I wanted to speak today about some of the challenges that occurred for residents of Vanier and Overbrook during the occupation of downtown Ottawa in late January and February of this year. However, I am unable to come speak in person as I need to be available to finish my work day and to pick my kids up from school.

I hope members of this Board can reflect on the need for equity when considering methods of participation. Going in-person only leaves out a large number of residents, often those who are lower income, who have less flexible employment, who have difficulties with transportation, and who, like me, have caregiving responsibilities. Thinking about equity-seeking citizens, I hope the OPSB will follow the lead of other committees offering hybrid participation. Hybrid participation is more equitable, is easier for most participants, and allows for the same information to be shared without expending people's time and travel budgets to the same extent.

On the subject of the convoy, while local residents faced less noise and harassment than those who live in Centretown, there have been many challenges in Vanier and Overbrook. We saw horns honking and convoy traffic in our neighbourhoods. We saw hateful signs and experienced street harassment. These pressures were especially difficult for the BIPOC people in our community who experienced racism related to the convoy and who had to see hate symbols, including confederate flags and swastikas, in their community. These communities often experience over-policing of day-to-day issues, but residents did not feel protected from the convoy.

I would ask you to think about how you can work to make things right with community members. What will you do to mend the harm that has occured? Is there a plan, or is this the job for someone else? If it is the job for someone else, the community is owed - at a bare minimum - an explanation as to why the convoy was allowed to hold our communities hostage and to subject them to hate, racism, ableism and other harms.

Thank you,
Laura Shantz