



## Don Valley Community Legal Services

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February 2, 2024

### **Re: 2024.MM14.2 – Restoring In-Person Landlord and Tenant Board Hearings**

Dear Members of City Council,

We are writing in support of item 2024.MM14.2. Don Valley Community Legal Services is a community legal clinic funded by Legal Aid Ontario. Our catchment area includes Wards 14, 15, 16 and 19, and sections of Wards 11 and 12. We serve many diverse communities and our clients are lower-income, racialized, and primarily renters.

The number of housing law cases our clinic handles continues to grow each year. In 2023, 37% of our cases were related to housing, and 20% were for eviction. Our legal staff assist tenants and represent our clients at the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB). Since the LTB moved to virtual hearings, we have encountered challenges and would like to add our voice to the request for a return in-person hearings as the default.

The virtual hearing model has negatively impacted many tenants and access to justice. Those with limited or no access to a computer, smartphone or internet are not able to properly participate in their hearings. People with language barriers or disabilities also face challenges with virtual hearings. There is a digital divide we cannot ignore.

Previously tenant duty counsel services and mediators were available in-person, allowing for matters to be resolved without moving to hearings. With the backlog at the LTB, this is an important part of the process that has been lost with virtual hearings. We also support the request to bring back regional scheduling which will help alleviate many of these challenges.

Furthermore, we applaud your request to the Government of Ontario to immediately move forward on all 61 recommendations of the Ontario Ombudsman's Report.

As the housing crisis worsens, we need to prevent needless evictions. Ensuring fairness to all participants in LTB hearings and restoring supports will help us protect affordable housing and keep people in their homes.

Thank you for taking the time to read our comments.

Sincerely,

**Don Valley Community Legal Services**

Per:

Bhavin Bilimoria, Director of Legal Services  
Laura Anonen, Community Development Worker