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Carding: An Open Letter to the City of Toronto and the Province of Ontario from Black Intellectuals, Writers and Organisers.

November 25, 2016

On November 17, 2016 the Toronto Police Services Board voted to continue the practice of Carding in a revised form. The decision by the TPSB represents a significant impact on the rights of Black, Indigenous, and Brown people, as well as homeless people and other marginalized people in our Toronto community.

In “Known to the Police” the Toronto Star’s ground-breaking analysis of street checks data, better known as carding, it was confirmed that the practice of carding in Toronto disproportionally impacts the lives of Black and Brown men in the City of Toronto. The Star’s analysis dramatically confirmed what Black people and Black activists had been maintaining for many years, that Toronto Police disproportionately target Black and Brown young people in their street checks. In these street checks the personal information of these young people is unconstitutionally and illegally gathered and stored in a database for unspecified use in the future. Many people who have been carded have come forward to explain how the practice of carding robs them not only of their Charter Rights but of their dignity as well. There is growing evidence that the information gathered in the database has been used to deny persons access to resources and jobs for which they would have been otherwise qualified. The corrosive effects of carding, on the lives and rights of Black Canadians in particular, have been a clear signal of their marginalization in the City of Toronto.

The practice of carding is so egregious that the Province of Ontario in a recent set of consultations suggested that it be significantly reformed. We say reform is not enough. Carding not only violates Charter Rights of Black Canadians and others, but carding robs its targets of dignity, bodily integrity, freedom of movement and freedom of assembly, and, makes clear to them that they are not seen as necessary or instrumental parts of the City of Toronto. Carding, as a recent UN Special report confirmed, yet again, after a fact finding visit to a number of cities, has an impact on Black people in Canada that is deeply destructive to their lives.

We the undersigned call on both the Province of Ontario and the City of Toronto to immediately abolish

carding, destroy all the data that is the fruit of these illegal detentions and issue an immediate directive to police officers that carding cannot be used in the Province nor the City as an “investigative tool”. We further demand that police officers should be clearly held to account for their behaviour when they violate the human rights of Black, Brown and Indigenous people through the surreptitious methods of carding.

We make these demands in light of the fact that the citizenship rights of Black Canadians are being violated and indeed made null and void each time a Black person is carded. The new regulations announced on November 17 on carding suggest that Black young people now and into the future will be targeted as collectively and generally suspect because of the colour of their skin. The new regulations confirm the intention of ongoing, sanctioned intrusion into the lives of Black citizens. If we say that young people are our future, then the clear message that carding and data collection and storage send to young people of African descent is that they have no future in this country. The new regulations signal open season on Black life. This is unacceptable in a multiracial and multicultural society. In fact, carding is an abhorrent practice that mars any claim of a just society in the Province of Ontario and the City of Toronto, let alone the country.

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File attachments:

Carding- OpenLetter from Black intellectuals, writers and organisers .pdf

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