



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

22 September 2020

Deputation – Planning and Housing Committee

Item 16.8 – Addressing Housing and Homelessness Issues in Toronto through Intergovernmental Partnerships

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

My name is Jonathan Robart. I am the Senior Advisor for Policy, Litigation & Law Reform at CERA –the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation. CERA has provided services to some of the most vulnerable Ontarians and Torontonians during its 32-year history. We began our Eviction Prevention work twenty years ago, when the concept of eviction prevention was not widely understood or discussed as it is today. As early adopters and long-time leaders in the eviction prevention space, CERA continues to provide free services to Toronto residents facing eviction or a human rights violation in their housing that may threaten their ability to stay in their home.

I want to begin by acknowledging the incredible work and resilience of City staff in preparing the reports attached to this agenda item; especially given the unique challenges that have arisen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you.

CERA strongly supports the City's Housing Action Plan to create 3,000 permanent housing opportunities including 1,000 permanent modular homes; 1,000 new units through acquisitions and renovations; and 1,000 new portable (and flexible) Canada-Ontario Housing Benefits. We are confident that these measures will help thousands of our fellow Torontonians find safe, secure and adequate housing.

We are pleased to see a robust commitment to eviction prevention in the City's Housing and People Report through, among other initiatives, the expansion and enhancement of local eviction prevention programs and the implementation of measures to minimize the number of court ordered evictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. We echo the call for Provincial and Federal government partners to provide emergency funding for cities and community agencies to assist renters facing eviction for rental arrears.

CERA is also pleased to see a human-rights based approach to responding to the immediate and long-term needs of our fellow Torontonians living in encampments and shelter spaces, as described in the Interim Shelter Recovery Strategy.

Finally, we strongly support the policies outlined in the Interim Shelter Recovery Strategy that form the basis for the Priorities for Action to address Indigenous and Black homelessness. A rights-based response to ending homelessness must confront the systemic failures and legacy of

racism and discrimination directly responsible for the overrepresentation of Black and Indigenous populations among the homeless in Toronto.

The most effective solution for preventing homelessness is to keep people in their homes. On this point, CERA is deeply concerned that any potential gains made by the implementation of the policies and plans discussed today may be erased by a lack of investment in eviction prevention programs that keep people in their homes. This risk of erasure remains especially high during COVID-19 and will continue long after the pandemic ends.

At CERA, we come face to face with this risk everyday. The numbers speak for themselves. Each month, CERA typically fields between 80-90 inquiries from tenants facing eviction and requiring support. This month, CERA is on pace to double the number of inquiries and field over 160 requests for eviction prevention support from tenants. The recent lifting of the moratorium on residential evictions by the Ontario Government and the subsequent restarting of eviction order enforcement has placed thousands of Toronto tenants at immediate risk of eviction.

Over the past decade, CERA has watched as the circumstances of people who call our eviction prevention hotline have become progressively complex, urgent, and desperate. The fallout from the COVID-19 Pandemic, the passage of Bill 184 by the Ontario government, combined with increasingly unaffordable housing has resulted in an unprecedented demand on CERA's eviction prevention services. This demand will only continue to grow without further investment by the City in eviction prevention programs and services.

Toronto residents regularly tell us that there is an urgent need for increased eviction prevention services to assist them. Encouragingly, a recently completed evaluation of our services found that 87% of CERA's clients said that we helped them stabilize their housing and 95% said that more services like ours should exist. CERA and the other frontline service providers you will hear from today have the skills and expertise to address the needs of those facing housing insecurity right now, but we are in need of resources and support from you to provide these essential services. CERA is urging the City to invest in the resources necessary to make the plans and policies discussed in today's meeting a reality.

CERA is urging the City to confront, right now, the very real eviction crisis facing tenants across Toronto and consider an immediate and increased investment in eviction prevention resources during the upcoming budget cycle.

Allowing the eviction of tenants during a global pandemic is unequivocally wrong, unacceptable and an affront to a human-rights based approach to housing policy. We must invest in eviction prevention resources and find creative ways to expand and enhance every eviction prevention tool at our disposal. We look forward to working with each and every member of the committee to end evictions and strive towards the progressive realization of the Right to Housing.

Thank you,

Jonathan Robart

On Behalf of the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation.