

7 October 2006

Honourable Gérald Tremblay, Mayor of Montréal  
Hôtel de ville  
275, rue Notre-Dame Est  
Montréal, QC H2Y 1C6

Dear Mayor Tremblay:

On behalf of the 225 organizational and individual members of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, I am writing to express our dismay over the recent decision of the Ville-Marie arrondissement to close the parks of the centre city to the public at night. This decision is sure to result in further criminalization of homeless people living in poverty in Montréal, who already face considerable risk of arrest and detention for minor, non-violent crimes.

As the striking research of Prof. Céline Bellot has demonstrated, Montréal has a sad record of incarceration of homeless people for minor infractions for which they are unable to pay the fines. Homeless people who also suffer from drug or alcohol addiction are unlikely to get the help they need while under arrest or in detention. Those who need clean syringes to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C are unable to get them while in detention. With this regulation, the city is allowing the Ville-Marie arrondissement to compound the health challenges faced by this population, and the city can look forward to filling its jails with minor offenders and aggravating an already serious problem of HIV and hepatitis C transmission.

The arrondissement seems to assume that homeless people should use shelters and community centres at night rather than stay in the parks. But many of Montréal's shelters will not permit entry to people who have chronic drug addictions. With this policy, the city is limiting the options of people with addictions and forcing them into environments that discriminate against them. People with alcohol addiction and people who wish to be together as a couple may find themselves equally disadvantaged.

We have learned from colleagues in Montréal that representatives of the Quebec Commission on Human Rights and Youth Protection as well as homeless activists and Ville-Marie officials had agreed over a year ago on a human rights-centred strategy for homeless people. The closing of the parks in Ville-Marie is in direct contravention of this agreement. This decision undermines any claim Montreal might have to being a city that respects the rights of all its citizens.

I urge you to ensure that this unfortunate decision is reversed and to encourage the Ville-Marie authorities to return to discussions with human rights experts and advocates for the homeless to find solutions consistent with both humanitarian and human rights principles.

Very truly yours,



Joanne Csete  
Executive Director