Dear Mayor and City Councillors,

In 2022, while campaigning for mayor, Mayor Scott Gilligham was quoted as saying "homelessness is a test of our compassion as a city"

Why then, in 2024, is it even a question that the EPC would be voting on defunding the Grants necessary for all of the art and outreach programs in City centre?

Our inner city youth are in crisis. The 2024 Winnipeg City Police report tells us the growth in violent youth crime rate is alarming.

I would like to talk about what that looks like from the point of view of someone who lives in North Point Douglas and has

done both outreach and workshop facilitating for youth at risk through programs offered by Art City through Resource assistance for youth.

If you want to protect our youth and you have to also protect these programs. Youth who have aged out of care make up a lot of the statistics you see in regards to unsheltered people in Winnipeg.

We see the racist policies that have been enacted by CFS that look like family separation, which have led to children fending for themselves in care, with little stability. Once they have aged out of care there are so few supports for these bright youth. Working along side them during workshops, we have talked candidly about their hopes, their dreams, their immediate goals to finish the classes they are taking ,

to find stable housing, to find a good job, to have a show in a gallery, to be part of the next community that will welcome them in as adults and as professionals.

I also see them on days when their checks are delayed, when they have no access to food, when they are facing eviction through no fault of their own. The system does not work for them. Places like Art City, Graffiti Gallery, RAY and public libraries become the safe spaces that they can rely on to use computers, store their artwork, connect with a broader community and have meaningful conversations about what they can do next in their lives. They are part of these communities and they belong.

Some of these youth have learning disabilities, or mental health conditions

that are compounded by the traumas they have faced in their lives. These youth are no different than your own sons and daughters execpt they have been born into different circumstances.

its no wonder, that when left unsupported and deliberately put at risk, these same youth, if they do not get the care and safety they require to survive end up in shelter, on the streets, using substances to survive the nights. Then they require the services of Main street project, mamawi, and others outreach agencies.

it is a whole pipeline of services. A whole pipeline of last chances and opportunities that are at risk with the cutting of these grants. It is nothing less than a death knell to many. In this particular case it would amount to quite literally, taking from the

poor to give to the rich.

if these funding grants are cut, to say it would be catastrophic to these communities would be an understament.

please do the right thing. A heart break to a single youth is a heartbreak to every outreach worker who has tried to help them along the way.

i appeal to your humanity, please protect these grants and increase funding so these programs can continue to provide safety and security to our community.

Stated in the COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES ACTION PLAN 2023 - 2026

Item 1.4 ACTION: Expand access to existing facilities and programming for recreation, library, community gathering, and 24/7 safe spaces, especially downtown.

OUTCOME: Improve access to safe community spaces

Item 3.2 ACTION: Co-create a city-wide community safety, well-being, and crime prevention action plan in collaboration with community-level partner agencies and stakeholders. **OUTCOME:** Increase safety and wellbeing

Item 3.6 ACTION: Increase funding to implement the Winnipeg Recreation Strategy. **OUTCOME:** Improve access to library and recreation services and facilities

The City of Winnipeg must implement and fund these plans.

Crime is up 31%. Youth crime is up 23% from 2022 to 2023, violent youth crime is up 43% over the last 5 years. Funding Community services reverse this trend.

Investing in Youth Programming is a win, win for the youth and for the safety and security of our city. Youth who have access to programming that provides activities, food security and a safe space to thrive have a place to be other than out on our streets. Community Programs provide our children with an alternative to addiction, homelessness, hunger and boredom. These vital programs provide our city's troubled and forgotten youth with a chance for a better tomorrow.

I stand in solidarity with community organizations that firmly oppose both the proposed alterations to the Community Grants Program review process and the substantial 62% reduction in funding for the critical initiatives it funds that directly contribute to community safety,

community development, and poverty reduction.

I urge you to reconsider the proposed changes to the Community Grants Program and instead:

1) Maintain the existing grant review process
2) Reinstate the 2.1 million dollars to the fund
3) Expand the reach of the program by adding additional funds to it.

The cuts and the new review process threaten the stability and effectiveness of organizations that are essential to building a safer, healthier, and more inclusive Winnipeg.

Sincerely,

Sharon Johnson