

SUMMER 2025 EDITION

# ToughTimes

Nothing about Us, Without Us, Is for Us



## WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT BILL 6



Photograph via The Pointer

Bill 6, the "Safer Municipalities Act", passed on June 3, 2025. Bill 6 lowers the bar to arrest-encampment dwellers on the suspicion that they have used an illegal substance in a public space. Refusing to leave may result in arrest without warrant, a fine of up to \$10,000, or six months' incarceration. Police may also destroy substances they "reasonably believe to be illegal."

On the face of it, Bill 6 protects Charter rights. No person may be charged if evidence of the offence was obtained as a result of seeking emergency services or while assisting another in an emergency situation. However, those from the Persons With Lived Experience (PWLE) community know that, once stabilized, they could become a revisited target.

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association called for the government to withdraw Bill 6, stating it "will only serve to create additional pathways to criminalize vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness and substance use disorders."

City of Brampton Mayor Patrick Brown supports the bill. "We're doing our best to make sure that there's zero tolerance for drugs in public spaces, and that means clearing out encampments."

Bill 6 may be subject to a charter challenge. In 2023, the Ontario Superior Court of Justice ruled that removing individuals from encampment dwellings when there is inadequate shelter, individuals are denied their right to life, liberty and the security of a person - Individuals are not to be cleared from public space encampment dwellings.

Bill 6 goes hand in hand with the 2024 'Community Care and Recovery Act', which shuttered Peel's Moyo Health and Community Services programs for safe consumption sites in May. Research shows overdose deaths are likely to increase when illegal substances are not consumed in a safe or controlled setting.

The Ontario Government intends to create a Homeless and Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) Hub in Brampton to 'replace' the supervised consumption site. The model of mandated abstinence treatment at HART hub sites eliminates proven and practical public health hygiene that keeps individuals and the larger community safer: needle exchange that limits disease transfer and needle litter; supervised drug consumption and safer supply testing services.

## Inside the Issue

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Photograph via The Town of Caledon

**By: Hailey Ford in co-production with the Metamorphosis Network**

Caledon is a big town with a small population and a growing problem when it comes to public transit.

The town is physically larger than Brampton and Mississauga combined, but makes up only a fraction of the Peel population. It won't be like this for much longer, with a population growth of 300k expected by 2051.

Despite this, the town doesn't have close to the public transit infrastructure needed to match the growth. Currently, it's served by only seven bus routes, most of which only run along major roads during weekday rush hours, and are run by a patchwork of transit agencies.

Limited transit options can bar car-less Caledon residents from social opportunities, community connection and the freedom to explore. It's not just about commuters, it's about quality of life.

Moaz Ahmad, a Mississauga-based transit and infrastructure advocate, says that public transportation will be critical as Caledon grows. He says it needs to be developed now so the town isn't scrambling to build this infrastructure later on.

"It's very exciting for Caledon, because they have this opportunity to build before the people come," says Ahmad. "[Public transit] opens up a lot of doors for people when you don't have to make that investment in a car."

The town is awaiting approval from the Province of Ontario to expand to 18 transit routes by 2051, in collaboration with Brampton Transit. In a written statement, Dan Terzievski, the Caledon Director of Transportation, explained the value of the partnership. He says "this arrangement allows us to offer viable and affordable transit options to the community while leveraging Brampton's well-established transit service operation."

In the meantime, the lack of density and limited public transit leaves people feeling isolated and struggling to connect. This impact is particularly felt by the youth, the elderly, and others who don't have regular access to cars.

**// PEOPLE WANT  
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Since 1992, Caledon Community Services (CCS) has been offering door-to-door transportation services for seniors and adults with disabilities to help manage the longstanding problem of accessible mobility.

"It's a lifeline for the community," CEO Geraldine Aguiar says. "People can't pay \$50 for a taxi to get up the road."

Caledon Community Services charges four dollars for rides within Caledon, compared with ride-share services that can easily cost more than three times that for a trip of the same distance (though the exact rates vary from hour to hour).

However, with limited staffing, funding and more demand than they can meet, Aguiar says they end up turning away about 1,000 rides a month.

Before COVID, they had 15 volunteer drivers, but that has now dropped to two. They have made up some of the loss with four more paid drivers, still not enough to fill the gap.

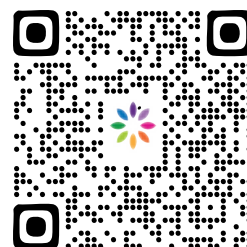
"It's a struggle for us to say no to someone because we can't accommodate a ride, but that is the reality," Aguiar says.

She says they were able to provide approximately 24,000 rides last year. With more drivers and resources, "that number could easily increase by 13,000 at minimum."



Photograph via Caledon Community Services

**BECOME A  
VOLUNTEER  
DRIVER**



The lack of resources means CCS can't offer rides for social trips, family visits, or to work. They have to prioritize medical appointments and day programs.

In Caledon, that leaves many missing out on those opportunities altogether.

"There's not anything that says once you reach a certain age, you don't need to go to the community center, you only need to go to the hospital," says Ahmad.

"People want to have full and rich lives, transit helps them have those experiences and opportunities."

Aguiar agrees that more public transit can help augment CCS, but not fully replace it. "The need for community and specialized transportation will always be there for the demographic where walking to a bus stop is a barrier."

Fifteen percent of people who live in Caledon, those between the ages of 15 and 24 (a similar proportion of the population to those over 65) are less likely to struggle getting to a bus stop, but are also feeling the lack of mobility.

Dmytro Basmat, a former programming manager at Che's Place, a youth centre in Bolton, believes the positive impact transit can have on younger community members is crucial to their independence.

"I worked with a lot of teenagers. They couldn't get anywhere except to school and back," he said. "They had to rely on their parents for transportation. That's unfair for them."

This is a sentiment shared by Sheralyn Roman, a community activist and mother.

"How does a student get to a part time job?" asks Roman. "If both parents are working in the city, how does their 17 year old get a part time job at a local grocery store?"

Like any commuter town, the majority of Caledon residents work outside of Peel, with 95 per cent using an automobile to get there. The lack of transit hours and routes reflect this, but there is concern that what exists isn't aligned with the demand.

"People need to go elsewhere at other times. People work overnight shifts," says Basmat. He

says service expansion needs to be a priority, not just during weekday rush hours. "[Decision makers should] focus on transport, focus on getting people where they need to go."

Roman's concerns go beyond employment, to the opportunity to volunteer, access to libraries, and community spaces that exist within Caledon.

She worries that people without reliable access to cars are not able to fully take advantage of what Caledon offers.

"In the village that I live in, there's an art gallery. There's a beautiful little cafe that also has a yoga studio. There are resources here," she says, highlighting that people can't enjoy these things if they simply can't get there."

Public transportation is access. It's opening up the community to everybody."

**"PUBLIC  
TRANSPORTATION  
IS ACCESS.  
IT'S OPENING  
THE COMMUNITY  
TO EVERYBODY"**



By: Sarah Grishpul



High temperatures can be deadly. The risk of heat-related illnesses increases with the temperature, time spent indoors, and individual sensitivity. Children, seniors, and those with chronic illnesses are most at risk.

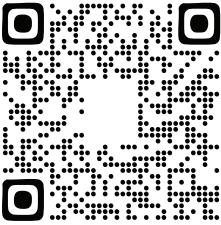
During heat warnings, the Region of Peel encourages individuals to seek shelter in public spaces with air conditioning, including shopping

centres, community centres, libraries and homeless shelters.

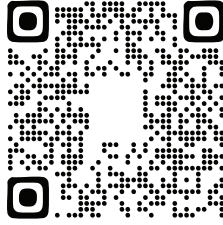
Heat warnings are issued when, for two consecutive days, temperatures are expected to be above 31C in the day, 20C overnight, or a reach a humidex value of over 40C.

In extreme heat, Peel municipalities will open cooling centres and public spaces to offer heat relief.

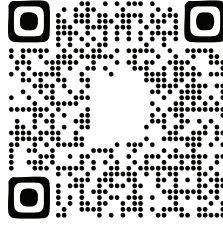
### BRAMPTON



### CALEDON



### MISSISSAUGA



## BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB OF PEEL

Boys and Girls Club has been changing the lives of children, youth, and families across Mississauga, Brampton, and Caledon for 42 years, since 1983.

As a not-for-profit, charitable organization, our purpose & impact has been and continues to be a positive service provider & partner for the 43,000 members we have served during this time.

Our valued & loyal members come from all walks of life, many from our vulnerable & marginalized communities across the Region, with some families seen as at-risk.

BGC Peel continues to be an affirming community where everyone can benefit from the services and programs we offer.

We are unique in that 80% of our youth leaders began as members with us as young as 6 years old. BGC Peel offers a lifetime for all children & youth to achieve and thrive in programs, school, and through life skill development.

BGC Peel provides a safe place to participate in impactful, fun activities that support the development of confidence, learning and positive relationships.

Opportunity changes everything. Our mission is to provide a safe, supportive place where children and youth can experience new opportunities, overcome barriers, build positive relationships and develop confidence and skills for life.

Our vision is that all children and youth discover and achieve their dreams and grow up to be healthy, successful, and active participants in society.

For more information, contact Michael J. Gyovai, Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director.





Screencapture via The Region of Peel

Dagma Koyi, founder of REST Centres, spoke to the Region of Peel about what should be done to address homelessness.

"Seek more consultation. Seek out those advocates. Seek out those agencies and organizations that are on the front line doing the work, and foster that collaboration," she says. "I think it is only together that we can bring the sustainable change we need to see in our communities."



"Poverty for me is created, I think that poverty can actually be solved. It is something that should not be taken lightly."

## IT'S TIME TO REVIEW THE PEEL YOUTH CHARTER



**By: Catherine Sople**

In October 2007 the Peel Youth Charter was crafted via the Peel Region Youth Violence Prevention Committee that had created the first Youth Crime Prevention Strategy in the GTA.

The 2005 Summer of the Gun of unprecedented youth and gang violence triggered quick action to respond.

In ceremony at Region of Peel, eleven signatories unanimously adopted the Charter on behalf of civic and policing partners: four local Peel governments, two public school boards, policing services, community safety committees and

the United Way of Peel. The Peel Youth Charter states: "By signing this Charter, we are committed to use our best efforts to ensure the safety, health, education and future employment of Peel's youth."

In 2018, the Peel Poverty Action Group advocated for a re-endorsement of the Peel Youth Charter with a request: Have the Charter be reviewed and updated by youth as the original version was created on their behalf by adults.

With an update to the Community Safety and Well Being Plan, the time is now for youth to be

engaged to update the Peel Youth Charter.

In this edition of Tough Times, we cover agencies that hold dear the tenets of the Peel Youth Charter. Read the Charter and send us your feedback: [info@ppag.media](mailto:info@ppag.media).

**READ THE PEEL  
YOUTH CHARTER**



**10TH YEAR  
ANNIVERSARY**



**Thursday, July 24, 2025  
10am-2pm**  
Mississauga Valley Community Centre  
Pavilion A & B  
1275 Mississauga Valley Blvd

You're invited to a community barbecue, rain or shine! Enjoy a free lunch and connect with our partners and community agencies to discover helpful resources available in Mississauga.



Learn more at [mississaugalibrary.ca/OWH](http://mississaugalibrary.ca/OWH)







**By: Hailey Ford**

Local activist, politician and academic Michelle Bilek has called Mississauga home even before it was named in 1974.

But she hasn't always had a roof over her head.

The first time she was homeless, Michelle was only a child.

"My mom grabbed me and my siblings, and we left my father in the night."

For months, the family bounced between a shelter and staying with family. In the 1970's, reprieve from "domestic violence" was a new topic for media attention - the suburbs had far fewer supports than Toronto

Dedicated to social justice, Michelle has had a strong community presence for decades which has led to saying the quiet part out loud - "Sharing stories is one of the best ways to help people feel less alone - and to make it clear to those in power what poverty looks like."

For Bilek, this meant gathering and sharing stories of those who were afraid to speak, putting data onto narrative, and moving policy to budget funding.

Michelle's dad struggled with mental health and addiction. Stigma and lack of supports prevented him from receiving treatment until much later in life.

"I think [my dad's] traumas and my experiences of that led me to get into psychoso-

cial work," Bilek says. "So I could learn a lot more about treatment options, as well as what he was seeing, thinking, and feeling."

Bilek earned a Bachelor's of Arts in Sociology from McMaster University with honours. Later in life, Bilek went back to school, studying Women and Gender Studies at York University. She says she was able to get scholarships, had wonderful professors, and gained a deep understanding of gender-based violence, equity, stigma, and racism.

However, through most of her undergraduate education, she was once again homeless.

"Mom decided, I don't know why, on a whim, that she would leave the post office, cash out her pension and go and run a restaurant," Bilek says. It was fine for a while.

But the rent was high and the mall was new, still finding its legs. "We lost everything. I was just starting my first year of university then, and we're homeless again."

Bilek worked at a hotel in the food service department, taking night shifts as often as possible. Bilek slept there when she could. She stayed in her car when she couldn't.

"It was stuffed with all my stuff. I had everything I owned in the back seat and in the trunk," she says.

At the time, she didn't consider herself homeless. The stigma, lack of resources, information, and understanding made it an uncomfortable idea that didn't quite resonate. "I don't think I identified until one specific incident."

It was a winter evening and snowing. She'd had an afternoon class earlier in the day, and was sleeping before her evening class started at seven. A security guard came over, knocked on her window and woke her up.

"You know classes are canceled, right?" Bilek says he asked. She hadn't.

"He glanced in the car and was looking at me, almost like a light bulb went off," she says. "He goes, 'you know, you can't stay here like that. You can't.'"

She drove off and found a parking lot near a strip mall. She stayed there often until they managed to get back on their feet.

"Being homeless is a very busy job. Staying alive is difficult every day," Bilek says. "I just don't think our power holders understand that the system has failed people, and that's why there are people on the streets."

In high school, she'd been asked to research the political system and parties. She identified the most with the New Democratic Party (NDP) and started volunteering on campaigns, which continued through university and beyond. She ran for office under the NDP five times, and twice municipally.

"When I was talking about these issues, workers' rights, but specifically around poverty and homelessness, it wasn't unusual for people to say 'what are you talking about?'" Bilek says. "People were at the peripherals. They were so ashamed, so hiding, everybody hid. No one spoke about it."

**// I DON'T THINK  
OUR POWER HOLDERS  
UNDERSTAND THAT  
THE SYSTEM HAS  
FAILED PEOPLE. //**

Bilek held multiple community table and board positions focusing on poverty, spreading awareness, and sharing the stories that many were afraid to talk about.

One of her boards oversaw federal funding initiatives in the community. At a regional conference, she learned about a pilot project happening in Hamilton and Waterloo - quantifying the number of people experiencing homelessness in a given community. She says this was an important step towards visibility.

"I don't think at that time we did a good job understanding how many were poor, or on the social housing waiting list, or utilizing social assistance," Bilek says.

In the time since, Bilek has further grown professionally, personally, and as an activist. She's left full-time bureaucratic jobs, board positions, table seats, and not-for-profits as she figures out what change she needs to accomplish in the moment. Often, that comes down to what people truly need, not just what politicians think they do.

"Bringing the voices of people with lived experiences, centering them, not just not just consulting them, not just speaking for them, but centering them and embedding them within power-holding structures is the only way that we can actually solve these issues."

Bilek says that people in power or positions of privilege may understand in theory that anyone can experience homelessness or poverty, but can't grasp the realities of it. Or what's needed to survive.

"Once you have to live that very busy life

of trying to survive and being as creative as possible, you get a better understanding of why people do whatever they have to do to survive," she says. "I'm thinking of stealing food, of finding means to make money under the table, because if they can't, they'll lose their income."

// BEING  
HOMELESS IS  
A VERY  
BUSY JOB //



Because of her past work, Bilek has connections to a lot of power-holders. She knows everything from housing and construction planning to municipal barriers and bylaws.

She says she knows the infrastructure side of things and the homelessness service sector to a tee. She also knows how to

make the most of her connections.

"I take a tactical approach. Politicians don't want to be attacked; what they want you to do is provide them with solutions," she says. "There are times when you have to be aggressive too, because the rights of individuals are being trampled on."

Bilek says that despite increased visibility and many activist efforts, things have gotten worse in many ways.

"When I was experiencing poverty, when I identified and understood people who are experiencing homelessness, it wasn't the catastrophe that it is today, the crisis level that is today," she says.

"We have to really tell politicians, remind them that people may be homeless, but they're also your citizens. They're not a problem. You are the problem because you caused people to be in this situation."

## CANADA POST AND ONTARIO WORKS CHEQUES



Photograph via Fort Erie

### By: Tough Times

Canada Postal Workers are set to vote on an offer presented by Canada Post. The vote was forced by the federal government, which previously 'paused' the strike action. Members are being urged to vote no by union leadership. Through any disruptions, Ontario Works will not be mailing cheques and documents may be delayed. Those who typically receive cheques should contact their local social assistance office to either set up direct deposit, sign up for a reloadable payment card or discuss other ways to receive cheques.

## SHIP TO BUILD AFFORDABLE BRAMPTON HOUSING



Rendering via SHIP

### SHIP Media Release

Services and Housing in the Province (SHIP) is raising \$4 million to help bring 52 new affordable and supportive housing units to Downtown Brampton. Located at 273 Main Street North, Brampton, the project comes at a critical point for the Peel Region. The region currently has only 7,600 dedicated affordable housing units. Shelters are operating at 300% capacity, and some residents wait over 21 years for subsidized housing. Rents will range from \$390 to \$950 per month, with 11 units built to be barrier-free and fully accessible.

## PEEL REGIONAL COUNCIL APPROVES CSWB PLAN



### By: Tough Times

Peel Region Council approved its updated Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Plan. Watch PPAG member Michelle Bilek call for more community inclusion and Indigenous representation to tap lived-experience solutions. The CSWB priorities encompass family violence, mental health and addictions, systemic discrimination, international students, and youth violence prevention. Next approaches aim to identify issues earlier and strengthen relationships with community groups.



## REGIONAL HOMELESSNESS SERVICES IN PEEL

In Peel there are many programs available to support housing, shelter and fundamental needs. Please visit [www.peelregion.ca/housing](http://www.peelregion.ca/housing) for more information.

### Street Helpline Peel - 1-877-848-8481

- Offering 24/7 support for urgent homelessness needs, food, shelter access, referrals and more. The Street Helpline connects you to our mobile Street Outreach team who can often come to your location to help. If you're in crisis or face an urgent need, call us.

### Shelter Intake Line - 905-450-1996

- We can help you find the best option in any Peel shelter, including in adult, youth and family shelters.

### Mental Health Support

- Distress Centre Peel – 905-278-7208
- Kids Help Phone – 1-800-668-6868
- Mental Health Mobile Crisis Centre of Peel – 905-278-9036
- Youth Mental Health Crisis Response Service – 416-410-8615

### Regeneration Meal Program and Supports -156 Main St N

- Facilities and food for people in need
- Showers and laundry
- Phone and computer
- Staff support
- Clothing
- Breakfast - 8a.m. to 9:30a.m. (9:15 a.m. on Sundays)
- Lunch - 11:30a.m. to 12:30p.m., Monday to Thursday
- Hours - Monday to Friday 7a.m. to 3p.m., Saturdays 7a.m. to 9:30 a.m., Sundays 7a.m. to 9:15 a.m.

### City of Mississauga

- Services are available to support at-risk individuals and the homeless in Mississauga, including free hot meals and shower access.
- Visit [mississauga.ca/recreation-and-sports/sportsand-activities/assistance-programs/help-for-thehomeless/](http://mississauga.ca/recreation-and-sports/sportsand-activities/assistance-programs/help-for-thehomeless/)

### Call - Street Helpline Peel Team at: 1-877-848-8481

Call if you are homeless, or at risk of being homeless, or know someone who is in need. Get help to access emergency and transitional shelters, street outreach, support services and finding permanent housing



Photograph via The Region of Peel

The **Peel Food Map** provides updated hours and information on donations, through the Emergency Donation Centre.

Call 211 if you can't access the online food map.



### Visit PPAG's Website



**ppag.media**

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