

Ombudsman Toronto

Housing Unit

Update to the Housing Rights Advisory Committee
June 3, 2025

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Presentation Overview

- Introduction to Ombudsman Toronto Housing Unit
- Highlights of casework from January – May 2025
 - Consultations
 - Investigations



Ombudsman Toronto Housing Unit

- The Ombudsman is an independent statutory authority who conducts investigations into the administration of City services
- The Deputy Ombudsman, Housing, leads a specialized Housing Unit within the Ombudsman's office that holds the City to account on its commitments made under the Housing Charter
- Our work includes
 - Conducting systemic investigations into the City's delivery of housing services
 - Conducting systems reviews
 - Consulting proactively with City staff
 - Engaging with community



Consultations – Overview

- We offer consultations to City staff to proactively address issues related to fairness and housing as a human right
- Topics we can consult on include
 - Fairness in service planning and delivery
 - The progressive realization of the right to adequate housing
 - Public experience – what we hear from complainants
- We can consult through a variety of methods, including
 - Sharing complaints trends
 - Providing written feedback on draft policies, procedures, programs, reports, etc.
 - Meeting with smaller staff teams to workshop specific issues
 - Providing training sessions for staff
 - Sharing best practices



Consultations – Examples

- Through our consultations, we have helped
 - Revenue Services develop a more consistent, fair, and equitable approach to its collection of property tax arrears to ensure low-income and vulnerable homeowners are treated fairly and in line with the Housing Charter
 - City Planning incorporate a stronger emphasis on tenant experience and tenant rights, and include the Toronto Housing Charter and HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan as part of the governing framework for their new Demolition and Replacement of Rental Housing handbook, which was adopted by City Council in April 2025



Our Investigation into the City's Response to a Vital Services Outage in a Multi-Tenant Home

- What we heard
 - We heard from a tenants' union about a multi-tenant home that had been damaged by fire, leaving tenants without heat, power, or hot water for six months through the winter
- How we heard it
 - We first heard about this issue through our regular community engagement activities, which help us identify issues faced by people in Toronto
- What we did
 - After launching an investigation, we examined the City's response to the tenants' requests for help restoring the vital services in their building and connecting them to emergency supports
 - This was our Housing Unit's second investigation, and was released on May 15, 2025



Our Investigation – What We Considered

- Our investigation considered
 - The adequacy of the City's Municipal Licensing & Standards Division ("MLS") investigation into the loss of vital services
 - Whether MLS' response was consistent with its bylaws, policies and procedures
 - MLS' communication with affected tenants and their representatives
 - Whether MLS' response was consistent with the Toronto Housing Charter and a human rights-based approach to housing
 - Whether EPIC's decision not to help the tenants was fair
 - Whether EPIC's decision was consistent with the Toronto Housing Charter and a human rights-based approach to housing



Our Investigation – What We Found

- Our investigation found that the City did not meet the standards owed to these tenants under the principles of administrative fairness or the Toronto Housing Charter
- Our main findings included
 - MLS acted arbitrarily and did not enforce its own bylaws
 - MLS staff were not properly trained on bylaws and procedures
 - EPIC lacked clear policies and procedures
 - City staff's actions were inconsistent with Toronto Housing Charter commitments



Our Investigation – What We Recommended

- We made 27 recommendations, including
 - MLS should review how it enforces the standards for rental housing and develop a process for responding to the loss of heat, power and water
 - MLS should improve the training and supervision of bylaw officers
 - The Housing Secretariat should develop guidelines on exercising discretion in the delivery of emergency assistance through EPIC
 - Staff at EPIC and MLS engaged in housing should be trained on the requirements of the Toronto Housing Charter
- City Council adopted our recommendations at its meeting on May 21, 2025. We will be following up with City staff to ensure our recommendations are implemented.



Thank You and Questions

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