

MEDIA RELEASE regarding the the Arrest of Protestors at Roos Island - May 12th 2023

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On May 9th and 10th, 2023 the Waterloo Region Police Services arrested and charged community advocates in relation to the April 27th protest at Roos Island at Willow River Park (Victoria Park).

The three protesters are members of established housing advocacy groups in the community who have been raising concerns about human rights violations related to the closure of Roos Island. The police charged them with Forcible Entry, Assaulting a Peace Officer and Mischief - Interfering with lawful use, enjoyment, or operation of property (WRPS Media Release, May 10th 2023).

Both the Social Development Center Waterloo Region and Waterloo Region Community Legal Services were at the rally on April 27th because we were raising concerns over the human rights violations regarding the fenced public space, prevention of access for social supports to the Island residents and the ban on tenting in the park. These charges are an extension of the criminalization of homelessness, which is antithetical to the human rights based approach to encampments that the City of Kitchener had previously endorsed. These charges are furthering the harm that the Island residents and their supporters are experiencing.

Additionally, the conditions of the charges state that the three protesters are not allowed to be in contact with one another, go to the safe houses associated with the Roos Island encampment, or be in any place that is deemed to be Willow River Park (Victoria Park). Not only is this a scare tactic enforced by the Police, these conditions also inhibit people on the Island from accessing their daily needs in the community, increasing isolation and decreasing their sense of safety.

The City of Kitchener's decision to fence off the Island and evict any future residents created conditions for these further harms to occur.

- We call on the City of Kitchener to rescind their recent decisions regarding the Roos Island Encampment
- We call on the Waterloo Region Police Service and the Crown's office to drop the charges laid against all three housing advocates
- We call on the City Council to require the City to collaborate with community partners and advocates to implement a Human Rights Approach to encampments and stop encampment evictions adversely affecting Black, Indigenous, and low-income residents.