

Right to Housing Coalition

Deputation to joint meeting: Affordable Housing Committee and Tenant Issues Subcommittee

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We are hearing a lot in the news these days about the rental housing crisis in Toronto. At the Right to Housing Coalition we are glad to see this issue finally getting the attention it deserves. For many people in our City, this crisis has been a reality for far too long.

The Right to Housing Coalition is a network of people facing homelessness, legal clinics, service providers, and scholars. We have been working together since 2009 to promote the human right to housing that is affordable, decent, safe, and secure.

In Toronto, the crisis of unaffordable and precarious housing is now affecting people across the income spectrum. But we are mainly concerned about how it is affecting the people who are most vulnerable.

One major impact of the rental housing crisis is that it increases discrimination. When landlords can pick and choose among many applicants, it is more likely that they will discriminate on the basis of race, gender, immigrant status, income, disability, age, and other factors. We are also seeing an increase in discriminatory evictions of so-called “undesirable” tenants, via sudden large rent increases or claiming “landlord’s own use.” In this way, the rental housing crisis disproportionately affects women, racialized and Indigenous people, immigrants and refugees, people with disabilities, older adults, youth, and queer, trans, and Two-Spirited people.

The crisis is also undermining the rights of low-income tenants. In a competitive market, tenants are more likely to hang on to whatever home they have, even if it is sub-standard, overcrowded, infested, or unsafe. They are less likely to stand up against harassment or demand repairs.

The rental housing crisis is also changing our neighbourhoods. When people lose their homes due to rent increases or discriminatory evictions, they often have trouble finding a new place they can afford in the same neighbourhood. People are being displaced, away from their friends, neighbours, and the services they rely on.

Thousands of people in Toronto each year can't find any home at all, and end up couch surfing, in our overcrowded and dangerous shelters, or living outside in our harsh climate. Homelessness has taken the lives of more than 800 people in our City. This rental crisis is a matter of life and death.

There is no question that this crisis demands action from the federal and provincial governments to create more affordable housing and raise incomes.

But there is a lot the City can do. We call upon the City to take 7 actions:

- 1. TAX FAIRLY.** It is shameful that this City is cutting homelessness services and delaying repairs in Toronto Community Housing, in order to keep property taxes low for homeowners.
- 2. INVEST IN HOUSING AND SHELTERS.** Housing is a human right and it should be the City's priority. Why are we spending billions on the Gardiner and a one-stop subway when thousands of people have no home?
- 3. PLAN RESPONSIBLY.** When evaluating new development proposals, the City must consider the impacts on low-income people in the neighbourhood, and take action to prevent displacement.
- 4. ADVOCATE** to the Province for changes to the Residential Tenancies Act, including an end to vacancy decontrol and the 1991 exemption.
- 5. EDUCATE** tenants about their rights and **ENFORCE** landlords' responsibilities.
- 6. IMPLEMENT INCLUSIONARY ZONING** with added tools and funding to create non-profit, deeply affordable housing.
- 7. ENSURE ONGOING FUNDING** for community organizations that promote tenants' rights and fight discrimination, such as the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation and the Federation of Metro Tenant Associations.