



Right
to Housing

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December 3, 2014

The Honourable Greg Selinger

Premier of Manitoba

Dear Premier:

I am writing to inform you of Right to Housing's priorities for Budget 2015:

1. A commitment of resources to raise the maximum Rent Assist benefit level to 75% of median market rent.
2. An increase in the housing budget by \$30 million to meet existing commitments without compromising other important housing initiatives.
3. A continued investment in addressing expiring operating agreements in Budget 2015 to ensure that there is no net loss of units with R.G.I. rent or less due to expiring federal operating agreements.

The Right to Housing Coalition applauds your government's new "Rent Assist" program - a progressive step in your commitment to reducing poverty. Helping people afford high rents frees up more funds for other necessities like food, clothing, transportation, and school costs. Ensuring that this program is available to all low-income citizens is essential, and helps to reduce the disparity between those on EIA and low-income working people. Its portability allows people to choose where they want to live. The goal of reaching 75% of median market rent has been strongly recommended by the community. It is important to reach that goal, in a responsible way, sooner than in the planned 4 years in order to provide immediate assistance to Manitoba's most vulnerable citizens. We also believe this must be achieved without clawing back other benefits available to low-income Manitobans. We urge your government to commit resources to raise Rent Assist benefits to 75% of median market rent within this coming budget year.

Right to Housing continues to appreciate that your government is meeting its commitment to provide more R.G.I. and affordable housing units for low-income citizens. However, the latest commitment of 500 new units each annually for 3 years is inadequate when we know that in 2011 there were approximately 13,000 households in Winnipeg alone paying 50% or more of their income on rent. We also know that the ongoing loss of social and affordable units challenge the ability to achieve overall net increases in supply. Budget 2015 must address the acute need for a proportion of the new units to be dedicated to larger families (requiring 3 bedrooms or more).

The Department of Housing and Community Development cannot continue its excellent path of developing high quality housing through existing commitments while maintaining the current stock, when it is functioning on a 0% budget increase. This is a particular concern given the declining departmental revenues and increased costs arising from the end of land sales,

expiring federal operating agreements, new mortgages, and cost of living increases. We urge you to ensure that the department receives a funding increase of \$30 million in Budget 2015 so it can meet the housing targets that have been set without compromising other important initiatives.

We are deeply concerned with the federal government's neglect to renew expiring operating agreements for non-profit, cooperative and Provincial housing providers and we are gratified that your government has committed to offering interim financial support through five-year agreements to providers who cannot afford to operate their housing program at a level consistent with their original operating agreement. We call on the Province of Manitoba to invest in addressing expiring operating agreements in Budget 2015 to ensure that there is no net loss of units with R.G.I. rent or less due to expiring federal operating agreements. We urge you to continue to call on the federal government to work with you to design and deliver a cost-shared rent subsidy program that includes R.G.I. assistance to replace the loss of subsidy due to expiring operating agreements.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to housing for low-income Manitobans. We look forward to hearing your response to our budgetary asks.

Yours truly,

Clark Brownlee

Coordinator

cc.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross

Hon. Kevin Chief

Hon. Greg Dewar