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Community
Housing

May 4, 2012

Toronto Budget Committee
10th floor, West Tower, City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Chair and Budget Committee

I am writing to you to discuss the impact of Bed Bug infestations in our communities. I urge this committee to designate funding to Toronto Public Health's ongoing fight against bed bugs. Toronto Public Health provides vital support to citizens of Toronto suffering through life-altering infestations.

Toronto community Housing (TCH) is the largest social housing provider in Canada and the second largest in North America. It is home to 164,000 low and moderate income tenants in 58,000 households including seniors, families, singles, refugees, recent immigrants to Canada and people with special needs. Our tenants come from diverse backgrounds including age, education, language, sexual orientation, mental and physical disabilities, religion, ethnicity, and race as well as increasing diversity in lifestyles and values. Our portfolio includes more then 360 high-rise and low-rise apartment buildings throughout the city.

Bed bug infestations are having a severe impact in our communities. For many tenants, infestations lead to chronic insomnia and emotional distress. They feel they must withdraw from their family, friends, and support services because of the overwhelming stigma associated with bed bugs. Fear of being judged and a lack of resources often prevent them from reporting their infestations and getting the help they need. Toronto Community Housing has a responsibility to provide clean, well maintained and safe buildings to its tenants. This includes a pest management program that meets or exceeds the industry standard. One of the major challenges in providing a successful pest management program is unit preparation which is a responsibility of a lease holder. Multi stakeholder approaches such as partnering with Toronto Public Health have proven to be beneficial in supporting tenants through this process. As a landlord, we are stretching our budgets and staff resources in order to educate and support tenants throughout the preparation and treatment process. It is difficult, time-consuming, but essential work.

In 2011-2012 the City of Toronto received $1,216,518.00 in provincial funding for TPH to develop and lead the Bed Bug Control Strategy. The strategy would be to deliver a comprehensive Bed Bug Control mandate which includes supporting the City's most vulnerable populations who may have Physical or Mental Health challenges and/or financial challenges that would limit their ability to address their infestation or recover from its effects. With this funding Toronto Public Health was able to develop a dedicated team of 6 inspectors who worked diligently with landlords like Toronto Community Housing, social agencies, pest control industry and tenants to create positive outcomes on countless cases.

As of March 31, 2012 all funding for this program ended. Without ongoing funding, the vital resources provided by Toronto Public Health including inspections, assessments and support will be significantly reduced or cease. The people most impacted by Bed Bug infestations will no longer have the support they need to resolve traumatic, life-altering infestations. You have likely heard the same message expressed by our tenants, community partners and agencies across the city of Toronto.

I urge this committee to consider providing ongoing funding to Toronto Public Health's continued fight against Bed Bugs so that they can continue this essential work. We need your help to control and reduce Bed Bug infestations while providing support and compassion to the most vulnerable among us.

Sincerely,

L. Koroneos

Len Koroneos

Chief Executive Officer (Interim)