation. We enclose the relevant documents for your reference.

Yours truly,



David Eby