



Planning and Housing Committee PH21.12 – RentSafeTO

Dear Members of the Planning and Housing Committee.

We are writing on behalf of the Right to Housing in Toronto (R2HTO), a network of organizations and individuals working to support the implementation of the human right to housing by the City of Toronto. The right to housing includes the principle of habitability – which means the right to housing that is safe, secure, in good repair, free of physical and health hazards, and provides a healthy environment in which to thrive.

Last December, we had the opportunity to address this Committee in support of implementing the Apartment Building Rating system (ABRS) and its accompanying components, including color-coded rating signs. We spoke about how these components are important steps towards ensuring tenants across Toronto can claim their human right to safe, adequate and healthy housing. We also noted that tenants across Toronto have been waiting too long for the fully implemented RentSafeTO program to be implemented. We urged members of this Committee to adopt and implement the recommendations under consideration at that meeting.

We were disappointed and surprised that the implementation of the color-coded rating sign component of the ABRS was not passed. This was despite support from tenants, their advocates, and the overwhelming support from tenant deputants on December 8th. Today's meeting presents an opportunity for this Committee to take steps to clarify exactly how City staff and Council will ensure all current and prospective tenants will be informed of the rating of their apartment buildings and the evaluation used to create the rating.

We urge this Committee to continue moving forward on efforts to ensure all current and prospective tenants will be informed of the rating of their apartment buildings and the evaluation used to create the rating. This process must prioritize the ability of tenants to claim their right to adequate housing while ensuring transparency and accountability from landlords.

The current state of the rental market in Toronto makes this information more crucial than ever. Current tenants should have easy access to reliable information regarding the state of their building. Higher than normal vacancy rates across the City will allow current tenants to seek more adequate housing if their current building is in poor state of repair. Prospective tenants who also wish to take advantage of these vacancy rates should be able to determine, with ease, the safety, maintenance, and overall condition of a prospective rental building when choosing among several places to live.

We know the information provided by the color-coded rating signs, alongside increased efforts to enforce safety, disrepair, and maintenance standards, will especially benefit equity-seeking tenants across the City. The burden of inadequate and uninhabitable housing is not shared equally among tenants across the City. Easy access to reliable information about a building's ABRs rating ensures accountability for landlords and provides them with an incentive to ensure their building is in a good state of maintenance and repair.

We also know that when tenants are forced to vacate units due to uninhabitable conditions, these apartments represent a loss of existing affordable rental housing due to vacancy decontrol. Increased enforcement and accountability measures relating to safety, maintenance, and disrepair issues are a worthy endeavour on its own, however, these measures also ensure the protection of existing adequate housing and prevent displacement of tenants.

We understand that some landlords have expressed concerns that color-coded rating signs may stigmatize neighborhoods and/or tenants who reside in particular buildings. The solution to this issue is straightforward: landlords who are truly concerned with the stigmatization of their tenants can and should take action to ensure their buildings are safe, well-maintained, and in good state of repair, and remain places that tenants can be proud to call home.

We support continued efforts by the City to enforce maintenance standards and hold landlords accountable for providing habitable and adequate housing. As always, R2HTO is available to the City, as is helpful, to discuss how to move these efforts forward and we will monitor progress to ensure these measures are implemented using a human rights-based approach.

Thank you,

Right to Housing in Toronto (R2HTO)