

HomeComing Coalition

*Deputation to the October 26th Executive Committee meeting,
Agenda Item EX18.13: Proposed Regulatory and Licensing Strategy for
Multi-Tenant Houses and Consultation Plan*

Thanks for the opportunity to speak. I am a former rooming house tenant. Until very recently, I was a neighbour to 6 rooming houses operating within 100 meters of my home. But today I am here on behalf of the HomeComing Coalition.

HomeComing is a human rights organization. Our touchstones are the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and the Ontario Human Rights Commission's policies that prohibit municipal zoning and licensing regimes that adversely affect the young, the old, newcomers, people with disabilities, people receiving public assistance – the very people who live in multi-tenant houses – and *Toronto's Housing Charter*, which reminds us that all residents should be able to live in their neighbourhood of choice without discrimination, and whether we rent or own, we all have an equal stake and voice in Toronto's future.

So does the proposal before us adversely affect vulnerable people? Does it respect the equality of owners and tenants? Let's test it by comparing it to the by-laws and practices that affect my own family – homeowners, 4 adults, related by blood and marriage.

My family moved into our home without our neighbours' approval. No notices to our neighbours. No public hearings. So any licensing regime must work something like a building permit -- based on the physical features of the building – not on neighbourhood opinion.

If our next door neighbour complains that we're noisy or let garbage pile up, then we might expect a visit from an inspector. We might have to remedy the situation, or pay a fine. But we would not lose our home!

And we would not expect to be held to standards that are different from our neighbours. I make this point because I hear that in the past the City's Licensing Commissioner has set conditions on rooming house tenants that no homeowner would stand for. No loitering on the front porch? I loiter in my front yard all the time.

My family can use an electric kettle, or a microwave, or a hotplate, in any room in our house. It's even more important that rooming house tenants, who may not have access to a kitchen like my family does, can do the same. We simply cannot have a policy that requires Toronto's lowest income residents to eat all their meals in restaurants, or to eat only uncooked food.

My family can stay housed as long as we pay our bills. Even if we let our house go to rack and ruin, we can stay.

It's not clear from this proposal what happens when the pilot period is over, or what happens to multi-tenant houses that are not in the pilot zones. So let's just make a commitment now: that no tenants will lose their home as a result of the City's actions. Not in the pilot zones. Not in the rest of the city. In the rare cases when a house must be shut down – not because of where it is located, not because it doesn't have a license, but because tenants are at greater risk than if they were homeless – because that is often the alternative – then the City will step in with subsidies and support to ensure any displaced tenant has an affordable

home. That, by the way, is also the advice of the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

The staff's proposal affirms that multi-tenant houses are an important part of the affordable rental stock. We couldn't agree more. So, as you consider this policy, ask yourselves – will tenants – the ones that need this housing, be better off? Because if not, then the policy needs to change.