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## 2021 OPERATING BUDGET BRIEFING NOTE

### Tenant Defence Fund and Tenant Information Programs

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#### Issue/Background:

On January 22, 2021, the Budget Committee requested the Shelter, Support & Administration Division to provide details on:

- The current gaps in access to information regarding the legal rights for tenants, and how this can be addressed through the Tenant Defence Fund?
- This briefing note describes the current gaps in access to information regarding the legal rights of tenants, and identifies how this could be addressed through City-funded programs such as the Tenant Hotline, the Housing Access, Stabilization, and Eviction Prevention program, and Tenant Defence Fund.
- The City, through SSHA's operating budget funds a number of programs that provide information to tenants on their rights and responsibilities.
  - The **Tenant Hotline** provides telephone information services to tenants in private market rental units in Toronto. The Tenant Hotline is administered by the Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations (FMTA).
  - The Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA) provides a **Housing Access, Stabilization and Eviction Prevention Program**, which includes a hotline service staffed by highly skilled case managers working under legal supervision. This program provides unique case management supports to individuals on a range of tenancy issues, including eviction prevention.
  - The **Tenant Defence Fund** is not an information service, but rather a program that assists tenants through two sub-programs that complement each other:
    - The **Tenant Support Grant Program** (Grant Program), administered by SSHA, provides direct grants to tenant groups to retain legal and other representation for participation in the legal process regarding Above Guideline Rent Increase (AGI) applications, maintenance applications and renovation, demolition or conversion applications.
    - The **Outreach and Organizing Program** (Outreach Program) helps tenants organize as groups, particularly in preparing to contest AGI and "renoviction"

applications, and apply for the Grant Program. SSHA currently has a contract with FMTA to deliver the Outreach Program.

Funding levels for 2021 are provided in the following table:

<b>Program Name</b>	<b>2021 Recommended Budget</b>
Tenant Defence Fund	\$201,000 gross and net for Tenant Support Grants.
	\$199,456 gross and net for the Outreach and Organizing Program
Tenant Hotline, FMTA	\$205,835 gross and net.
Housing Access, Stabilization and Eviction Prevention Program, CERA	\$118,670.00 gross (\$0 net).
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$724,961 gross, \$606,291 net</b>

- The \$201,000 budget for the Tenant Defence Fund includes a \$100,000 increase in the 2021 Staff Recommended Budget

**Key Points:**

- The **Tenant Hotline** manages consistently high call volumes, resulting in longer than ideal callback times. Given tenant questions around provincial eviction moratoriums and changes to tenant legislation, program enhancements would improve the hotline's telephone capacity which would in turn improve the responsiveness of the hotline for residents.
- Since September 2020, requests for services and support from CERA's **Housing Access, Stabilization and Eviction Prevention Program** have increased by 54%, as tenants face the threat of losing their homes on top of losing their incomes. Program enhancements would increase CERA's ability to respond to this increased demand as well provide more in-depth service and case management for complex issues, including legal advice.
- Per Council direction through report [PH19.9](#) an enhancement of \$100,000 for the **Tenant Support Grant Program** of the TDF is included in SSHA's 2021 Staff Recommended Operating Budget for consideration through the 2021 Budget Process. This increase will provide \$25,000 to the **Tenant Defence Fund** to maintain the current service levels of 100 grants per year given the increase in available funding per grant from \$1,000 to \$1,250; and a further \$75,000 to provide sufficient funds to support the expanded role of the Fund given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic during which many residents are experiencing lost wages and face severe challenges paying rent.
- Further, the Planning and Housing Committee has directed the General Manager, SSHA, to examine opportunities to align, over the intermediate- and long-term, existing programs for tenants in the private market with current market conditions, and to report back to the

Subcommittee on the Protection of Affordable Rental Housing in the second quarter of 2021 on proposed program changes as well as the cost of implementing such changes. This work is on track, with a targeted report back in June 2021, to allow any recommended changes to be implemented through the 2022 City Operating Budget.

**Questions & Answers:**

- Are there other programs that support tenants with information?
  - **Housing Help Centres** offer a range of services and referrals to services in one location to assist tenants with finding/securing housing and eviction prevention.
  - The **Eviction Prevention in the Community (EPIC)** program assists vulnerable households facing imminent risk of eviction by offering intensive case management services to prevent the loss of housing and avert homelessness. Individuals and families are assisted to keep their existing housing unit or secure new permanent housing.

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**Date:** 25 January 2021