



Right to Housing

453 Montrose Street
Winnipeg Manitoba
R3M 3M2
204.488.1786
info@righttohousing.ca
www.righttohousing.ca

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The Honourable Greg Selinger
Premier of Manitoba
204 Legislative Building
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

Dear Premier Selinger:

Budget 2014

The Right to Housing Coalition applauds the \$20 million that your government has committed in the recent budget to poverty reduction through the new Rent Assist program. We are pleased to see that various rent supplement programs have been combined and that the rent assistance is portable and will assist all low income people who qualify, whether they are on EIA or working. We are also pleased that your government has made a commitment to restore rent subsidies for people on EIA through the Rent Assist program to 75% of median market rent, something poverty activists have been urging for several years. The focus in Budget 2014 of bringing up rental assistance rates for single individuals to this level is a good priority, since this is the group that has fallen furthest behind, in terms of total income, over the past two decades. We also commend your government for providing interim rent supplements for social housing units whose operating grants have expired or will expire over the next several years. These measures show your government's responsiveness to the community's advocacy and to the living conditions of low income citizens.

Our primary role in the community is to advocate for more R.G.I housing for those in core housing need. The new Rent Assist Program should help those people by making better housing units more available and freeing up scarce resources for other basic needs. A very important addition to Rent Assist would be for the department to mount a public education campaign to make sure that those most in need of rent supplements will learn about this new program. Low income workers may be especially isolated and uninformed about such benefits.

We wish to commend your government for its continuing commitment to creating more units of affordable and R.G.I. housing units. You are right on track with the original commitment. Of course, our role is to advocate for more R.G.I. units where the need is

greatest, and we will continue to do that. We are still seeing the R.F.P.'s come out seeking builders for seniors' housing and while we believe that is a need, we also want to reinforce the need for low income housing for Aboriginal people, single parents, and newcomers. Each of these populations has unique and significant housing requirements that need to be addressed as commitments for more new units are being planned.

We are concerned about the administration of the "affordable" housing program. For example we recognize that the new Living Gospel Family Place building is wonderful. We understand that families who need and want to access the affordable units cannot afford them and that those units are still empty. This is a situation that requires immediate attention.

For many years, governments and others were concerned that if the EIA rent allowance was raised, landlords would pocket the extra funds, still leaving people in substandard housing units. We have suggested that the municipalities and the province collaborate to set some minimum standards for rental units. This, of course, means more funds being allocated for inspectors, and funds being made available for building improvements. There are likely many jurisdictions that have successfully tackled this problem and we urge the Manitoba Housing to do that research to find a way to improve the rental housing stock in Manitoba. The Department has done a commendable job in renovating public housing. We would like to see some form of programming for renovations and regulation to the private sector. The issue of disappearing rooming houses is a huge issue that urgently needs addressing, as those tenants are the most vulnerable to homelessness.

We again commend you and your government for the poverty reduction measures in the recent budget. We look forward to a response to the issues we have raised in this letter.

Yours truly,

Clark Brownlee
Coordinator

c.c. Minister Peter Bjornson
Minister Kerri Irvin Ross