



The Fight for HSF Justice: Victories and Ongoing Struggles

Nov 29, 2016

On November 29, Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS) presented a report on its administration of the Housing Stabilization Fund (HSF). The report, [which is now online](#), proposed a number of changes that are clear victories for our fight for HSF justice. Others changes are unclear - they could be really good or they could be devastating. There are also a few issues that TESS does not address.

Important Victories

- City was forced to acknowledge there are problems with the HSF; policy changes, some in line with our demands, have now been proposed.
- Separate income test for HSF will be eliminated. This means just being on OW or ODSP will be sufficient.
- Disability-related benefits and Canada Child Benefit will no longer be counted against applicants.
- Employment related expenses benefits will no longer be counted against applicants.
- Similarly, assets people have will no longer be counted against them.
- Bed bug policy will be changed so that funds will be provided for furniture other than just beds.
- Less documentation will be required of applicants.
- The identities of the Decisions Review Committee members will be made public.

Clarifications Needed

- Bed bug replacement funds will also be issued for “soft furniture.” No explanation of what this means is provided.
- A HSF “flat rate benefit structure” will be introduced. Again, no details are provided. Does it mean that there will be a set amount for each furniture item or that everyone will get the same amount?
- Under “extraordinary circumstances” the flat rate will be supplemented. The only example given is domestic violence. Will disability accommodations be considered? If not, the policy will continue to be arbitrary and may have a discriminatory effect.
- The report states less documentation will be required but we have no details about this either.



Laura Bardeau spurred a public fight for #HSFJustice this summer.

The Fight Isn't Over: The City Must

- **Make the policy public:** TESS commits to making the changes public, but not the policy itself.
- **Accommodate disability related needs:** If someone needs to move into a building with attendant care they should not be refused HSF. Add health, welfare and/or safety to the eligibility criteria.
- **Communicate decisions in writing with rationale:** Full or partial decisions must always be provided in writing. They must speak to the specific case and the reasons for decision taken. If a denial is issued because there wasn't enough information provided, the missing information must be clearly stated and the applicant given an opportunity to provide it.
- **Stop penalizing applicants for administrative delays:** Currently, when someone applies for moving money and the application is delayed by TESS until after the person moves, TESS says they no longer qualify for the funds. This is an abuse of process.
- **Update the definition of homelessness:** Currently only people moving from the street or shelters are considered homeless. This leaves out so many others who are temporarily staying with friends and family.
- **Eliminate need to move to cheaper housing:** In a City with ever-rising rents, this policy unjustly restricts HSF eligibility.
- **Ensure sufficient budget to cover increased HSF expenditure:** Add \$15 million to the HSF to replace money lost to the CSUMB cut.