

Ombudsman Toronto

Housing Unit

Presentation to the Housing Rights Advisory Committee
May 13, 2024



Overview

- Overview of Ombudsman Toronto (OT)
- History of OT Housing Unit
- The Right to Adequate Housing
- Mandate of OT Housing Unit
- OT Housing Unit Work



Overview of Ombudsman Toronto (OT)



OVERVIEW OF OMBUDSMAN TORONTO (OT)

As one of the City's four accountability offices, we hold the City accountable and make sure it treats all people in Toronto fairly and equitably

- An Ombudsman works independently, impartially, accessibly, and confidentially to ensure the local government serves people fairly by:
 - Investigating complaints from the public after regular complaint mechanisms have been exhausted
 - Looking into concerns without a complaint, at the Ombudsman's discretion
 - Helping people navigate their local government when they are experiencing problems



History of OT Housing Unit



December 2019	City Council approves the HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan and revised Housing Charter, which includes reviewing the establishment of a Housing Commissioner
May 2022	Crean Consulting and Maytree report recommends the Ombudsman's office as a locus of accountability for housing oversight
July 2022	City Manager requests that OT consider the Crean Consulting and Maytree report, and report back to City Council with recommendations
February 2023	City Council approves Ombudsman Toronto's 2023 budget, which includes a Deputy Ombudsman, Housing role and a new Housing Unit
March 2023	Ombudsman Toronto brings additional details about the Deputy Ombudsman, Housing role and the new Housing Unit to City Council
August 2023	Reema Patel begins her tenure as Deputy Ombudsman (Housing)

The Right to Adequate Housing



Housing is the basis of stability and security for an individual or family. The centre of our social, emotional and sometimes economic lives, a home should be a sanctuary—a place to live in peace, security and dignity.

- The United Nations

Canada's National Housing Strategy Act, SC 2019

- It is the housing policy of the Government of Canada to recognize that adequate housing is:
 - A fundamental human right affirmed in international law
 - Essential to the inherent dignity and wellbeing of the person and to building sustainable and inclusive communities

Toronto's Role

- All orders of government have a role to play in furthering the progressive realization of the right to housing. This includes municipalities
- In fact, the UN states that “local governments are often at the forefront of the struggle for housing and can play a key role in protecting and realizing the right to adequate housing”



Revised Toronto Housing Charter - Opportunity for All

- The City of Toronto recognizes that housing is essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person and to building sustainable and inclusive communities
- The Toronto Housing Charter moves deliberately to further the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing, and adopts a human rights based approach to housing where all residents have the right to
 - A safe, secure, affordable home
 - Housing that is maintained in a state of good repair
 - Housing that is accessible
 - Housing that is culturally appropriate
 - A home that is part of a complete community with equitable access to a range of opportunities
 - An equal stake and voice in decisions and policies affecting their communities and their housing
 - Equal treatment with respect to housing, without discrimination



Mandate of OT Housing Unit





Our Mandate

- Investigations and systems reviews
- Advocate for a right to housing
- Relationship-building
- Engagement
- City staff consultations

Investigations and Reviews

- Conduct systemic investigations and systems reviews related to the City's planning and delivery of housing and homelessness services
 - Systemic Investigations: Examine and recommend fixes to issues related to housing involving a practice/policy/procedure that may appear neutral and fair but has an adverse effect on particular segments of the population
 - Systems Reviews: Measure the degree to which housing policies/programs are meeting intended outcomes (like an audit program)

Advocate for Right to Housing

- Advocate at a systems level for fairness and the progressive realization of the right to housing



Relationship- Building

Engagement

Consultations

- Develop and sustain relationships with the broader housing community through meaningful and ongoing dialogue, learning, and information sharing
- Engage and consult with people with lived experience of housing precarity and discrimination, external housing bodies, and all levels of government to learn, identify systemic issues, and share information and best practices
- Act as a sounding board and offer advice to City staff formulating housing and homelessness policies/programs
 - Identify gaps between stated goals and current practice, particularly as they impact on administrative fairness and the right to housing



OT Housing Unit Work



Our work so far

- Housing Unit is now fully staffed
 - Deputy Ombudsman for Housing – Reema Patel (currently on parental leave)
 - 1 Administrative Assistant
 - 3 Investigators
 - 1 Policy Development Officer
- Launched first investigation into the City's decision to deny base system shelter access to refugee claimants and asylum seekers
- Monitoring and following-up on the City's progress in implementing the recommendations from OT's investigations into
 - The City's clearing of encampments
 - Toronto Community Housing Corporation's (TCHC) tenant human rights complaints process



Our work so far (continued)

- Consulting with City staff to proactively address housing-related issues, including with the Housing Secretariat
- Building a human rights framework for systemic investigations into housing, alongside OT's administrative fairness reviews
- Building an engagement plan
- Meeting with members of community groups, people with lived experience of housing precarity and discrimination, advocates, members of Council, and senior staff at the City to introduce the work of the Housing Unit, hear about housing issues, and build relationships
 - Connected with over 50 internal and external stakeholders so far



Our work ahead

- Conclude investigation into the City's decision to deny shelter access to refugee claimants and asylum seekers
- Continuing to monitor and follow-up on the City's progress in implementing the recommendations from OT's investigations into
 - The City's clearing of encampments
 - Toronto Community Housing Corporation's (TCHC) tenant human rights complaints process
- Launching a new investigation / systems review
- Continuing to consult with City staff
- Publicize our human rights framework for systemic investigations involving the right to housing
- Staying connected to the community through a comprehensive engagement plan



QUESTIONS?

