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March 21st, 2023

Mayor Gillingham
Council Members
City Clerk

VIA EMAIL

Re.: Budget 2023/2024 Submission

Dear Mayor and Council Members:

For the record, the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg has an over 100 year history with a long standing commitment to creating a sustainable Winnipeg that is just, equitable and caring. This submission is informed by this long history and just some of our most recent research and coalition work.

SPCW was the lead on:

- *Poverty, the Pandemic and the Province*: Manitoba Child and Family Poverty 2023 (all charts in this submission are from this report)
- *We Matter, We Count*: Winnipeg Street Census 2022, 2018 and 2015

SPCW partnered with CCPA Manitoba and chapter authors on:

- *Winnipeg at a Crossroads*: Alternative Municipal Budget 2022

SPCW contributed to the City's:

- *Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Strategy 2021-2031* (adopted 2021)

SPCW through Immigration Partnership Winnipeg (IPW) partnered with the City to develop:

- *The Newcomer Welcome and Inclusion Policy and Strategic Framework* (adopted in 2020)

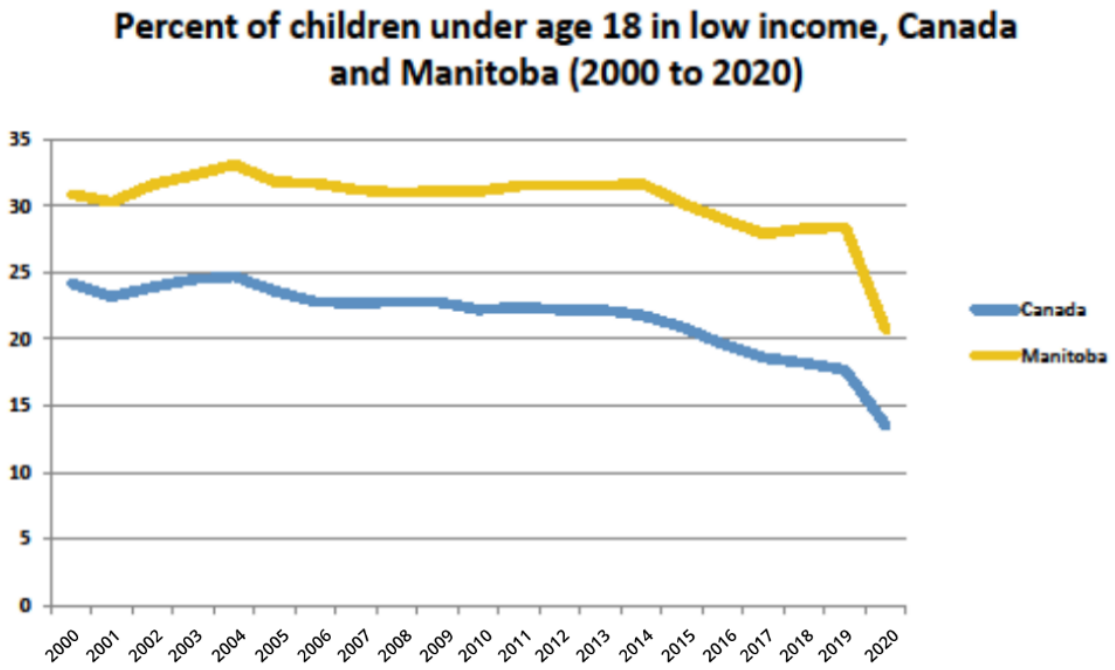
SPCW supports the findings of:

- *Millennium for All Report on Securitization of the Millennium Public Library*
- Fearless R2W's *Housing Solutions for Indigenous Youth Ageing Out of Care*

Manitoba continues to be the province with the highest rates of child and family poverty while Winnipeg Centre continues as the urban federal riding with the highest rates. The 2020 data, the most recent available, demonstrates that 31% of Winnipeg Centre children and their families lived in poverty. The other ridings in Winnipeg all have unacceptable levels of poverty:

- Winnipeg North 23%
- Winnipeg South 16%
- Elmwood-Kildonan 15%
- St. Boniface-St. Vital 15%
- Winnipeg South Centre 14%
- Charleswood-St. James-Assiniboia-Headingly 12%

These numbers do show a marked decrease in child and family poverty between 2019 and 2020. However, an analysis of postal codes and the Canada Emergency Response Benefit recipients, available in our full report, clearly shows that a large proportion of the CERB funds went to families who were already struggling prior the pandemic. Some of these families were then found to be ineligible and are having to pay it back without any further assistance in dealing with the ongoing repercussions of the pandemic.



It is our expectations that when the 2022 data becomes available, it will demonstrate a loss in any ground gained. This can be mitigated only if, in 2023 and future years, all levels of government change their approaches to poverty. Each level of government must do all in its power to mitigate and eventually end poverty. As *Winnipeg Without*

Poverty, the Make Poverty History Manitoba's community led report that in turn led to the City creating its own poverty reduction strategy, found, the City has many levers within its control to better meet our most pressing needs, poverty and its after effects; homelessness, addictions and crime. It also has a Charter responsibility to look after the health and well-being of all of its inhabitants.

The City's poverty reduction strategy was passed on November 25th, 2021. It's development was a unique partnership between the City and community. It was unique, sadly, because those of us from community who participated in that process actually saw our perspectives well reflected in the strategy. Unfortunately, without dedicated yearly funding, it will fail.

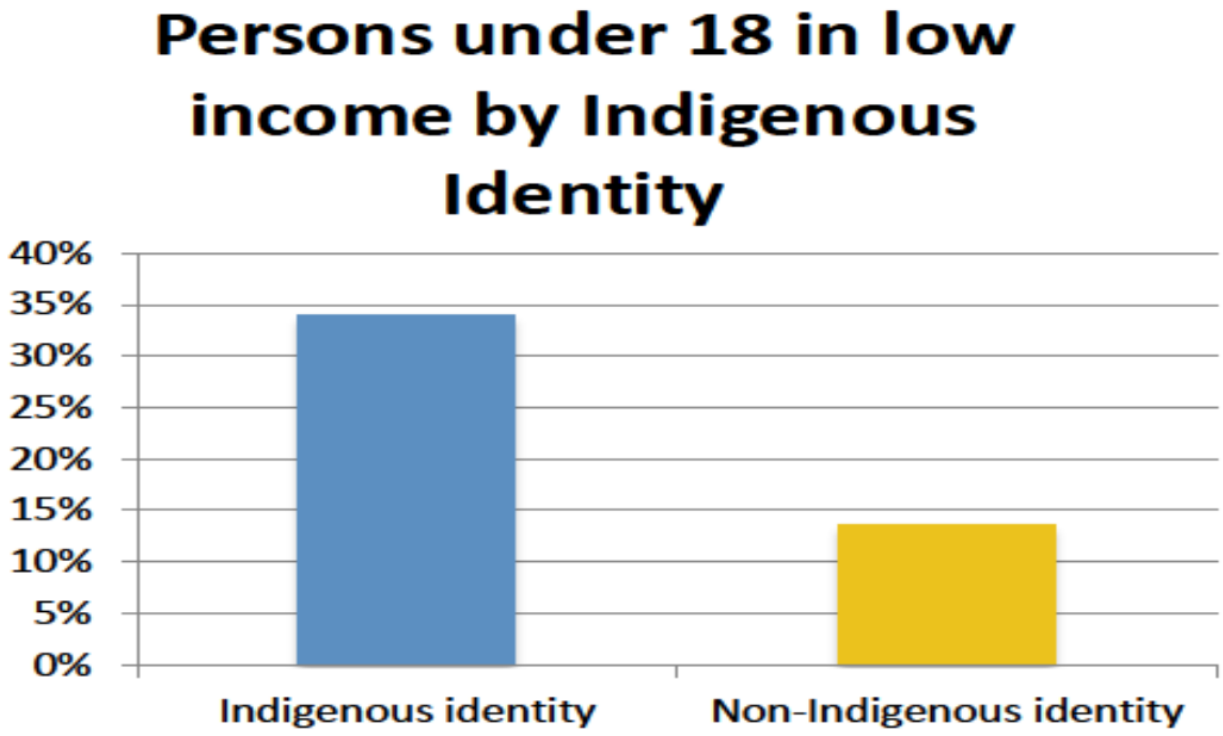
The City is making some investment on housing and meeting some of the needs of Winnipeg's unsheltered population. It is ensuring that it is accessing available federal funds thought the Rapid Housing Initiative. A commitment to direct outreach such as Main Street Project's outreach van, more funding for another 24/7 safe space and potentially holding parcels of land for non-profit development are all needed, though still could use more funds. However, what is an essential addition is dedicated staff. The Property and Development department are set to lose two dedicated housing staff positions. These positions must be made permanent until the housing crisis in this city has been resolved. There also must be a senior management position to ensure there is the ability to influence policy. With this submission, we urge Mayor Gillingham to appoint the staff position promised in the election within his office without further delay.

The second pole of the strategy, that speaks to supporting Indigenous Children, Youth and Families, is getting little to no attention though. The 2022 alternative municipal budget recommended operating funds for Circle of Life Thunderbird House, as well as for both Bear Clan and Mama Bear Clan. The success of the outreach work of the latter two initiatives is indisputable but maintained primarily through volunteers and unstable donations. This puts these programs at risk. The Circle of Life Thunderbird House was never funded or otherwise supported so has never been able to be the hub of connections and support for Winnipeg's urban Indigenous population it was meant to be. The estimated costs for the above would only be $490,000.

The other main recommendation is to properly resource the Indigenous Relations department with a further three full time staff for an estimated cost of $300,000. The department must also be given the autonomy to lead the work of reconciliation based on community identified priorities. The renaming of roads that currently commemorate the perpetrators of the attempted genocide of Indigenous Peoples is one such. There are members on today's council, Councilors Browaty and Wyatt, who voted in favour of renaming Arena Road to Milt Stegall Drive in 2007. If the City of Winnipeg can honour a football player, it can certainly pay tribute to the original Peoples of this land by using their languages to acknowledge their historical and ongoing presence. That there will

be some cost and period of adjustment is obvious. However, Mayor and Council must vote in favour of these changes as otherwise, it will be sending a message that it supports reconciliation unless it costs money or inconveniences anyone.

Winnipeg is the Canadian city with the highest percentage of Indigenous inhabitants. Indigenous children and families continue to be overrepresented in poverty across the country and in Manitoba in particular.



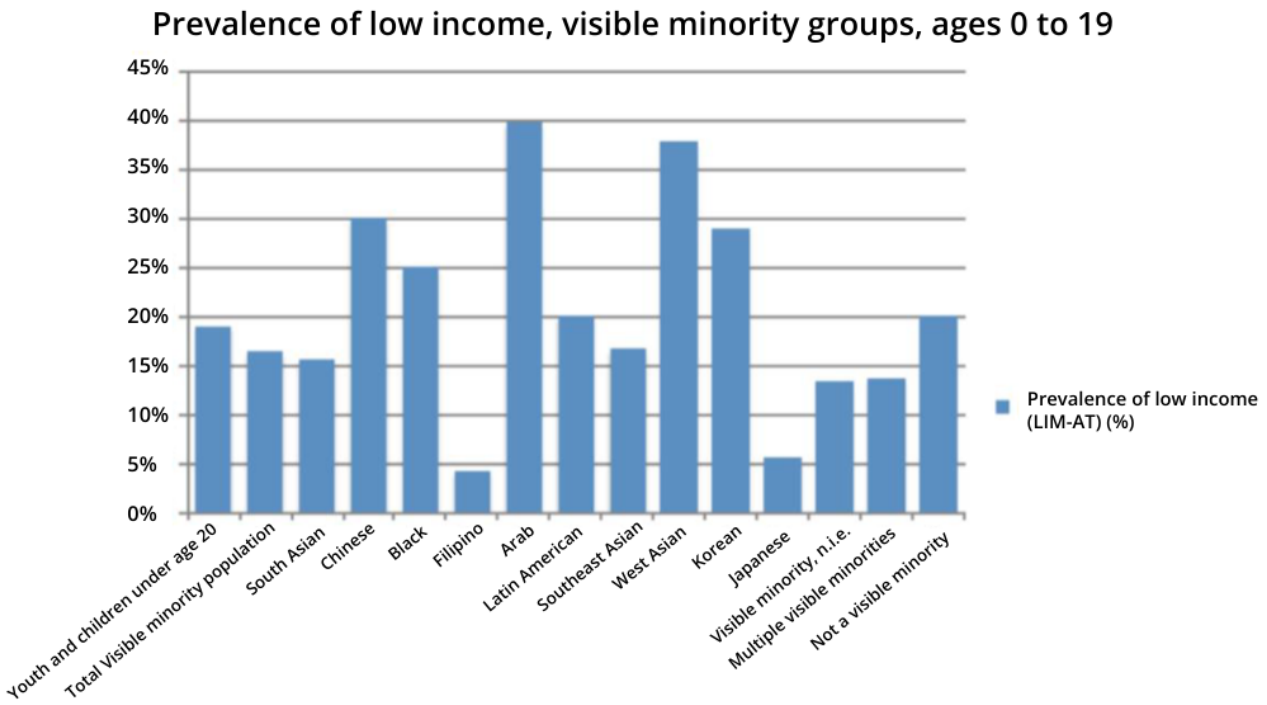
That the Indigenous Relations department has been asked to prepare a report on what a 2.5% decrease would mean is disquieting. What is further troubling in this proposed budget is that while there is comparatively little to no new funds found for poverty reduction, what small gains there have been are being clawed back.

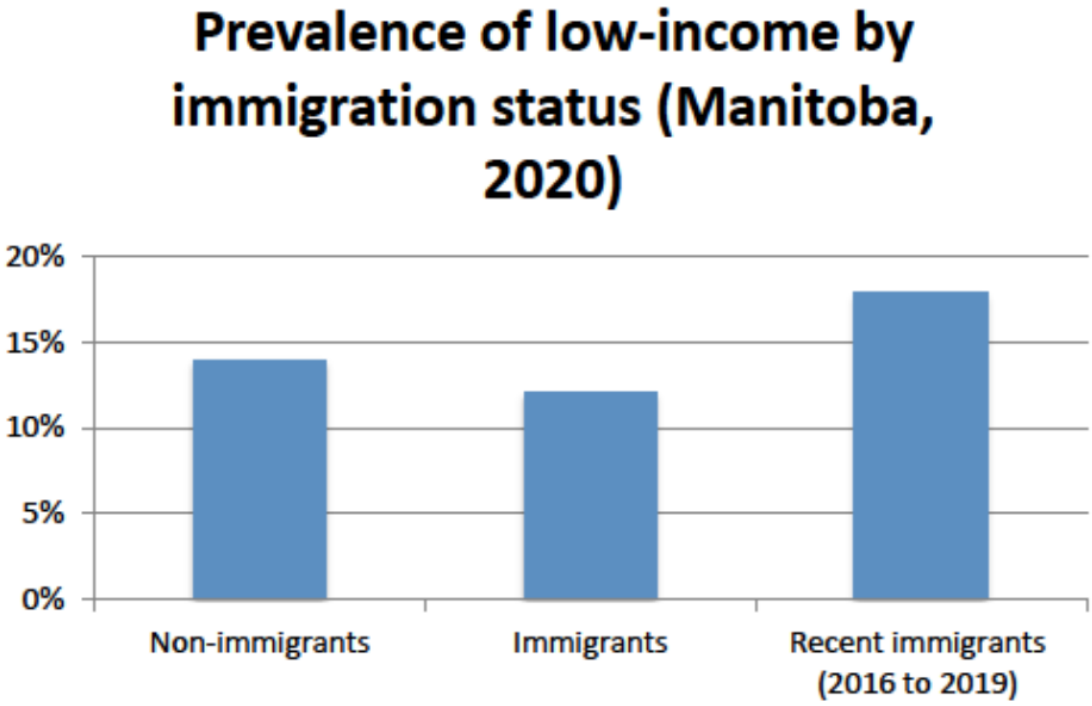
The public washroom at 715 Main – Amoowigamig's funding must not only be restored to the original 10 hours per day but must move to 24/7. By all measures, Amoowigamig has been a resounding success even on the less than adequate funding Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata has received to run it. The City's own report demonstrates its success in saving lives right in the moment through overdose interventions to connecting people with the supports they need for long-term stability. It also provides some measure of dignity to a population that is too often demonized. It must remain Indigenous run given that all Street Census reports indicate that Indigenous Peoples make up the majority of people experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg.

The next example is the Millennium Library and the Community Connections Space. Once again a creative City and community co-creation to respond to the initial security lockdown of the library in 2019. It was created to help the people who were already in the area around the library who needed more services than what some believe are traditional library ones. It was successful on the limited funds it had. Making referrals to other services, hosting community organizations to do their outreach and simply providing a welcoming space and kind ear. However, it was never funded enough to meet the need. It needs at least one additional community crisis worker and should have been staffed regularly by the people who have built relationships with struggling community members, namely the community safety hosts. This program has been a success in that it both employs people who have faced barriers to employment and provides a more effective and humane response to people in crisis. It has successfully de-escalated 92% of incidents as the community safety hosts receive four (4) times the amount of training a traditional security guard does.

In the wake of the tragic death of Mr. Cayer, ten to twenty thousand dollars a week has been found to add the police presence, metal detector and security guards at the Millennium Library. Funds were found for a safety audit of the library by Guarda World, the parent company of Guarda who first held and lost the contract to supply security at the Millennium Library. Yet, the Community Connections space remains closed and the City is breaking its commitment to Fearless R2W as they may soon have to lay off community safety hosts in response to fewer shifts being available. The funds, approximately $500,000, must be found to re-open and fully staff the Community Connections space so it is open during full library hours. In general, Library Services must be better funded to bring it to staffing levels of comparable cities such as Halifax but preferably Edmonton.

Attached to this submission is one from Immigration Partnership Winnipeg and a letter that is signed by 22 community organizations that collectively represent 150 organizations all speaking to the importance of the funding the Newcomer and Inclusion strategy. There is no need to reiterate those points here. However, as additional information, not only are Indigenous people over-represented in poverty but so are Black and other People of Colour. Immigration and settlement also play a role in poverty.





Funding the strategy will help ensure the City is doing what it can to address this inequity.

It is understood that the City must operate on a balanced budget and that the freeze on provincial funding has forced difficult decisions to be made in years past. However with an unexpected addition of $30 million from the province for this year's budget and an acknowledged need for a better funding model of municipalities, Mayor and Council can, and so must, look to do more for those most in need.

In closing, this submission notes that this budget, as proposed, is signaling a step back from successful interventions and the broader approach needed to address growing needs. Winnipeg continues to be the major city that spends the largest proportion of its funding, more than ¼, on policing. Yet, we do not see the reduction in crime this investment ought to yield. The evidence of the vast majority of criminologists is clear. Police are a response to crime but not the solution. It seems that Winnipeggers are more and more in agreement. The Police Accountability Coalition conducted polling in September of 2022. When asked if one had to pick one of two choices to reduce crime, more on poverty reduction or more on policing, 62% said more on poverty reduction while only 19% said more on policing. (Full poll attached).

As long as we continue to invest in ineffective and unsustainable responses to social ills, without even attempting to match those investments in what does work, poverty reduction, the status quo will not only be maintained but it will worsen as that has been the trend to date. Once again, the City Charter stipulates that Mayor and Council must fulfill the purposes of the City with one of those being to look after the health and well-being of its inhabitants.

Sincerely,



Executive Director