

November 27, 2023

Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
Hon. Paul Calandra, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Trevor Jones, MPP, Chatham-Kent-Leamington
Sean Weir, Executive Chair, Tribunals Ontario

We are writing today to ask for immediate action on the 61 recommendations accepted by Tribunals Ontario by the Ontario Ombudsman in May 2023, regarding the current Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) system in Ontario. Further, we are asking for a LTB location to be set up within Chatham-Kent.

Chatham-Kent, like many other municipalities in Ontario and Canada, has a shortage of affordable housing and thus unlawful and unnecessary losses of affordable units are not something that we can abide. The current LTB system is contributing to this issue and contributing to homelessness.

Tenants and landlords in Chatham-Kent are suffering hardships, losing tenancies or homes because of delays and inequities in the current 'virtual-first system'. Chatham-Kent is largely rural and many tenants and landlords do not have access to high-speed internet, a computer, transportation out of the community, or the skills to navigate this complex and technical new system. Further, the wait times are still lengthy, especially for tenants, causing frustration with the system and abandonment of their cases and homes.

Chatham-Kent has a large French speaking population as well as a growing number of residents for whom English is not their first language, who need equal access to LTB applications, mediation, and tribunals.

This year, approximately 70 people were evicted without appropriate notice from a long-term rental "hotel" and while staff, legal clinic staff and outreach partners tried to save their tenancies, the pressures were too great and the tenants walked away. Some of these households have landed in the emergency housing and shelter system and others in encampments. This is terribly stressful and unhealthy for those residents and adds pressure to Police, Social Services, EMS, and so on. Within the former tribunal system, this could have been stopped and some of those tenancies saved. This is only one example, there are many.

Further, social services staff and the staff of community partners are spending hours waiting to assist their clients to attend a virtual tribunal. While they are doing this, they cannot help those other residents find and secure housing.

Landlords are also reporting that backlogs in the system are resulting in increased financial hardship. With the rising costs of properties in Chatham-Kent it is essential that landlords receive rents and protect their investments and have access to tribunal in a timely manner.

Chatham-Kent Legal Clinic management report that staff are jumping between multiple virtual tribunal calls trying to assist numerous clients at the same time and they are not able to deliver the level of assistance that they are intended to provide.

We want the province to know that as a municipality we agree that the 61 recommendations are valid and the need for action is urgent.

Providing a Landlord and Tenant Board location, hearing disputes between our residents, will be a return to a program that existed prior to the pandemic. Hearings were held at the W.I.S.H Centre at 177 King Street East in Chatham three times a month. The hearing locations were fully staffed with adjudicator(s) and mediator(s) who had knowledge of the local supports and familiarity with the housing situation here. That service model provided better service for our residents and most importantly saved tenancies that were sustainable, which helped alleviate the homelessness that we are seeing in the community today.

Chatham-Kent is committed to a respectful and cooperative relationship with the province of Ontario and we are offering administration's assistance with securing a cost effective space for the landlord and tenant tribunal location within Chatham-Kent.

Sincerely,

Mayor and Council Members

C. Mayors and Councils of Municipalities of Ontario