



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

November 23, 2020

Subcommittee on the Protection of Affordable Rental Housing

Item RH4.1 – Tenant Support Grant Program Updates

Dear Members of the Subcommittee on the Protection of Affordable Rental Housing,

CERA began its 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.

The City's work on tenant rights and eviction prevention continues to move in the right direction and we are thrilled to see the City stepping up in these areas. We commend City staff and members of this Subcommittee on the work undertaken to date and we support efforts by the City to make tenant facing supports services more accessible, flexible and streamlined. These efforts could not come at a more crucial time.

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 increasingly difficult situation for renters has resulted in escalating demand for CERA's eviction prevention services over the years, which COVID has accelerated. In September 2020, we shared with this Committee that the volume of client requests for our services had doubled and, since that time, the increased demand has remained steady. As the fallout from COVID-19 continues and more people are facing eviction, services like those provided by CERA and other organizations are likely to remain oversubscribed.

To begin to address this increased demand for eviction prevention services, CERA is urging the City to broaden its service offerings and to make their existing services more flexible and accessible to the increasingly complex and urgent realities experienced by tenants facing eviction across Toronto.

We are pleased to see the City is committed to ensuring these services reflect the health and safety related challenges for tenants caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, we support the proposed changes to the Tenant Defence Fund (TDF) program guidelines, which will make this program more flexible and accessible during the pandemic and beyond. Removing administrative barriers, allowing a shift to online applications, and adding disputes of N13 (renovation/demolition) applications as an eligible application type are positive developments. Given the increasingly complex and rapidly changing nature of eviction trends across the City, we especially support the broadening of SSHA's discretion to approve a wider range of application types and other tenant-led legal efforts aimed at preserving affordable private market rental housing.

We applaud the creation of an online option for applications; however, it is important to ensure that barriers are not inadvertently placed on individuals without reliable access to the internet. As such, we would encourage the City to continue to allow paper-based applications.

We are concerned with the proposed decrease to the maximum number of grants available each year for tenant groups from 100 to 80. We note that the General Manager's report references the fact that uptake for the Tenant Defence Fund grants are consistently high and funding was fully utilized in both 2018 and 2019. While we applaud the proposed increase to \$1250 for the grant amount available to tenants, this increase should not come at the expense of the number of grants available. As such, we encourage the City to implement the long overdue increase to the grant amount available to tenants while maintaining the maximum number of grants available.

Upfront investment in preventative services to meet increased demand is critical and ultimately less costly than dealing with the fallout from widespread evictions. We applaud the City's efforts in this regard and would encourage the City to continue to explore creative and expansive ways to prevent evictions as a key tool in the fight to protect affordable rental housing.

Thank you.