

Premier Ford ignoring 'heroes' in city's northwest corner

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By Faisal Hassan
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York South—Weston, the community I represent, is home to folks you have heard about throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, suddenly deemed “essential:” the personal support workers caring for seniors, the grocery store workers ensuring families have food, the transportation and warehouse workers without whom our supply chains would grind to a halt.

Folks for whom working from home during the pandemic is not an option. Folks who don't have a paid day off if they have COVID-19 symptoms.

While Premier Ford and his ministers continue to call folks from neighbourhoods like mine heroes, when it comes to protecting their health and safety, Ford's actions don't match his words.

Toronto Public Health data has confirmed that the city's northwest corner — encompassing neighbourhoods like Weston, Black Creek, Downsview-Roding CFB and Mount Olive-Silverstone-Jamestown — has been hardest hit by the coronavirus, with some of these neighbourhoods seeing COVID-19 rates more than 10 times higher than in the city's least affected, wealthier areas.

Yet, my community has been neglected by the Ford government when it comes to access to testing for COVID-19.

For months, my constituents have contacted me to express frustration with not having local access to testing. In June, I wrote to the premier and minister of health outlining the need for testing facilities in York South—Weston. I suggested bringing in local pop-up testing, and using the former Humber Memorial site at 200 Church Street as a testing facility. Months later, they haven't responded.



Meanwhile, Ontario Health told me folks here should just get tested elsewhere. We're in a hotspot. Families here have been getting sick. But it's these families that have been asked to get on a bus to find a testing centre in a neighbourhood with more resources.

These northwest neighbourhoods have the largest proportion of Black residents in the city; health inequities and systemic racism are rampant. Governments have neglected us when it comes to affordable housing, youth programs, mental health supports, better transit and overcrowded schools.

Doug Ford cut affordable housing, mental health funding and youth programming. He hiked class sizes. Folks are facing more crowded conditions and fewer resources.

Meanwhile, local social service organizations like Weston King Neighbourhood Centre, Community Place Hub and Midaynta Community Services have asked the government for help with PPE and cleaning supplies. Community groups have made generous donations to try to fill gaps, but the government hasn't heard their cries.



A recent study by the Wellesley Institute shows tenants in the northwest corner are likeliest to be targeted by an anticipated wave of evictions.



The social and economic disparities in York South—Weston and the city's northwest corner aren't new, but they have been intensified by COVID-19.

We are people and families. We are workers who have given our all during this pandemic, caring for seniors in nursing homes, driving city busses and bagging groceries. We are neighbours who love and care for each other.

And we deserve better.

Faisal Hassan is the NDP MPP for York South—Weston, and Youth Engagement critic for the Official Opposition.