



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

July 12th, 2022

Mayor John Tory
Chair of the Executive Committee
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Members of the Executive Committee,

Re: EX34.7 Review and Considerations for a Housing Commissioner Role or Function

I am writing to you on behalf of the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA) in support of the City's efforts to adopt an accountability mechanism that can help progressively realize the right to adequate housing. CERA is Canada's leading non-profit organization working to advance the right to adequate housing by providing free services to renters facing evictions and human rights violations to remain housed, by providing education and training about housing rights across Canada, and by advancing rights-based housing policy through research and policy advocacy.

Over the last couple of years, we have monitored, supported and participated in various initiatives that the City has embarked on to solve the housing crisis and to fulfill its commitments in the HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan. Given that the strategy stems from a Housing Charter committing to the right to housing, it is also necessary to develop an institutional framework that can offer guidance on the extent to which the plan is and ought to be advancing the right to housing. To this end, the recommendations under consideration by the Executive Committee are a positive step towards making this a reality. We are pleased to see these preliminary steps reflect a broad acceptance of the directions for an appropriate accountability framework set out in the consultative report presented by Crean Consulting and Maytree Foundation.

Moving forward we hope the initiative is designed and resourced appropriately. For example, the proposal to set up an Advisory Committee is a good way to guide the City's actions based on human rights expertise and the lived experiences of those impacted by the housing crisis. The implication is that this Committee can only make a meaningful impact if it is led by right to housing experts and those with lived experience and supported by the City. The Committee should also have the independence to bring issues to the attention of City Council. Such an arrangement helps operationalize a meaningful approach to engagement and representation, a key principle of the right to adequate housing. In fact, this adds a proactive element to the mechanism's approach to advancing the right to housing. CERA is more than happy to participate in such a committee.

Indeed, we believe we can help the City develop the capacity building programs that it also recommends as a way to better educate staff with the fundamentals and the practical application of a rights-based housing strategy. We also hope the City applies an expansive interpretation of an education program,

crafting a curriculum that helps staff understand the nuances of human rights and housing over time, in a concerted, measurable fashion. Indeed, we hope rights-based housing approaches to solving our systemic housing issues become part of the City's culture.

Crucially, the effectiveness of this initiative is contingent to a significant degree on what the independent body conducting reviews of systemic issues in housing will look like. As of now, the option presented by staff is the creation of a Deputy Ombudsman, Housing. In some ways, this may hold promise given the body's alignment with some operational elements and objectives of an independent commissioner – one that responds to complaints and systematically reviews issues related to fairness and maladministration. These functionalities can be modulated to respond to violations of the right to housing and identify systemic housing issues in a department that specifically focuses on housing. It seems plausible that this arrangement could complement the proactive approach to resolving housing problems through the Advisory Committee and collecting more data in a more robust fashion. For this arrangement to work effectively, time will need to be invested to clearly delineate roles and responsibilities and staff the new body with the requisite capabilities. It is imperative to invest significantly in this new body given how it can function as a way to enhance transparency and accountability in the housing system over the long haul.

We look forward to remaining involved and offering our expertise as this initiative develops over the coming months

Thank you,



Bahar Shadpour

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