

As faith leaders, we call on all provincial candidates to recognize housing unaffordability for what it is – a moral crisis – and to take concrete steps to solve it.

The gutting of Ontario's rent control and the failure of successive provincial (and federal) governments to invest sufficient amounts in non-profit and co-op housing has enabled for-profit landlords across Ontario to raise rents to levels unbearable for middle and low-income individuals and families and deprived them of affordable alternatives. We know from the experiences of congregants, their friends and relatives and what we ourselves witness just how hard life is for renters.

Overt homelessness is horrible but it is merely the tip of the housing unaffordability iceberg. Even working people who once had no major difficulties renting a home now struggle to do so, month after month. Many must uproot themselves every year or two, disrupting their lives and often their children's education, and incurring major moving expenses; others cannot move from poor housing because there are no appropriate, affordable options. Many households can no longer afford expenditures that were once considered normal and are unable to save for emergencies, let alone a dignified retirement. The absence of that spending ripples negatively through the rest of the local economy, hurting jobs and businesses.

We urge all candidates and parties to formally commit to the following:

Taking immediate action to preserve Ontario's dwindling stock of affordable housing:

- End rent decontrol on vacant units; tighten the criteria for above-guideline rent increases; restrict evictions for non-urgent renovations and provide effective measures when evictions for renovations or demolitions are justified, to ensure tenants can actually exercise their right to return to their unit, as provided in Hamilton, Toronto and London bylaws.
- Allow demolitions only if the new building includes at least the same number of comparable units as in the old building, at the former rents, in addition to any new affordable units required by municipal bylaws; and impose a temporary moratorium on demolishing any habitable affordable mid-rise apartment buildings until these rules for renovations and demolitions are in force **and** investments have been made sufficient to get half way toward the goal (below) of doubling the supply of non-profit and co-op housing in the affected municipality.
- Provide grants, loans and loan guarantees to enable non-profit housing providers to acquire existing private-sector rental buildings that have affordable or below-market rents.
- Give municipalities and other non-profit housing providers advance notice and first right of refusal to purchase multi-unit buildings that are to be sold.

While doing the above, also ensuring that enough new affordable rental housing units get built to end housing unaffordability in Ontario, by doubling the number of affordable rental housing units by 2035:

- Provide the funding needed to achieve that doubling to municipalities and other non-profit and co-op housing providers for the various phases of new housing projects, from feasibility studies to occupancy. Subsidize their environmental impact studies.
- Ensure that at least half of the new housing units are built by 2029.
- Streamline procedures and fast-track all applications for new construction of municipal housing, housing co-ops and non-profit housing.
- Mandate that heating and cooling expenses are included in the rent, to encourage proper insulation.
- Mandate moderate densification as the norm. Prevent expansion over the Greenbelt.

- Facilitate quality, durability and good value for money by bulk purchases of high-quality building materials.
- Provide multi-year commitments to operating funding for health and wrap-around services for thousands of new supportive housing units each year.
- Provide public land for housing only to non-profit, public and/or co-op housing providers.

The task of building the needed new housing and preventing further losses of affordable housing units cannot be postponed. The constant stress caused by steep rents and fear of evictions damages people's mental and physical health, and their social and family relationships. People should not have to couch surf for months, rely on food banks, take on credit-card debt, work 60-80 hours a week or exhaust their savings to keep up with rising rents and cover basics. Human needs must take priority over profit maximization.

We urge you to formally support all of the urgent proposals in this letter, which, taken together, will put us on a course to ensure everyone in Ontario is safely, stably, accessibly and affordably housed.



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