

Lived Experience Groups Response to the Proposed Changes in Government of Ontario Bill 184, Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act, 2020 and Effects of COVID-19

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Prepared by “Homes for All” Coalition

The coalition of lived experience groups in the Waterloo Region appreciate the opportunity to share our views and submit the following comments and recommendations. With the changes brought on by COVID-19, we are the most vulnerable, lack financial supports, at high risk to meet rent payments and in constant fear of eviction. Prior to COVID-19, the housing crisis in the Region posed a major concern, but the Region posed a major challenge and the pandemic has further exacerbated the conditions. These constant stressors contribute to poor mental health and other health conditions that add costs to the economy.

The proposed changes in Ontario Bill 184, Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act, 2020 emphasize the rights of the landlords and do not sufficiently address the rights and needs of tenants. Low-income residents and individuals with disabilities are not adequately supported or addressed within the Bill.

Coalition of Lived Experience Groups

- Social Development Centre Waterloo Region
- Awareness of Low-Income Voices (ALIVE)
- Alliance Against Poverty (AAP)
- People’s Action Group (PAG)
- Disabilities and Human Rights (DHR)
- Renters Educating and Networking Together (RENT)

Our lives have greatly been affected by COVID-19.

At a glance:

Our lives are undergoing continuous rapid change and we live in fear of eviction

Eliminating the fear of eviction enables us to contribute to the economy

We are not engaged in legislation and policies that impact us

Include us in discussion periods to share our insights on proposed policies and initiatives

- We are not being engaged in discussions regarding policies that directly affect them

- Ensure engagement and discussion earlier in the process

- Implement longer timeframes to accept comments from the public

Material

Plain language materials

- Complex policies and terminology make it difficult to comprehend
- Processes and timelines are not explicitly stated

- Clearly identify individuals to contact
 - Use plain language avoid technical language
- Identify next steps and ensure consistent information is being provided

High unemployment rates and high risk for eviction

Eliminate risk of eviction during the pandemic

- Without income security, fear and risk of eviction significantly rise
- “Half of those who earned \$16 per hour or less lost their jobs or the majority of their work hours”¹

- Ban future evictions for rent arrears accrued during the pandemic
- Implement a finance program to help us with sustainable repayments
- Include us in the economic recovery plan, we want to participate
- Work with us to adjust when the systems fail us

Lack of affordable housing

Address affordable housing needs

- Our Region has a housing crisis
- It affects more of us than you realize (e.g., students and youth, single parents, people earning minimum wage, people with abilities challenges, Indigenous peoples, seniors, recent immigrants)

- Implement policies that include 30% affordable & 20% visitable/accessible units in all new rental buildings; re-habit unused commercial or public properties; establish modular settlements (prefabricated or tint/container built); expand the home sharing model
- Improve the availability and effectiveness of shelters

¹ Submission to the Government of Ontario regarding Bill 184, Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act, 2020, prepared by Maytree, June 25, 2020, p. 2.

A 'broken system'

- Bill 184 puts a 'band aid' on an already broken system.
- Lack of rent controls, especially, vacancy rent control and lack of enforcement to ensure quality of low-income housing

Address the system not the symptoms

- Implement comprehensive rent control
- Eliminate incentives that support eviction and renovations
- Equitably protect the rights of tenants and landlords, taking into consideration that they do not have the same power in the relationship or capacity to advocate for themselves

Lack of justice for tenants

- Prior to COVID, hearing dates were already difficult to schedule
- Uncertainty regarding the postponement of hearing and how to schedule hearings after COVID
- Bill 184 protects landlords and lacks access to free financial and legal advice for tenants

Justice for all

- "Maintain the requirement that landlords go to court to get an eviction order if a tenant breaks a rent repayment agreement"²
- Provide funding to increase tenants' access to free legal counsel

Well-being falters

- Constant fear increases mental health and other health costs
- Some 40 percent of workers reported that employment anxiety was interfering with their personal and family lives³

Affordable housing improves well-being

- Improves our individual and collective health and well-being
- Reduces demand on other costly services that treat what are largely preventable problems

Bill 184

Amend Bill 184

² Ibid, p. 3.

³ 'Getting Left Behind,' by Wayne Lewchuk et al., (McMaster University, June 2018), p. 55. https://pepso.ca/documents/pepso-glb-final-lores_2018-06-18_r4-for-website.pdf

- Unjustly harms the tenants
- A system that ensures safe affordable housing with justice for tenants and landlords
- Everyone benefits when this happens

Our Recommendations

1. Mandate engagement events with lived experience groups earlier in the decision-making process to support meaningful interactions
2. Convey impacts of the climate emergency and engage all residents
3. Consider shelters as a long-term solution rather than as a transitional/short-term solution.
4. Improve rent control and relief systems and increase provisions surrounding low-income residents
5. Include additional provisions within Bill 184 to support tenants to support an equitable process.
6. Focus on long-term efforts for creation of affordable housing and alternatives to shelters
7. Implement policies that include 30% affordable & 20% visitable/accessible units in all new rental buildings; re-habit unused commercial or public properties; establish modular settlements (prefabricated or tint/container built)
8. Improve accessibility to cooling centres, food centres, and washrooms
9. Provide funding to improve access to legal support and services for tenants for Landlord Tenant Board (LTB) hearings
10. Improve clarity regarding eviction moratoriums and require landlords to provide at least a 6-months' notice to tenants
11. Require LTB and associated documents to be prepared in simple and plain language to allow tenants to better understand the process

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