To: Chair and Members
Emergency & Community Services Committee

From: Joe-Anne Priel
General Manager
Community Services Department

Date: November 7, 2007

Re: Inland Refugees from the United States (ECS07076) (City Wide)

Council Direction:
Not applicable.

Information:
There has been a noticeable increase in the number of people coming into Hamilton and a number of surrounding municipalities, from the United States (U.S.) since mid-August. Homeland Security in the U.S. has initiated a crackdown on illegal workers and their employers within the U.S. On September 10, 2007, social services’ delivery staff from Niagara, Peel, Windsor, Toronto and Hamilton had a teleconference to discuss the impacts of the new immigrants on the emergency shelter system and Ontario Works (OW) offices.

Since September 11, 2007, staff has been monitoring the number of OW applications and trends in occupancy within the shelter system to assess the impact of these new refugee applicants. To date, 49 applications for OW have been completed on inland refugees coming from the U.S., representing 93 individuals. The countries of origin of these applicants are primarily Haiti and Columbia.

Refugees entering Canada at Fort Erie are being processed through the Peace Bridge Newcomers Centre (PBNC). At the PBNC, a refugee claimant declares their intent to locate in a specific city, and must identify whether or not they are going to reside with family, friends or are destined for an emergency shelter. Since September 11, 2007, staff has received daily reports from the PBNC where 33 people have identified Hamilton as their designation of choice. Data on the number of applications for OW indicate 93 individuals have applied, mostly from Columbia and Haiti. A review of these applicants indicates they are coming to Canada through Quebec rather than through Fort Erie. Most coming from Quebec are being referred to the Good Shepherd Family Centre and other emergency shelters. It is very difficult to get information from these refugees, as they do not want to jeopardize their situation. Some have indicated that
they have gained information from an organization out of Naples Florida, about where they should go and what they should say when they present themselves to emergency hostels. The website that was being used to transmit information was www.jerusalemhaitian.org. It is our understanding that this organization has been instructed to “shut down” this site. Staff have confirmed that the website is “under construction”.

In December 2004, there was a significant influx of refugee claimants as a result of the implementation of the Safe Third Country Legislation. The Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) declared it to be an emergency situation because of the large number of refugees that needed to leave the U.S. within a specific timeframe and delays in processing time through immigration. At that time, Hamilton initiated a comprehensive response. MCSS worked with the Consolidated Municipal Service Managers involved and were able to recoup administrative/program expenditures that were incurred.

Staff are working closely with the local MCSS office and the regional municipalities of Peel and Niagara and the cities of Toronto and Windsor to monitor the impact of these new immigrants on the existing shelter and social assistance system. At this time, MCSS has not considered the numbers to present an emergency response and does not warrant a change in the cost sharing arrangement. A review of expenditures shows our use of hotels and associated costs is actually lower than in 2006 for the same period.

To date, the most noted impact has been seen at the Good Shepherd Family Centre. At one point, 11 of the 20 units were occupied by inland refugee claimants. As a result, there was an increase in hotel placements and the number of families being turned away at the centre. The Good Shepherd Family Centre is providing information on the incidence of turn-aways on a daily basis, so that we have a clear understanding of the impacts on the emergency shelter system and local families requiring emergency shelter. As of October 19, 2007, eight of the 20 units were occupied by inland refugees.

Staff will continue to keep Council updated on developments on this issue.

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Joe-Anne Priel
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Community Services Department