

Living in Community

November 11th, 2025

To: Vancouver City Council

Re: Opposition to cuts in proposed 2026 Budget

On behalf of Living in Community, we write to you to share our opposition to the proposed cuts in the City's 2026 Capital and Operating Budget, and in particular the proposed 12% cuts to the Arts Culture and Community Services department.

Living in Community (LIC) is a Vancouver-based non-profit and charity, working with partners in the city and across the province to protect and advance the safety of those working in the sex trade. We were created in the city as a response to violence against sex workers, and our model began to address a lack of trust among sex workers, police, the City, businesses, and other residents after the serial killer Robert Pickton was finally arrested.

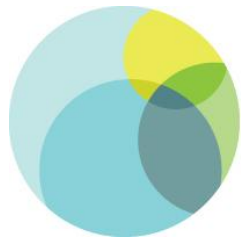
Over time, our work grew from convening and working with different community groups in Vancouver, all focused on how to increase the safety of those working in sex work by ensuring they are connected to services and frontline organizations, to convening and working with different community groups across the province with the same goal.

In 2012, LIC was a member of the City of Vancouver's Task Force to address the safety needs of sex workers. Along with other community members, we supported the City with creating Sex Work Response Guidelines which ensure sex workers' safety and needs are considered by all City staff, and we supported the City creating two social planner staff positions specifically focused on ensuring sex workers in the city are safe and that sex workers' needs are integrated into City planning.

Moreover, beginning in 2014 we began to convene the SAFE in Cedar Cottage project, which is a network of community members and neighbourhood stakeholders who meet regularly to discuss and address sex work concerns along Kingsway in the Cedar Cottage area. This project was created in 2014 to help address the lack of service providers around the Kingsway stroll, and robust community engagement was done at that time through interviews, group meetings, surveys, and conversations at community events.

Since those early days in 2014, the need has been identified for a drop-in space for sex workers on Kingsway, where sex work has been present since at least the 1990s. In 2020, we supported the City creating a temporary washroom trailer in this community, and then later a permanent drop in space, the Kingsway Community Station, which is operated by RainCity Housing. Through our monthly SAFE in Cedar Cottage meetings over the years, we receive updates about the KCS and we consistently hear that it is a needed, effective, and community-building space for sex workers in the area to be safe, to be connected to services and supports if they need them, and to build community. This has never been more true than now, in this time when one sex worker-serving organization in the city had to reduce their programming this year (WISH Drop-In Centre Society) and another had to close entirely after 30 years (PACE Society) due to funding constraints.

Since the early 2010s, the City has been a leader and has made significant moves to right the wrongs of the past and to invest in and care for one of our most vulnerable groups of community members.



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With this strong foundation in mind, we are extremely concerned that these forthcoming budget cuts will undercut and in fact undo the progress made so far, and will cause harm to sex workers and vulnerable people in the sex trade.

We know, through decades of both research and lived experience, that **the best way to keep vulnerable folks safe is to ensure that the services and organizations that they already go to and trust are open, available, and accessible.** This does not mean more police, it does not mean ill-advised “rescue” campaigns. These type of policing or enforcement-based approaches are ineffective, waste taxpayer dollars, and cause both sex workers and those at risk of exploitation or trafficking to go further underground and be further disconnected from community social services.

The recommendation for funding frontline services was made in the Honourable Commissioner Wally T. Oppal’s 2012 report *“Forsaken: The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry”* which recommended that governments must “provide funding to existing centres that provide emergency services to women engaged in the sex trade to enable them to remain open 24 hours per day.”¹

It was also made in the 2019 Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which recommended that “all governments... support programs and services for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people in the sex industry to promote their safety and security. These programs must be designed and delivered in partnership with people who have lived experience in the sex industry. We call for stable and long term funding for these programs and services.”²

In this time when we know the City is concerned about safety, as well as about efficient use of limited resources, we ask you to support the most effective and cost-efficient solution which is to ensure that these needed frontline community services remain open, and that the City’s social planners and infrastructure supporting the safety of this vulnerable group remain in place.

Any alternatives chosen, such as increasing policing while decreasing community supports, sadly will be a waste of taxpayer dollars and, we fear, will lead again to predators targeting vulnerable sex workers who cannot access the services they need. This has happened before, as the City knows all too well.

Please do not undo decades of progress to protect our vulnerable neighbours, and instead re-commit to ensuring your social planning staff, community services, and funding for initiatives including the Kingsway Community Station remain intact.

Sincerely,

Halena Seiferling
Executive Director, Living in Community
director@livingincommunity.ca

¹ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/law-crime-and-justice/about-bc-justice-system/inquiries/forsaken-es.pdf>

² <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>