

Submission to the Rental Housing Task Force

B.C. Student Housing Working Group

I. Introduction

The B.C. Student Housing Working Group would like to thank the Rental Housing Task Force for the opportunity to provide comments as part of the public consultation process. The Working Group is comprised of eight representatives from public post-secondary institutions (PSIs) across B.C. (see Appendix 1 for a list of the Working Group members). Working Group responsibilities include providing advice to the Province on the development of a new student housing strategy to increase the number of student housing beds available in B.C.

Working Group members have in-depth experience in managing and delivering safe and affordable housing for students. The members represent a balance of PSIs in terms of size, geographic region, educational mandate and perspective. We are happy to have the opportunity to share our insights on how we work together with students living on campus, providing unique and fulfilling environments that are important to their academic success.

II. Overview of Student Housing in B.C.

Public post-secondary campuses serve a wide range of student demographics from direct-from-high-school 1st year students, to older adult learners, graduate students, and students with families. To serve this diverse population, on-campus student housing comes in many forms at 16 of B.C.'s 25 public institutions, ranging from traditional dormitories with shared washrooms and central dining services, to studio and shared-suite style units, to multi-bedroom townhouse and apartment units.

Student housing is different from market rental housing in many ways. The costs to operate facilities include an array of support services and value-added amenities that contribute to campus life and student academic success that are not found or required in a typical landlord/tenant environment. Some amenities are available campus-wide to all students, such as security, mental health services, health and wellness clinics, academic advising, recreational facilities, learning commons, and chaplaincy. Other services and amenities are directly incorporated into student housing developments, such as residence life advisors, 24-hour front desk and emergency response services, fitness rooms, games rooms, quiet study and social spaces, music practice rooms, special recreational programs, food services, bicycle storage and others.

In 2017, the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training (AEST) completed an assessment of student housing need across the Province. AEST conservatively estimated a

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Province-wide unmet demand for additional student housing at roughly 17,000 beds, almost double today's supply of 21,000 beds.

Budget 2018 included a new public post-secondary financing program which provides access to up to \$450 million in government loans and grants to help public universities, institutes and colleges finance new student housing projects over the next 10 years. Project financing will come from a combination of contributions from participating institutions and government loans, with financing to be fully repaid through student housing rental income. At present, AEST is targeting 5,000 new student housing beds, over ten years, to be added to current stock under government's financing program. In addition, larger PSIs are expected to create 3,000 new beds through financing arrangements that do not include taxpayer-supported debt, for a total of approximately 8,000 new beds.

III. The importance of student housing to student success

Student housing operations invest in professional and student staff teams, most of whom live and work in the on-campus student housing environment. These teams foster student academic and personal success through formal community standards agreements that prioritize the needs and rights of students living on campus. These communities are built in accordance with international standards that have been proven to enhance student outcomes.¹ For example, communities develop quiet hours, establish behavioural expectations, and provide academic or social programs. In most cases, these policies and practices have been developed over many years of experience, including conversations with students, residence councils and residence staff.

In short, student housing is more than just a place to live—it provides diverse students with a supportive community environment focused on their development as citizens and learners.²

IV. The Impact of the *Residential Tenancy Act* (RTA) in a Student Housing Environment

Student housing is currently exempt from the RTA to allow institutions to put the needs of students first. Many jurisdictions, including Ontario and Manitoba have excluded student housing from their respective RTA's.

¹ <https://forum.academica.ca/forum/good-news-for-the-champions-of-on-campus-housing>

² <http://www.nwcc.bc.ca/news/student-leaves-positive-mark-campus-life>

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Residence standards are established to ensure a living environment that embraces diversity and fosters student well-being and academic success. Living in close quarters allows students to get to know people from different cultures, backgrounds and sexual orientations. While differences are invaluable and make learning and on-campus living more vibrant, differences and conflicts are bound to occur, particularly, when living in a close community. For this reason, it is imperative that student housing operations establish clear expectations and standards to guide students in living together. Living on campus in a shared residential setting is different from living in a private apartment or house or with your family, and thus requires different tenancy arrangements.

Institutions have developed student housing contracts that aim to balance the rights and responsibilities of individual students living in student housing with the educational goals of the community and the operational needs of the institution. These contracts are reviewed and updated annually to reflect the values and context of individual institutions in their efforts to provide positive, safe, supportive and inclusive environments for students to live and learn.

Student housing contracts provide an option for students who might be disadvantaged and unable to enter into a standard rental agreement in the private market. For example, students often require less than 1 year of housing, do not have housing references as they may not have lived away from home, or must pay for dates outside of what they require for the duration of their academic program.

There are a multitude of reasons that support the continued exemption of student housing from the RTA:

1. The RTA does not recognize or support a hands-on approach to community development. The vast majority of students living on-campus are away from home for the first time and are likely to require the services of housing professionals to manage many aspects of community living. In the post-secondary context, residence life programs and community standards facilitate an atmosphere of academic success and personal growth. This often requires proactive intervention to address far more complex issues than any landlord would be expected to, including:
 - i. Personal crisis such as suicide, mental health issues, or sudden tragic loss;
 - ii. Allegations and impacts of sexual misconduct or assault;
 - iii. Stalking or personal harassment;
 - iv. Experience of homophobic/sexist/racist remarks or materials;
 - v. Unforeseen physical health issues impacting community members.

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- vi. Romantic relationship breakdown and the aftermath; and/or
 - vii. Roommate and interpersonal disputes (i.e. noise, cleanliness, personality clashes).
2. One of the features of current student housing agreements in B.C. is the built-in mechanisms supporting students who may have to leave their studies mid-year due to unforeseen circumstances. For example, students who develop a medical or mental health condition who can no longer complete their studies need to have options to leave their housing and not be unreasonably financially penalized. This flexibility would not be possible with the RTA, and is one of the important ways institutions go beyond a mere transactional relationship with on-campus student residents.
 3. PSIs need to be able to limit tenants to those who are students of the institution. Under the RTA, institutions would not be able to enforce a student status requirement or maximum length of stay, resulting in non-students living in student housing creating long waitlists for new or returning students. The mixture of students and non-students would limit the institution's ability to develop and enforce academic specific policies such as extended quiet hours during exam periods.
 4. Institutions have well-developed processes for dispute resolutions within an on-campus community that are bolstered within student housing agreements. While the RTA is necessary to provide safeguards to tenants in a living space without site-specific dispute resolution, PSIs have long understood their obligations to students to provide timely administrative justice and fairness in processes and decision-making. Trained professional staff deal with behavioural issues, within formalized processes in place to address disputes among students, and between students and the institution.
 5. While the RTA regulates rent increases in the community, approval of student housing and other fees is normally provided at the Board of Governor level, a body which includes student representation. Institutions often consult with students on campus prior to any rent increase proposed to the Board. Educational institutions are not motivated by profit, but rather by providing a quality living and learning environment that is financially sustainable and enhances the ability for the institution to recruit and retain diverse students.

V. Alignment Between the Working Group and Provincial Student Associations

The goal of the student housing strategy is to increase the number of student housing spaces in the province to meet the unique needs of students requiring housing while

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attending public post-secondary institutions. It is critical that student housing remain exempt from the RTA in order to meet the needs of students. PSI student housing contracts that govern student life on campus support many of the objectives that B.C. student societies advocate for. These objectives include, but are not limited to:

1. Respect for student rights and clarity on housing responsibilities;
2. Clearly developed processes to report problems within campus housing;
3. Clearly defined policies and procedures on room entry and inspection to ensure maintenance and safety;
4. Flexibility to move students from one space to another to promote wellness and maximize individual preferences;
5. Open and transparent consultation on fee changes; and
6. Clear tenancy start and end dates.

PSI's have and will continue to work with their student representatives and other student advocacy groups (e.g. student associations, residence hall associations) to ensure that student concerns brought forward are addressed, and that the objectives noted above are well-balanced, fair and most importantly, supportive of the creation of safe and inclusive living environments for all students.

VI. Conclusion

Student housing contracts at B.C.'s public PSIs have been successful in meeting student and institutional needs, and helping foster positive living and learning environments in support of student success. Housing contracts protect students' interests while enabling institutions to develop communities that support the personal, professional, and academic needs of students. Many students and families choose on-campus housing because of its safety, security and convenience. Residence life and education programs, which establish community standards and support students to be successful members of the community, are the key factors in the creation of healthy, positive and safe living environments.

The Student Housing Working Group thanks the Task Force for the opportunity to provide feedback. We would be happy to provide further information to the Task Force, upon request.

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Appendix 1

The following are members of the B.C. Student Housing Working Group:

Member	Title	PSI	Region
Kerry Clarke	VP, College Services / CFO	Selkirk College	Interior
Jim Dunsdon	Associate VP, Student Affairs	University of Victoria	Vancouver Island
Colin Fowler	VP, Finance & Facilities	North Island College	Vancouver Island
Andrew Parr (PSI Co-Chair)	Managing Director, Student Housing & Hospitality Services	University of British Columbia	Lower Mainland
Martin Pochurko	VP, Finance and Administration	Simon Fraser University	Lower Mainland
Shelley Rennick	Director, Facilities & Capital Planning	University of Northern British Columbia	North
Chris Rogerson	Director, Student Success	British Columbia Institute of Technology	Lower Mainland
Craig Toews	VP, External	University of the Fraser Valley	Lower Mainland