

Statement from Halifax Mutual Aid

July 6, 2021

Since January 2021, Halifax Mutual Aid (HMA) crisis shelters have offered a needed addition to a shelter system that is buckling under the pressure of the housing crisis. Conventional shelters are forced to police and exclude some people, and in these cases crisis shelters are necessary to offer occupants safety from environmental and human threats. The waiting list of people who need a crisis shelter continues to grow.

Today, Halifax City Council announced their intention to remove these life-saving crisis shelters built by volunteers with HMA. This indicates an end to what they called their “empathy-based human rights approach to homeless encampments that recognizes the human dignity of people experiencing homelessness.”

This change in policy will further endanger the growing number of people in our community without long-term housing, especially given the current conditions:

- An out-of-control housing crisis with no end in sight.
- Ongoing and increasing unemployment (13%+ currently).
- The potential for increased student homelessness in August.
- No real solution to provide actual and affordable housing to the homeless.
- Proposed affordable housing projects inaccessible to the poorest, with rents in excess of social assistance payments.

In their statement, Halifax City Council has requested that Halifax Mutual Aid remove the crisis shelters. We can not in good conscience put people in a worse situation than they are currently. HMA volunteers are also hesitant to potentially violate occupant’s Section 7 Charter Rights, the guarantee to the right to life, liberty, and security, as it was attributed to homeless encampments in a 2015 ruling by the BC Supreme Court. Therefore, HMA does not intend to remove crisis shelters until there is no longer an urgent need for them.

HMA encourages all levels of government to pursue housing first solutions working directly with the growing homeless population. This issue affects human beings, members of our communities who deserve dignity and respect.

HMA extends its thanks to the broader Halifax community for their ongoing support.

For more information, contact HMA at halifaxmutualaid@riseup.net