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## **City of Toronto Leadership in Recovery Efforts – Deputation at the Executive Committee**

October 21, 2020

Good morning Mr. Mayor, members of the Executive Committee, visiting Councillors and City staff,

My name is Jasmine Ramze Rezaee, and I am the Advocacy and Communications Director at YWCA Toronto, one of Toronto's leading multi-service women's organizations. Thank you for having me.

As you know, YWCA Toronto is a big community partner of the City. We value our partnership, and commend the City for its swift response to the pandemic. The report by the Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild is very clearly a comprehensive document that contains many progressive recommendations which we support. We praise the breadth and reach of the public consultations that informed the recommendations, and we feel the report offers a balanced and sensible approach to recovery planning.

However, we are here this morning, like so many other speakers, to urge you not to lose sight of equity concerns and the interests of women and girls when considering how to tackle the resurgence of the virus and what to prioritize in terms of recovery efforts. We are also here to urge you to take on a greater leadership role at tripartite tables on five specific issues – to some extent in line with the recommendations by the City Manager.

**We hope you will lay the foundation of an equitable, gender-responsive recovery plan.** Sincere and bold steps must be taken to build the city we want – which is ultimately a city that has enough affordable housing for all residents, that has a public transit system that works, that has quality, affordable and easy to access child care, that provides adequate income and program supports, **and** that is safe for all communities. A city that is fair and livable for all residents can become a true cultural and economic hub that attracts talent, newcomers, and investment.

But that is not the city we lived in prior to the pandemic, and at YWCA Toronto we are really concerned about the toll the pandemic has taken on communities that already faced heightened levels of poverty, violence and other forms of systemic marginalization. As you know, women, Black, Indigenous and racialized communities, people with disabilities, and people on fixed incomes have been disproportionately impacted by COVID.

Right now, we need to strengthen supports for the most vulnerable members of our city while laying the foundation to support women's labour market re-entry choices more broadly, accelerate affordable and supportive housing options, enhance culturally-appropriate mental health services, and include a gender lens in all recovery and budgetary considerations to ensure the needs of diverse communities of women are met.

For these reasons, we are urging the City to embrace its leadership role in the following five areas:

- 1) Broader income security reform – we think it is time for the City to advocate for broader income security reform and work with other orders of government to create a national income program. Time-limited measures by the federal government only go so far – it's time for basic income.

2) Universal child care – the federal government has already highlighted its intention to do some serious work in this area, and the City has an opportunity to be a strong advocate at these tripartite tables to call for a quality, affordable, and accessible child care system that is provided by the public and non-profit sectors.

3) Housing reform – and the acceleration of the National Housing Strategy. The City is obviously doing a great deal of work in this area but it will be particularly important for the City to work with other municipalities in engaging, educating and advocating for the Province to do its part to support affordable housing efforts. And, we think the City can also do things like levy a luxury housing tax and vacant home tax to accelerate its housing commitments.

4) Non-profit sector support – we would also urge the City to take on an advocacy role on behalf of the non-profit sector that is hemorrhaging funds right now because of responding to increased costs related to COVID, increased needs by communities to access supports, and just to ensure we can survive the pandemic and not have to shutter our programs. Many non-profits have already shut down, and we are very concerned about the post-COVID landscape for our sector and for the communities we serve without greater government leadership and investment.

Lastly, we need to add "employment equity" consistent obligations and conditionality to all economic recovery, social and physical infrastructure investments – including all financial transfers – through mechanisms like legislated employment equity regimes, community benefit agreements (CBA's) with employment equity obligations and requirements, fair and equitable public procurement contractor provisions, and so forth. We believe the City can be a powerful actor, voice, and advocate for federal, provincial and municipal employment equity regimes

In conclusion, we call on you to take an intersectional gender equity lens to your recovery road map, and prioritize the immediate needs of communities impacted by COVID, while engaging in long-term recovery planning in support of all residents and our sector. We hope you will embrace your leadership role in advocating for progressive solutions at various orders of government. We are committed to continue our partnership with you and hope you will utilize the expertise of YWCA Toronto and the community sector as we work together towards achieving shared priorities and objectives.

Thank you for your time.