



Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation
Centre pour les droits à l'égalité au logement

10 December 2019

Deputation – Planning and Housing Committee
Item 11.5 – HousingTO 2020 – 2030 Action Plan

Good morning councillors, staff, advocates and residents of Toronto:

My name is Alyssa Brierley and I am the Executive Director and General Counsel for CERA – the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation. For those of you who don't know us, we've worked to advance the right to housing for over 30 years, on the frontlines trying to stop people from losing their homes and also working to advance progressive housing policy in Toronto and Ontario.

You're going to hear from many people today and they're probably going to throw a lot of data, a lot of facts and a lot of numbers at you. But I'm here today to tell you about someone who called our hotline last week. I won't use her real name for confidentiality reasons, so I'll call her Sue.

Sue had just received an eviction notice and was desperately looking for someone to help her stay in her home. Sue has lived in Toronto her whole life: she was born here, went to school here, worked here, raised her family here and, for the last 15 years has lived in a modest apartment in the East End of the City. Sue is being evicted because she's paying \$900 a month rent in a market where the average one bedroom apartment goes for \$2250. She's being evicted so that her landlord can make more money, it's as simple as that. For someone like Sue, this is devastating because there's nowhere for her to go.

It wasn't supposed to be like this. Housing is a human right. It is a human right because you can't lead a life of dignity without a roof over your head. You also can't do so many other things without a home. You can't raise a family, get a job, be healthy or participate in a democratic society without a place to call home. And because it's a human right, that means it matters more than other things, like profit or neighbourhood character or all the other reasons why we so far haven't been able to make sure that everyone has a roof over their head in this city.

That is why I am thrilled to be here on International Human Rights Day to urge this Committee to pass this new housing plan that commits to the right to housing.

This means that policies can prioritize the needs of people over other considerations. This means that policies will contemplate the people who most often fall through the cracks in our city. And this means that open, transparent and participatory processes will guide the development of our ongoing work.

This housing plan is for Sue and all of the other people like her because there are thousands of Sues in this city and they need help.

I want to challenge this Committee, Council and staff to ensure that the housing plan walks the walk of human rights by prioritizing those in the greatest need, ensuring that an independent Housing Commissioner is established and creating a workplan with clear goals, targets and timelines.

I want to commend the leadership of this committee in supporting the right to housing and I want to recognize the incredible work of staff in putting together a plan that has the potential to fundamentally transform the way we do housing in the city by putting a human rights lens on it. This is a big deal – the first time in Canada. In April we asked you to be bold and you have. Thank you.

I also want to commend staff for leading an open, transparent and participatory process to develop the plan. CERA was an active participant in this process as a member of the External Advisory Committee, hosting our own consultation, participating in city consultations and even presenting at one of them. We remain ready and willing to assist in the ongoing work to bring this Housing Plan to fruition.

The lack of safe, affordable and adequate housing is one of the greatest human rights challenges of our time. Today, this Committee can take the first step towards meeting that challenge by adopting this plan and I urge you to do so.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AB', with a large, stylized flourish extending from the bottom right.

Alyssa Brierley
Executive Director and General Counsel
Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation