



EQUAL  
EDUCATION  
LAW CENTRE



**17 October 2025**

Dear Geordin Hill-Lewis,

Equal Education (EE), the Equal Education Law Centre (EELC), and Ndifuna Ukwazi (NU) are appalled by your recent [remark](#) dismissing spatial apartheid as mere ‘*propaganda language that is no longer rooted in reality.*’ From where we stand, working with communities on the ground, alongside parents and learners across Cape Town and beyond, spatial apartheid is not propaganda. It is your policy in action.

We cannot help but ask what compels a public leader to deny a truth that is visible in every map, every commute, every school report, and every eviction. At best, your remarks are a semantic smokescreen that obscures a reality the City itself has long acknowledged. At worst, they are a deliberate dog whistle - an appeal to those who refuse to confront the enduring inequalities that continue to benefit Cape Town’s most privileged residents.

### **Your Own Government and the Highest Court Disagree**

This denial flies in the face of recent Constitutional Court findings. In December 2024, Justice Mathopo, in the *Bromwell Street* matter, held:

*“The City of Cape Town’s implementation of the National Housing Programme is declared to be unconstitutional to the extent that the City unreasonably compounds the legacy of spatial apartheid by failing to provide Temporary Emergency Accommodation in the inner city to persons evicted from Woodstock, when its residents had succeeded in resisting forced removals under the successive Group Areas Acts.”*

Even the President, in the 2025 State of the Nation Address, acknowledged:

*“To tackle inequality, we need to undo apartheid spatial planning, which has scarred our cities and forced many people to live far from areas of work and opportunity. We have delivered millions of housing opportunities since 1994, providing safety and dignity to poor households, yet the practice of building housing developments on the periphery of urban centres has perpetuated inequality and urban sprawl.”*

To call spatial apartheid propaganda is not only factually wrong, it is politically reckless and out of step with the priorities of a Government of National Unity, which has itself committed to dismantling spatial inequality.

## The Data Disagrees

The facts are as undeniable as they are uncomfortable. Datasets produced by your own administration tell a story of deep, racialised inequality.

The City of Cape Town has published a [map](#) that overlays property values with matric pass rates. Suburbs with higher property values consistently achieve matric pass rates above 90%. In contrast, areas with property values below R1500 per square metre - overwhelmingly in areas historically designated for Black and Coloured working-class people under apartheid - record pass rates below 60%. This is your City's data, not ours.

[Research](#) also shows that Cape Town continues to suffer from the "40x40x40 legacy", where residents affected by enduring spatial apartheid live in 40m<sup>2</sup> homes, located 40 kilometres from places of work, and spend approximately 40% of their income on transport alone. This is the geography of exclusion - a city designed to keep poor and working-class residents on the margins, both physically and economically.

Ironically, while the Mayor claims to prioritise tackling unemployment, the administration continues to ignore one of the primary drivers of South Africa's endemic joblessness and stagnant growth: spatial exclusion. According to Harvard Growth Lab, spatial inequality remains one of the single largest structural barriers to economic inclusion and productivity in South African cities. Ironically, your statements at a recent webinar convened by the Centre for Development Enterprise, a neoliberal thinktank that championed the Harvard Growth Lab research, appear to directly contradict this position on spatial apartheid.<sup>1</sup>

## Education and Spatial Inequality

You do not need to look far to see this evidence in action - it is visible in every school every day.

An eleven-year-old child in this city was recently [forced](#) to walk 35 kilometres home after being left by a bus. This is not an isolated incident. Across the city, poor and working-class learners spend hours travelling to reach schools, risking their safety on roads and highways.

Between 2013 and 2020, average travel times increased across all modes of public transport - 91 minutes by train, 59 minutes by bus, and 51 minutes by taxi (National Household Travel Survey). Only those who travelled by private car saw shorter journeys. Many of these learners and their parents who take these commutes are let down by a system which has failed to even the playing field and ensure equitable and quality access in ALL schools, irrespective of their geographic location.

Equal Education learner member Azakhe Msimango explains:

*"I have to wake up at around 4:30 am to bathe and prepare to go to school. I am a learner at Thandokhulu High School located in Mowbray, which is about 45 minutes away from where I live. You add traffic and the long taxi queues, it takes me two hours to get to school. I am schooling at Thandokhulu High School because my parents thought that the school is better*

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<sup>1</sup> Mbolekwa, S. 2025. [Public housing won't solve segregation: Cape Town mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis](#). Times Live. 13 October 2025travelled.

*for me and better than the ones in our township, but I still face challenges commuting to school and it is a hassle. Even beyond that, there's a big difference between Mfuleni and Mowbray and the broader CBD, it's giving apartheid. Black people in the township with limited access to things and white people in the CBD with access to resources. So the spatial injustice is still happening and it is not easy for us as learners - getting to school late, being tired because you wake up early, and sometimes transportation not being available because taxis are striking."*

This story is the rule, not the exception. It captures the daily exhaustion and danger faced by thousands of learners who must cross the boundaries of a segregated city just to claim their right to education. This has been highlighted at length in the Equal Education school safety report called [Safety Ngoku!](#). We advise you read this report and familiarise yourself with the lived experience of people who reside in the city you lead.

Spatial apartheid lives on in every kilometre between a child's home and their classroom. Families travel far because nearby schools are overcrowded, under-resourced, and underserved - not because these schools are inferior, but because the state continues to deny them the investment they deserve. In areas like Khayelitsha, Kraaifontein, and across the Cape Flats districts, learners face crumbling infrastructure, teacher shortages and low learning outcomes. These are not the failures of schools or educators, but the failures of government policy, funding and planning. Your remarks ignore this structural reality and suggest that the spatial barriers families face are no longer relevant when they remain central to educational exclusion.

Even when parents try to overcome these barriers, they meet new walls. School admission policies still mirror apartheid-era feeder zones. A parent in Gugulethu applying to a former Model-C school because the State has failed schools in township areas is often rejected on the basis of 'oversubscription' or distance policies that quietly preserve racial and class segregation.

Cape Town remains a city of two schooling systems: one for the beneficiaries of apartheid, and one for those it oppressed. Under your watch, the city's future continues along this path, with rapid exclusionary property development in the CBD "[driving economic growth](#)", while racialised patterns of exclusion remain entrenched on the periphery.

### **Housing Market and Racial Exclusion**

The same geography that determines a child's access to a quality school also determines their family's access to a home. Education and housing are not separate crises but two sides of the same coin. Spatial apartheid is not just a matter of where people live, but of who gets to belong, and who must keep travelling across the boundaries of exclusion simply to survive.

Apartheid-era spatial design remains intact because the City continues to resist integrating affordable housing into well-located areas near good schools, transport, and jobs.

The result is predictable: Black and working-class families remain confined to the periphery, while wealth and opportunity are concentrated in the inner city. The Western Cape Education Department reinforces this segregation through rigid school admissions policies that privilege "feeder zones"

aligned with these exclusionary boundaries. These policies do not operate in isolation - they are part of a broader system that sustains apartheid-era geography under new terms.

Spatial apartheid cannot be denied, because ignoring it leads to urban planning decisions that systematically block equitable access to socio-economic rights. At a recently launched mixed-use precinct in Cape Town, racial exclusion was reproduced despite the inclusion of discounted housing units. Landlords and agents continue to favour higher-income tenants, and because Black, Coloured, and Indian households earn significantly less than White households, segregation persists in practice. This pattern is not incidental; it is structural.

By denying the existence of spatial apartheid, you obscure this system and absolve those responsible for dismantling it. Ignoring how race, class, and geography intersect in the housing market allows the City to appear progressive while maintaining the status *quo*. Spatial apartheid is not a slogan; it is a market design. One that prices working-class families out of opportunities and locks the next generation into poverty.

### **Policy Failure and Political Misdirection**

The myth that semigration is overburdening the City of Cape Town and the Western Cape conveniently obscures the State's active role in deepening the crisis. While [Not in My Backyard](#) (NIMBY) voices push back against arriving families, the real issue lies in the government's refusal to effectively break from apartheid-era planning.

By failing to build housing in well-located areas to accommodate a growing population, and by offering inadequate support to schools in township communities, the state entrenches spatial inequality and then shifts blame onto those most affected by it. Your comment is not simply inaccurate; it is a political deflection that masks deliberate policy choices which continue to protect privilege, pit the haves against the have-nots, and render those responsible invisible to accountability.

### **A Caution and A Call**

We caution you that any policy that treats income or class as a substitute for race will fail to undo spatial apartheid. It will only reproduce it. Real inclusion requires confronting how race, land, and power remain intertwined in this city's design.

Spatial apartheid is not 'propaganda.' It is a lived and ongoing reality. A structure that decides who can live where, who can learn where, and who can thrive. If you cannot see spatial apartheid, it is not because it has disappeared. It is because you refuse to look beyond the City Bowl.

To deny it is to deny the daily experience of millions, just to comfort those who continue to benefit from inequality. It makes apartheid's legacy seem distant and abstract when, in truth, it remains mapped across our streets, schools, and housing markets. Confronting and undoing this demands principled and *honest* leadership that is willing to name injustice for what it is, and to act decisively to reverse it.

Spatial apartheid is not propaganda - but pretending it is not real is.

[END]

**To arrange a media interview, contact:**

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