



July 9th, 2020

Hon. Steve Clark
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
17th floor, 777 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

Dear Minister Clark,

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you and other housing advocates in late May. We are glad to see that you have joined the Ontario Jobs and Recovery Committee – an encouraging signal that affordable housing is recognized as a critical part of the COVID-19 recovery process.

As we continue to respond to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for a potential second-wave, the Ontario Alliance to End Homelessness urges a strong prevention and housing-focused response at the center of our public health and economic recovery strategies.

We have already seen the devastating impacts of inadequate housing during this pandemic. The majority of COVID-19 related deaths are connected to long-term care homes, where an already vulnerable population has been put at greater risk by congregate living conditions.

We have seen similarly frequent and significant outbreaks in shelters, where crowded spaces and pre-existing medical conditions create vulnerability. People experiencing homelessness who rely on these shelters have a higher likelihood of underlying medical conditions and face barriers to healthcare, making them more likely to become severely ill from COVID-19. If a second wave of COVID-19 arrives, it may come at a great cost - loss of life, the financial cost of supporting more people in our social systems, and increased pressure on our already stretched healthcare system.

Housing is our first line of defense against COVID-19, but it also offers a path towards recovery. While some parts of the economy have started to return, the recovery looks to be slow and gradual. Affordable housing is essential for supporting those in housing need, while housing development, conversion, and supportive housing will create much-needed job opportunities. With that said, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the cracks in our social safety net and the utmost importance we must be placing on homelessness prevention.

We urge the Provincial Government to take the following key actions to develop, enhance, and ensure that affordable housing is available to people as a tangible contribution to our economic recovery.

1. Convert existing buildings to affordable housing.

Enabling hotels/motels and similar existing buildings to be converted to affordable housing, through capital funding, right to first refusal regulations, and necessary zoning changes, will very rapidly create permanent,

affordable housing, much needed supportive housing for priority populations, and be a critical part of infrastructure development to help support economic recovery and increase affordable housing stock.

2. Ensure that people are not evicted due to the economic crisis brought on by COVID-19.

It will cost significantly more to support people who are evicted through other health and social systems than to prevent evictions in the first place. We propose new protections within the Residential Tenancies Act to ensure people cannot be evicted during the ongoing economic crisis and moving forward. In particular, we are concerned about the upcoming changes to Bill 184, and strongly support more, not less opportunities for people to slow down the eviction process, particularly as the majority of evictions are due to affordability issues.

3. Provide more affordable housing allowances and benefits.

Homelessness is largely an affordability issue. Making housing more affordable through housing allowances or similar direct benefits will help prevent and reduce homelessness quickly, further reducing the pressure on our systems.

4. Invest in prevention measures that integrate systems more effectively and comprehensively.

Identify opportunities for collaboration and improved service coordination and integration between systems (for instance, between education, child and family services, health and justice) to set the foundation for broader homelessness prevention measures. Ensuring housing stability, increasing awareness of mental health issues and family breakdown and navigation of social supports will need closer attention and dedicated resources during and after the pandemic.

Developing more affordable housing, ensuring that people remain housed and homelessness prevention are critical components of an effective economic recovery. Housing is the foundation for people being able to thrive and move forward following COVID-19, and we urge your Government to move forward with these critical solutions.

Thank you and we look forward to further discussions,



Kaite Burkholder Harris
Chair, Ontario Alliance to End Homelessness