



Changes to rent regulation needed to protect tenants

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Originally published in the Winnipeg Free Press on April 14, 2026

Summer in Winnipeg brings sunshine, BDI ice cream, the Winnipeg Folk Festival and a renewed sense of joy.

For us, it also brings another rent increase and another struggle.

Every July, we receive a new rental lease agreement for the coming year from our landlord, and with it, three questions to reflect on: will we be able to afford our home for another year? Can we keep saving for a house? Can we afford to save right now? For the past three consecutive years our new rental agreement has come with a notice that our landlord is trying to raise our rent above the provincial rent increase guideline. The first year it was an eight per cent increase, then another 16 per cent the next year, and this past fall it was an additional seven per cent demand.

Each year, the Residential Tenancies Branch (RTB) sets a guideline percentage that landlords are allowed to increase rent-controlled units by. However, a landlord can apply to the RTB for an above the guideline increase if they can show that the guideline won't cover their cost increases.

These above-guideline rent increases, sometimes called AGIs, have become a free for all for landlords in Manitoba. The Right to Housing Coalition obtained recent figures on the extent of AGI use by landlords through a recent access to information request. In 2024, landlords applied for 327 separate AGIs to raise the rent on a total of 18,651 rental units. All 327 applications were approved by the RTB. The average increase for these 2024 AGIs was 11.6 per cent, well above the three per cent inflationary guideline set by the government. These increases are often fuelled by unnecessary renovations that the landlord has undertaken in order to get the rent increase they want.

The NDP government has recently proposed changes to residential rent regulation to better protect renters.

One of the proposed changes includes setting limits on the amount of capital expenses, such as renovations, that landlords can claim on their AGI applications. Under the proposed changes, the amount they can claim will be half of what it currently is, limiting the cost of renovations they can pass on to tenants.

These changes are a step in the right direction. We hope these changes will lead to landlords focusing on the work that is actually needed, rather than prioritizing renovations that will get them the largest rent increase.

Our landlord chose to spend thousands of dollars replacing all the light fixtures in every unit when the old ones worked just



fine. They chose to take out the old working intercom and spent thousands of dollars just to replace it with a new one that works just the same.

We have friends who had their perfectly good hardwood floors ripped out of their building and replaced with vinyl flooring just so their landlord could say that they had spent the money to justify a rent increase. When we appeal to the RTB that the landlord is choosing to spend money on unnecessary renovations, we are told that it doesn't matter if the expenses are necessary or frugal, it only matters that the landlord has actually spent the money.

Every year we have gone through the process to read, understand and, when necessary, challenge our annual rent increases through the RTB. Every year we discover thousands of dollars of inaccuracies and misrepresentations of expenses in our landlord's application that, if unchallenged, would mean they would get a higher rent increase than they should be allowed. There are currently zero fines, penalties or consequences for the landlord for mischaracterization of their expenses in this process.

The AGI process in its current form puts the onus on tenants, along with the RTB officers, to ensure the landlord's AGI application is correct. Landlords can take advantage of systemic barriers to tenants and overworked or under-resourced RTB officers to have incorrect AGI applications approved for a permanent increase to

their rental income. Tenants like us are forced to do the unpaid labour involved to fight these increases or else we let our landlords unfairly raise our rent. This must change.

The rent increase guideline for 2026 has been set at 1.8 per cent. Some tenants in our building have already received notice that our landlord, Thorwin Properties, plans to apply for another AGI of up to 15 per cent this year. For us that means an additional \$200 every month that we will be paying to our landlord instead of saving for our future house.

As we ready ourselves for yet another upcoming above-guideline rent increase, we will again have to ask ourselves if we can afford another year in our current home. With changes to rent regulation finally on the table this year though we will also be asking an additional question: Are Wab Kinew and the NDP government ready to finally prioritize stable and affordable homes for Manitoba renters over the increasing profits of corporate landlords?

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