



June 26, 2020

RE: NPRN Statement on Bill 184, Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act, 2020

The Niagara Poverty Reduction Network has concerns regarding several sections of a new bill proposing changes to the Residential Tenancies Act, Housing Services Act, and to the processes of the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB).

Bill 184 proposes to change the way tenants are able to access and communicate with the LTB by requiring advanced notice of filings, limiting information tenants can present during hearings and formalizing repayment agreements that take place without the Landlord and Tenant Board hearing process. These changes would disproportionately impact tenants who are marginalized and living on a low income and could lead to quick evictions, leaving people with no place to go.

The process to resolving disputes through the Landlord and Tenant Board is already complex and can be confusing. The changes assume tenants have access to the most up to date information and are able to mediate agreements on their own. As proposed, the bill would allow for legally enforceable repayment agreements to be made outside of a hearing process. Currently, at an eviction hearing tenants can speak to a duty counsel lawyer and get the input of a Board mediator to explain the implications of signing a repayment agreement, inform them of their rights and ensure the plan is reasonable. The changes will have consequences for more vulnerable tenants who are living on a low income or living with mental health conditions who rely on the support and advocacy of public legal services.

The Bill comes at a very challenging time during which NPRN has been advocating for increased tenant protections and a rent support program in response to COVID-19. While earlier this year, NPRN partnered with the Niagara Community Legal Clinic and local libraries to host information sessions about tenant rights and responsibilities. The series was in response to a housing market with low vacancy rates and the understanding that once tenants lost their housing there were few options to move into.

NPRN is urging the government to amend the Bill, protect tenants' rights, ensure equitable access to legal counsel and an adjudication process that tenants can access.

Niagara Poverty Reduction Network
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The Niagara Poverty Reduction Network is a collective of over 30 agencies and individuals working to wipe out poverty in Niagara through education, collaboration, and advocacy to address poverty's root causes.