October 28, 2009

Mayor Fred Eisenberger
Office of the Mayor
Hamilton City Centre
77 James Street North, Suite 230
Hamilton, ON L8R 2K3

RE: Open Letter to address the housing crisis

Dear Sir:

I am writing to you on behalf of the more than 300,000 college and university students who are members of the Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario, to call on your municipality to take immediate steps to address the crisis in public housing in Ontario.

Homelessness and the lack of affordable public housing are affecting thousands of families across Ontario. After riding the tails of a strong economy and booming housing market during the last decade, many people in Ontario have been hit hard by the recent recession. Thousands of jobs have been lost and people are finding it even harder to find adequate and affordable housing. Not only has it been harder for thousands of people to make ends meet, but homelessness has grown dramatically, as an extreme consequence.

In recent years, evictions have soared because of the decreasing affordability of housing in the Ontario. Almost 67,000 households faced evictions in 2006 in the province – a figure that has most likely risen since the beginning of the recession. That is equivalent to more than 260 households for every working day of the year. The alarming number of evictions has considerable short and long-term impacts on these households. One-third of these families end up in shelters and another one-third become part of the “hidden homeless” – those who find short-term shelter with friends or family.

Sales of public housing units have become a disturbing trend in the province. Despite the sale of housing units by the municipalities in the province, there are almost 130,000 households on public housing waiting lists throughout the province. The large proportion of this number is concentrated in the medium to larger-sized municipalities in the province. If public housing units are not expanded, it will take several years to decades for people on these waiting lists to obtain housing.

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Municipalities across Ontario are also faced with an increasing number of people relying on shelters. For example, over 8,500 people stay in shelters annually in Ottawa, while over 3,500 people in Hamilton and 1,300 people in Sault Ste. Marie rely on shelters each year. In Toronto, the number has reached 30,000 and those sleeping in shelters each night had more than tripled from 1990 to 2006 in the city. While demand is up, cities across the province have been reducing the number of shelter beds available.

**Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario is calling upon municipalities across Ontario to introduce council resolutions that will declare an immediate moratorium on evictions and the sale of public housing units.**

*In addition, students are calling on municipalities to introduce council resolutions that will ensure the replacement of all shelter beds lost due to closures and funding cutbacks over the past 2 years.*

**Finally, students are calling on municipalities to call on the provincial government to dedicate new funding to a province-wide housing strategy.**

We urge you to take immediate action to address the current crisis and the damaging effects of social cutbacks on the most vulnerable people in our province. We look forward to hearing back about your municipality’s commitment to ending the housing crisis and any concrete actions taken to do so.

Sincerely,

Shelley Melanson
Chairperson