



CANADA WITHOUT POVERTY  
CANADA SANS PAUVRETÉ

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*Registered Charitable #13091 6638 RR0001*

Kingston Frontenac Public Library  
Attention: Representatives of the Library Board  
130 Johnson Street, Kingston, Ontario, K7L 1X8

May 25, 2016

**RE: Discriminatory new “Code of Conduct”**

Dear Ms. Claudette Richardson and other members of the Kingston Library Board,

It has come to our attention that a new Code of Conduct was recently passed for the Kingston Frontenac Public Library that discriminates against homeless individuals and those living in poverty. As the Executive Director Canada Without Poverty, a leading national anti-poverty charity, I felt compelled to write to inquire about these policy changes.

Media reports indicate that recent changes in the Code of Conduct point to rules concerning “offensive body odour and/or offensive clothing/bag odour ... [and that] aimless loitering without using library services will not be tolerated.” It has been reported that the title of the Code has been altered from “Everyone is welcome at the Kingston Frontenac Public Library,” to simply “Welcome to the Kingston Frontenac Public Library.” While seemingly small adjustments, these changes hold significant implications – in effect, they further entrench negative stereotypes and set a precedent for prejudice by other institutions.

We are pleased to hear that the library is holding off on implementing the policy while conducting public consultations. **We urge the Library Board to take a step further and amend the Code to ensure that the public library is adhering to its human rights obligations.**

The city of Kingston has been pro-active in its efforts to prevent and address homelessness by working collaboratively with local partners, community members and those experiencing homelessness. With a strong foundation in community support, we are gravely concerned that the library – a central public institution – has created a policy that could, in effect, penalize individuals who are homeless or living in poverty. It also appears that these changes are in direct opposition to your vision and values that promote respect, dignity and inclusion.

**Libraries are public spaces that should be welcoming to all members of the community and offer educational opportunities to everyone regardless of status.**

Living on the streets or forced out of shelters during the day, homeless persons have limited access to safe, private environments where they can attend to themselves or be left in peace. People who are poor and homeless are often pushed out, ignored and rendered invisible. It is a cycle of discrimination and exclusion that is perpetuated by policies that refuse to acknowledge the dignity of the most marginalized.

Libraries can set the tone for the community – consider libraries in Calgary, Hamilton and Halifax that have recognized the influential role they can have in addressing poverty and homelessness. Instead of punishing homeless individuals using the library, they developed systems of support that included outreach workers, public health nurses and even dietitians. Surveying the needs of their clients, these libraries helped to be a bridge between critical social services and individual needs that were otherwise unmet.

**As you conduct public consultations on the new Code of Conduct, we urge you to consider this exchange as an opportunity to provide leadership on empathy, understanding and human rights.** It can be a chance to reaffirm the strength of the community spirit and what it means to ensure ‘everyone is welcome’.

We would be pleased to provide further advice on how the Library Board can adhere to their human rights obligations. We look forward to hearing from you on this issue as well as the results of the public consultations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leilani Farha". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Leilani Farha  
Executive Director