



# ACORN Canada

Uniting Communities for Justice

## BC ACORN Presentation to Rental Housing Task Force

### What is BC ACORN?

BC ACORN is the British Columbia chapter of ACORN Canada (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, Canada). Founded in 2004, we are an independent national organization which has rapidly grown into one of the country's most effective voices for low and moderate income Canadians, with over 102,000 members in Canada. In BC, we have five chapters across Metro Vancouver and 19,000 members across the province. Our central purpose is to effectively represent and champion the interests of Canada's low and moderate income urban citizens on the critical issues of social and economic justice.

### The Experience of Low and Moderate Income Tenants

Metro Vancouver is in the midst of a housing crisis. Over one third of households are renters and 43 per cent pay more than thirty per cent of their income on rent. One in five households in Metro Vancouver spend half of their income or more on shelter.<sup>1</sup>

While rents are rising exponentially, insufficient rent control regulations are pricing low and moderate income tenants out of their communities, and out of the limited affordable housing that exists in the province. Currently, rent can be raised by two per cent above inflation. For many, this is unaffordable and increases financial hardship among low and moderate income households. However, landlords are increasingly able to take advantage of loopholes in BC's rent control regulations to raise rents even higher.

For example, vacancy decontrol allows landlords to hike up rents when a tenant vacates their property. This gives landlords an incentive to force tenants out into a market which is unaffordable, and decreases the overall supply of affordable housing.

Another concern facing low and moderate income tenants in Metro Vancouver is the prospect of renovictions and demovictions. Tenants are being forced out of their homes by landlords who are using renovations as an excuse to increase rents above the maximum allowable rate, ultimately renovicting tenants who cannot afford to pay the increase. If tenants do not accept the increase, they are simply provided with an eviction notice and the landlord will rent the unit to someone else at a higher rate. Metro Vancouver ACORN members are being faced with rent increases of 100 per cent due to renovations.<sup>2</sup>

Tenants are also concerned about demovictions. Across the Province, affordable units are being demolished, forcing tenants into a housing market with rising rents and plummeting

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.policynote.ca/rising-housing-costs-in-vancouver-new-evidence-from-the-census/>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.acorncanada.org/new-westminster-acorn-rally-against-renovictions>



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vacancy rates. As of 2017, the vacancy rate was less than 1% and the average rent had increased by almost six per cent to \$1,297.<sup>3</sup>

## ACORN Members' Top Three Priorities

1. Lack of affordable housing
2. Rent control loopholes
3. Renovictions and demovictions

## ACORN Members' Ideas and Solutions

1. Strengthen BC's Rent Control Laws
  - a. Tie rent control to units rather than to the lease.

*Rent control which is attached to the lease incentivizes landlords to force out tenants in order to rent the unit at a higher rate. By tying rent control to the unit, tenants will have greater protection and we can prevent further loss of much-needed affordable housing.*

- b. Commit to exploring alternative maximum rent increases, as the current 2% plus inflation is too much.

*For example, Manitoba, Ontario, and Nova Scotia's maximum rent increase is tied to the rate of inflation. All are substantially lower than the maximum allowable increase in BC for 2018.*

2. Ensure tenants have a seat at the table during the Residential Tenancy Act review.  
*Low and moderate income tenants must be given a voice to ensure any changes to the Residential Tenancy Act meet their specific needs.*

3. Enforce laws against unjustified renovations

*Landlords are capitalizing on the lack of enforcement around renovations, enabling them to evict tenants unjustly and raise rents through the roof. By ensuring that tenants are only asked to vacate their homes for necessary renovations, and ensuring they are provided with the same rental costs on their return, renters will be protected from unscrupulous landlords who are treating tenants unfairly.*

ACORN members would also like to see municipalities increasing the supply of deeply affordable housing through inclusionary zoning policies. Inclusionary zoning is a powerful tool that can be used to increase supply of affordable housing in our cities by demanding that a certain percentage of new developments is affordable housing.

Cities must also ensure affordable and social housing is not lost by utilizing rental replacement policy to provide housing for displaced tenants. Replacing affordable units will maintain the

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<sup>3</sup>[https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/esub/64467/64467\\_2017\\_A01.pdf?r=1526671384221&sid=YMwrSn3pbYey3KI0AlP2X8SVeAfLVnlEuvyzNZFIfB4ws7sdmEoZLXJqPbBsn6G2](https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/esub/64467/64467_2017_A01.pdf?r=1526671384221&sid=YMwrSn3pbYey3KI0AlP2X8SVeAfLVnlEuvyzNZFIfB4ws7sdmEoZLXJqPbBsn6G2)



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existing supply of affordable housing and will ensure that tenants are not forced into precarious housing situations in a hostile rental market.

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