

Submission from Jonathan Robart, Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodations



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

December 7, 2020

Economic and Community Development Committee

EC18.3 – Supporting People with Disabilities in Toronto During and Beyond COVID-19 - Shelter, Support and Housing Administration Programs

Dear Members of the Economic and Community Development Committee

CERA has been working to advance the right to housing and rights-based housing policy in Toronto and Ontario for over 30 years. We were founded in 1987 by a small group of Ontarians who were deeply concerned about discrimination in housing. Our work includes working directly with tenants across Ontario facing eviction and housing-related human rights violations, including discrimination and unequal access to adequate and accessible housing. I am writing to share some of the experiences we hear about from persons living with disabilities who struggle to obtain and maintain adequate housing.

At CERA, we routinely assist people living with disabilities who are openly discriminated against when attempting to secure and maintain adequate and accessible housing. We frequently hear stories about landlords discriminating on the basis of disabilities, preventing access to housing, evicting tenants due to disability-related behaviors, and failing to accommodate disability-related needs.

We hear from tenants with physical disabilities who require accessibility features that are not available in many properties. Persons with psychosocial and/or intellectual disabilities report needing assistance in the form of support or social workers to assist them with their housing needs but are unable to secure these supports as too few are available.

In addition to all of this, we know that people with disabilities may experience difficulty securing steady and sustainable levels of income, including from social assistance and disability support programs, which places them at higher risk of eviction due to rental arrears. We also know that homelessness disproportionately affects persons with disabilities. In Toronto, marginalized groups, including those with disabilities, are overrepresented in our shelter system. Some shelters have accessibility features for persons with physical disabilities and very few are accessible for persons with other types of disabilities.

In short, persons living with disabilities across Toronto are struggling to claim their human right to adequate housing.

Because of this, we're supportive of this commitment to prioritize accessibility for all new shelter and housing in development. We are also encouraged by the City's stated commitments to engage with people with lived experience of disability on future efforts to increase the amount of accessible housing and to ensure residents of shelters are provided with the appropriate level of accessibility support.

Addressing the above realities will require the City to take a rights-based approach to housing and shelter and the accessibility policies that govern it. This policy must be designed, implemented, monitored, and evaluated with the full participation, leadership, and engagement from persons with disabilities, and lived experience with disability, and directly affected by a lack of accessible housing and inaccessible shelters. We also urge the City to approach the above issues through an intersectional lens that recognizes how marginalization including of race, gender, family status (i.e. single parenthood) amplify these challenges and affect people with disabilities. Ultimately, the City must not only ensure the availability of physical, equitable and financially accessible and supportive housing, but must also ensure persons with disabilities can effectively participate in the life of the community where they live.

As always, we are available to assist the City with this effort as is helpful.

Thank you,

Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation.