To The City of Winnipeg Council

I would like to bring to light some of the issues we face as City of Winnipeg Transit Shelter Service employees as well as in the Loops and Stops department.

There are 864 bus shelters located in the City of Winnipeg, Transit services aproximatly 635 of them. The remaining 228 are serviced by Downtown Biz and 2 other contractors. In 2019 we had 8 Shelter Servicer positions in the Loops & Stops department. Each servicer had a run of about 80 shelters per week that were cleaned plus Comfort Stations. In June of 2020 we lost Shelter Servicer positions due to budget cuts. This left 6 people to clean and disinfect 635 bus shelters as well as comfort stations. We have one employee who cleans aproximatly half of the comfort stations and a general labourer gets taken off of his tasks/duties to clean the other half. On average we, the remaining 5, each have a list of 127 shelters to tend to per week. Under normal circumstances each servicer can clean 20 to 25 shelters on a good day however these are no longer normal circumstances.

As we are all very aware the City of Winnipeg has a serious homeless and mental health crisis. This crisis became a pandemic before Covid 19 even started. Unfortunately, Covid has escalated this problem and bus shelters have now turned into homes for some of Winnipeg's unfortunate population.

Many of the shelters are riddled with needles and other drug paraphernalia, home made weapons, human waste, old furniture, food waste, plywood/wood scraps, metal and general garbage. We can only clean and disinfect once the occupant(s) has vacated. Most times it's not an easy task asking the occupant to exit so we can clean. We always try to approach the situation and the person with dignity and respect keeping our and the public' s safety in mind. We feel compelled to try to help the person. This is a human being and we can not just throw their lives away into a garbage bag but we encounter a lot of push-back. I have been "chased" away and threatened with needles and home-made weapons. Often resulting in a call to a supervisor and the police. This takes time away from the job and valuable resources away from the city. Sometimes we get lucky and the shelters are vacated or even vacant when we arrive. This presents a whole lot of other issues as we have to watch for the "booby trapped" doors to make sure we don't have used needles fall on our heads and check the silicone joints in the glass for broken off needles. The benches are usually caked with feces, the floor soaked with urine and lots and lots of garbage. We have to call for a dump truck, a front-end loader and more man power to remove the waste, clean and disinfect. Taking other Loops and Stops employees away from their duties, some of which are clearing snow, pouring concrete pads, repairing bus stops and broken shelter glass, mowing grass etc. Most times we have to wait for the heavy equipment to arrive so we can do our job safely. This takes up time we could have put into cleaning additional shelters.

I have spoken to many of my co-workers regarding these issues and we all feel that we want to take pride in our work and keep the bus stops and shelters clean for all Manitobans to use. We want people to feel safe and want to see ridership go up. I feel that this is almost an impossible task we're facing. These are hard times for all of us. Our anxiety levels are all through the roof and I can see just by looking at my co-workers that many of them have stress from dealing with this over the last 2 years. We feel that our health and safety is being jeopardised. This is all due to the lack of employees in the department. Even if we were to have the 2 positions, we lost in June of 2020 re-established it would only be a band-aid solution. I am asking you to help us make the city a safer and cleaner place for all of our residents and visitors by adding funding in the budget for more employees and equipment in the Loops and Stops department for the City of Winnipeg Transit.

Thanking you in advance,

Mike Cabral