

Province responds to housing task force with steps to protect renters, landlords

Chinese and Punjabi translations are included

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In addressing the recommendations of the provincial Rental Housing Task Force, the B.C. government is moving ahead immediately with increased public education and bolstered enforcement to better protect the rights of both renters and landlords.

“To make renting work better for everyone, we need to make sure both renters and landlords know their rights under the law and have a place to go when there’s an issue with those rights,” said Selina Robinson, Minister of

Municipal Affairs and Housing. "Housing is the foundation of people's lives. We want to create a rental market where there are no surprises, renters and landlords are treated fairly and there is better security for both sides."

All of the task force recommendations will be addressed through three phases. Immediate Phase 1 actions focus on better public education, enhanced enforcement and improved co-ordination with local governments to address specific issues in their communities, including renovictions.

- Public Education:

The goal is to provide improved awareness for renters and landlords on their rights and responsibilities, which will reduce the number of cases ending up in arbitration. This enhanced public education will be supported through new funding to Landlord BC and the Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre. Additional public education will focus on rules around renovictions, including new policy guidelines introduced last year, to help clarify the many situations when ending a tenancy would be unnecessary or illegal, and the limited situations when a rental unit needs to be vacant for renovations.

- Enforcement:

Responding to concerns, the Province has created a new compliance and enforcement unit within the Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB) to investigate complaints and take action against landlords and renters who are repeat or serious offenders. The new team has 21 active investigations and recently issued its first administrative penalty against a landlord.

- Co-ordination:

A new local government liaison position has been created within the RTB to help resolve issues that involve a role for both local government and the RTB, such as illegal renovictions and demovictions. The position will support communities in tackling the challenges unique to their situation.

“Renters and landlords told us that, in many cases, problems could have been avoided if people had known their rights and responsibilities,” said MLA Spencer Chandra Herbert, chair of the Rental Housing Task Force and Premier’s advisor on residential tenancy. “They also told us enforcement was key, as there are people who knowingly break the laws, and only strong enforcement will stop them. I’m glad to see the minister has heard these concerns and taken action to increase enforcement of the law, improve access to the Residential Tenancy Branch to ensure people know their rights and responsibilities, closed loopholes that were driving up rents and evictions, and capped annual rent increases to the rate of inflation. I’m glad to hear the minister is now working to make further improvements to make renting more fair and secure for everyone.”

Building on the Phase 1 actions underway, Phase 2 work will include further actions by the end of 2019.

Recommendations that require legislative changes, additional resources, stakeholder consultations or policy work, such as rental restrictions in strata units, will be considered as part of Phase 3, with actions to come in 2020.

These steps build on long-overdue investments in the RTB that are beginning to address service concerns reported by the task force. For example, call wait times are now down to five minutes, well below the 45-minute average in 2017. The branch has also started recording

information calls and is developing a new case management system to streamline its processes.

“Housing security for British Columbians is a priority the BC Green Party shares with the provincial government, and people across the province are looking for leadership in helping them meet the challenges in the rental system,” said MLA Adam Olsen, member of the Rental Housing Task Force. “I am proud of the work that the task force has done to present recommendations to improve our rental system, and I look forward to continuing to work with government to ensure that much-needed improvements take place to benefit both renters and landlords.”

Action on housing and ensuring fairness for tenants and landlords are shared priorities between government and the BC Green Party caucus, and are part of the Confidence and Supply Agreement.

Quotes:

David Hutniak, chief executive officer, LandlordBC –

“LandlordBC is excited to support the Province in its efforts to educate landlords about their rights and responsibilities as, in our experience, education is the best way to ensure secure, positive tenancies for both tenants and landlords. LandlordBC looks forward to working with the Province to balance the impacts of renovations on renters with investing in the health and safety of the critically important homes we provide B.C. families.”

Andrew Sakamoto, executive director, Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre (TRAC) –

“TRAC is extremely pleased to receive this funding. As a provincial leader in tenant education, we plan to use these funds to develop quality legal resources and deliver

face-to-face services to some of our province's most vulnerable populations. Tenants will have a chance to learn about their rights and responsibilities under BC's Residential Tenancy Act, particularly the rules around illegal renovations that can threaten security of tenure. Proactive education, along with increased rental supply and enhanced legal protections, will go a long way towards addressing B.C.'s current rental housing crisis."

Quick Facts:

- The task force was appointed by Premier John Horgan in April 2018 with Spencer Chandra Herbert, MLA for Vancouver-West End, as chair; and Adam Olsen, MLA for Saanich North and the Islands, and Ronna-Rae Leonard, MLA for Courtenay-Comox, as members. They presented their final recommendations to government in December.
- These latest steps build on actions government has taken over the past year-and-a-half to bring balance to B.C.'s rental housing system:
 - enhancing the provincial Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) program and Rental Assistance Program (RAP) to benefit 35,000 households, including 3,200 newly eligible families and seniors throughout British Columbia;
 - limiting annual rent increases to the inflation rate;
 - closing the fixed-term lease loophole and eliminating the geographic rent increase clause;
 - strengthening protections for manufactured home park tenants;
 - introducing stronger protection for renters from renovations or demolitions;
 - increasing strata fines to discourage unwanted

- short-term rental activity;
- providing \$6.8 million over three years to the Residential Tenancy Branch to improve services; and
- introducing rental zoning legislation to give local governments the ability to preserve and increase the overall rental supply.
- The Province's first poverty reduction strategy, TogetherBC, includes \$10 million for a provincial rent bank to help low-income renters with short-term loans. Creating a rent bank was a recommendation of the Rental Housing Task Force.

Learn More:

Learn more about services and improvements to the Residential Tenancy Branch:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/housing-tenancy/residential-tenancies>

Read the full Rental Housing Task Force recommendations and What We Heard report:

https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/381/2018/12/RHTF-Recommendations-and-WWH-Report_Dec2018_FINAL.pdf

A backgrounder on how government will address the remaining Rental Housing Task Force recommendations follows.

For a traditional Chinese translation, visit:

https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/NR_RHTF_Action_TraditionalChinese.pdf

For a Punjabi translation, visit:

https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/NR_RHTF_Action_Punjabi.pdf

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