

SUBMISSIONS TO THE TORONTO CATHOLIC SCHOOL BOARD

BY: Claudia Esposito, parent, St. Michael's Choir School

- Thank you for allowing me to present. I am thankful for the chance to address the honourable members of the Board
- By way of introduction, I represent, a group of concerned parents from St. Michael's Choir School on Bond Street
- Our single purpose here is to ask the Board to protect our children, your pupils, from the imminent risk of harm posed by the opening of the Bond Place Hotel homeless shelter less than 50 metres from our school yard
- Our school is the product of a partnership between the Toronto Catholic District School Board and the Archdiocese of Toronto
- Our boys, starting as young as 7 or 8 years old, attend the school to learn under the auspices of the Toronto Catholic District School Board but also to sing and perform as a Choir to serve St. Michael's Cathedral for weekly masses, funerals, weddings and most religious celebrations
- Our school is a unique school and it has existed for 83 years
- It is not a private school
- None of the families are particularly wealthy
- Our school is also a commuter school and there are no school buses
- Our boys travel to Bond Street from all over the greater Toronto area
- Many of the parents work a long distance from the school and many children start taking public transportation at a very young age, often unaccompanied
- The school is also comprised of an academic building on the east side of Bond Street and a Choral Building on the west side of Bond Street. The gym is housed in an area beside the Choral Building and across from the academic side
- During regular school hours, the children cross Bond Street to transition between the academic building and choral building and gym throughout the day
- Recitals and concerts are held in the evenings and mass duties take place on Saturday evenings and early Sunday mornings, therefore outside of regular school hours
- As such, children must, by necessity, be on Bond street, often unaccompanied, during the week and on weekends, and at all hours
- That is why the parent community and the school community were shocked to find out that the Bond Place Hotel homeless shelter was opened by the City of Toronto on August 21, 2020 without any prior consultation with the school community.
- The shelter houses approximately 200 formerly homeless residents, many with serious mental health and addiction issues, and has the capacity to house up to 285 residents. This exceeds our student population at the Choir School. The

stated purpose of the shelter is to allow homeless individuals to have a space in which they can physically distance.

- Bond Street is a short street, and it is less than 250 metres long between Dundas and Shuter. As such, Shelter residents do not have a lot of space to move and wonder and naturally gravitate toward the school campus on a daily basis. Trespassing on school property, injecting drugs on school steps, drug trafficking and sex-for-hire interactions in plain sight are daily occurrences at the school now. Needles, feces and used condoms are routinely found on school property. Staff and children are harassed and insulted. Staff are scared to go to work. Both the Choral Buildings have had trespassers and the Choral Building was broken into twice since the Bond shelter opened.
- Many of the Choir School parents only found out about the shelter's opening through media outlets the week before school was set to open. Many others found out only at the online information meeting hosted by the school the Friday evening before classes began, and way after we were required to make decisions about online vs. in person learning
- On September 10th I listened to the first and only Community Information Session on the Bond Place shelter. The meeting participants were asked whether any consideration was given to the presence of the Choir school mere metres from the Bond Hotel when the decision to open the shelter was made. The response by the presenters was to the effect that the presence of the school was overlooked and that this was an oversight in the site selection process.
- The shelter operator also explained that the shelter does not keep a record of its residents. It is a no "barriers shelter". No questions are asked of the residents. No background checks are conducted. Names are not recorded. As such, the operators do not even know if the residents have a criminal history or are sex offenders
- On September 13, 2020, I wrote a letter to two elected officials at the City of Toronto and copied it to officials within the Toronto Catholic School Board expressing my concerns. In 48 hours, approximately close to 200 parents asked me to add their signature to my letter.
- It has been 3 weeks since the Community Information Session and 2 weeks since I wrote my letter. During this time, the City representatives and the shelter operators have not taken any concrete steps to address the serious hazard created to the school community by the shelter residents. The situation has been getting more dangerous and precarious every day
- Placing a sizeable population of individuals who have significant addiction and mental health issues next to a school in a limited geographical space creates obvious social and security hazards,
- The day before school started, I drove on Bond and observed with my own eyes a group of 5 or 6 residents on the shelter steps, grouped together with no social distancing in sight, clearly high, sharing an oversized bong and in plain view of the shelter's yellow-vested Community Safety Team a few feet away. No masks

were in sight. I should add that the Covid Assessment Centre lineup from St. Michael's hospital has been seen stretching north on Victoria Lane, east on Dundas and south on Bond, directly in front of the shelter. Our kids must either walk from Queen Station, directly in front of the Covid Assessment Centre Lineups, or south on Bond from Dundas, directly in front of the shelter doors

- The stated purpose of the shelter is to allow for physical distancing and to prevent the spread of Covid in the homeless population. The shelter is doing nothing to achieve this goal, while posing an incalculable risk to vulnerable and innocent children
- While we understand that homelessness is a serious problem, we cannot ask our children, already traumatized by the pandemic climate, to cope with having to view commercial exchanges of drugs and sex, and being exposed to serious safety risks posed by armed and unstable residents while exercising their right to education
- The homeless are vulnerable, but so are school aged children
- My request to you today is for the Board to Support our efforts to have the Bond Hotel shelter immediately relocated to a more suitable location that does not endanger children entrusted in your care
- The question is not whether a child might be hurt. The question is that a child will be hurt if the Board and City fail to act.