**

November 28, 2016

**Mayor John Tory**

Office of the Mayor
City Hall, 2nd Floor
100 Queen St. West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

mayor\_tory@toronto.ca

Dear Mayor John Tory,

I am writing as the Mental Health Lead of Inner City Health Associates, an organization of over 60 physicians that provides medical and psychiatric care to people experiencing homelessness. We work on the streets, in shelters, and in drop-ins, and care for many of the most marginalized people in Toronto. Our physicians see every day the challenges that our clients face when they are unable to afford the TTC fare in order to attend their medical appointments. It is not unusual for clients to miss appointments due to lack of TTC fare, which can result in dire, and potentially very costly, consequences. It is also challenging for clients to obtain healthy food, look for work, or stay connected to their social supports if they are unable to use transit. We join the call for a free, unlimited metropass for all people in Toronto living on a fixed income or in poverty.

The Toronto Drop-In Network (TDIN), Young Parents No Fixed Address Network, Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy (MTML), and the LGBTQ Service Providers Network came together with concerns about the elimination of TTC tokens, roll-out of PRESTO fare cards and the sixth straight fare increase in a row. Now is the time to do the right thing for the people who use our programs and provide people with fixed or no income a free and unlimited metropass.

Together the above networks represent over 120 social service providers who regularly distribute TTC tokens to service-users. Inner City Health Associates is similarly concerned that PRESTO fare cards will be a barrier for low-income and vulnerable people, and make it more difficult for community-based organizations to provide transit supports.

The individuals who receive support in our programs are amongst the most vulnerable members of our community; those who are precariously housed, those who are young parents, those with low-literacy, those with mental health concerns, and those who are undocumented. Many survive on low-incomes and face multiple barriers when it comes to accessing services.

We have heard that when TTC tokens are phased out, limited use media (LUMs) will replace them, and programs will be expected to distribute these instead. However, this is the time to rethink the way we deliver transportation supports to the residents of our city who require them.

We think the City of Toronto and the TTC should do what they have already identified as necessary, and improve transit equity while it we have the chance. We join the call to provide free monthly passes to people on social assistance, and discounted fares to those who are low-income, not only to support transit equity, but to improve health, reduce poverty and as an added bonus, cut the administrative burdens and costs associated with distributing fares to social service providers.

Now that City Council is reviewing the Poverty Reduction Work Plan December 1st, and will be receiving the Transit Equity Committee Report, it’s time to do the right thing.

Cities across the country have adopted low-income passes and discounted fares based on financial need. Our ‘world-class’ city is falling behind where it really matters.

We would welcome an opportunity to speak directly with you regarding these matters.

We know that affordable transit can change the lives of the people we support in our work, and look forward to collaborating to make transit accessible for everyone.

With regards,

Michaela Beder, MD

Mental Health Lead, Inner City Health Associates