

Attention: City of Toronto Subcommittee on the Protection of Affordable Rental Housing

Re: RH 4.1, Tenant Support Grant Program Updates and RH 4.2 2021 Work Plan on the Preservation of Affordable Rental Housing

Monday November 23, 2020

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

On behalf of the Scarborough Civic Action Network (SCAN), a non-partisan network that aims to address inequities across Scarborough through civic engagement, we are writing to express support for measures like the Tenant Support Grant Program that will help to protect affordable rental housing and the tenants who rely on such housing.

Programs like this are critical right now as we continue to cope with the pandemic to ensure the protection of affordable rental housing especially for people who are struggling financially or those who are unaware of their housing rights and how to exercise those rights.

Owing to extensive engagement in the community before and during the pandemic, we are aware of many pressing and stressful emerging issues and realities facing tenants including:

- In some high-rise rental apartment buildings, newer tenants are being charged double the rent of longer-term tenants. Not only is this unfair for the new tenants but it also creates precariousness for tenants who have been living in the buildings for quite some time. In some cases, some long-term tenants have been offered money to move out to enable the units to be rented at a higher cost.
- Some tenants living in high-rise apartment buildings in neighbourhoods with some of the highest number of active COVID cases not only in Scarborough but the city as a whole have made the decision to stop working and stay home over the past few months for fear of the safety of their children and their extended family members that include elderly people. This has resulted in significant income loss and created challenges for paying for housing costs not to mention other necessities. We know of many residents who have higher education degrees and professional work experience but many are only able to secure minimum wage jobs that involve manual labour. Due to the pandemic, their economic hardship has increased owing to the loss of one income.
- Tenants are reluctant to call for maintenance work that needs to be done in individual apartments because they are asked to pay additional charges for that maintenance work. This leaves tenants living in hazardous conditions where many tenants develop allergies and other health problems owing to mould, paint and other substances because walls are broken.
- Tenants have been given eviction notices for unsubstantiated claims or situations that do not warrant such an extreme response. One tenant who has three kids was given an N5 notice which demanded that she pay almost \$1000 because management accused her children of damaging an elevator. This claim was made without sufficient evidence. She was told that if she didn't pay the fine, she faced eviction. Living on one minimum wage income made it impossible for her family to pay the fine. She was advised by SCAN to access support from a legal aid clinic; however, without this advice, she would not have known how to deal with this situation and without the financial means to pay the fine, she was facing eviction.
- Many tenants in high-rise market rental apartment buildings in Scarborough are immigrants who do not have knowledge about their rights as tenants or about resources that can support them when dealing with housing problems. Immigrants have numerous barriers in accessing information about housing supports which include not only language but also knowledge about the kinds of supports available and of course, how to access them.



Right now, many market rental tenants are facing all kinds of stresses and impossible situations which threaten their housing which is basic and fundamental to their security and safety.

Tenants need programs like the Tenant Support Grant Program and other programs that help to protect tenants' rights. And in order to access these programs, tenants also need to know about these programs. Many tenants have almost no knowledge about tenant protection programs and how to deal with housing issues with their landlords which makes them very vulnerable to the demands of landlords and/or property management. Many people feel intimidated and fearful which in turn may result in losing access to affordable housing. Without affordable housing, many people face overwhelming hardship which is all the more terrible during a pandemic.

We urge the City of Toronto to:

- Increase protection supports for market rental tenants especially those living with financial constraints and hardships.
- Ensure those tenant protection supports are easy to access and make use of.
- Enable all tenants to know about tenant protection and support programs.
- Where possible, work with community leaders, community groups and local organizations to disseminate such information and engage tenants especially immigrants.

These steps will help to ensure the protection of affordable rental housing in Toronto.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Anna Kim, SCAN Coordinator

Nita Goswami, SCAN Membership Engagement Worker