



# Response to the LeSage Review

Item 1b  
June 29, 2010

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**To:** Board of Directors  
**From:** Keiko Nakamura  
Chief Executive Officer

**Report::**TCHC:2010-64

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## **PURPOSE:**

To provide my initial response to the *"Report on the Eviction of Al Gosling and the Eviction Prevention Policy of Toronto Community Housing Corporation"* authored by the Honourable Patrick J. LeSage.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

I recommend that the Board of Directors receive this report for information.

## **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The Board established the LeSage Review to obtain advice on how the organization could learn from the circumstances leading to Mr. Gosling's eviction through an open, independent process. The review is all about improving our organization, learning how we can better serve tenants, and strengthening our role as a social housing provider.

The events that led to Mr. Gosling's eviction and subsequent passing has profoundly affected our entire organization and has been a catalyst for change. We have learned a very powerful lesson from these events.

The organization is taking the LeSage Review seriously and we are strongly committed to action. From the day we learned of Mr. Gosling's passing, we have been working to make substantive changes to improve how we respond to vulnerable tenants.

Justice LeSage has delivered a thoughtful, balanced, and forward-looking report. I am pleased that he acknowledged the hard work, professionalism, and compassion of our staff. He recognized the funding and resource limitations we operate under, as well as

the need to reform the legislative framework for social housing. I thank him for his sound advice.

The report provides us with clear direction on where we can make improvements—for example, in increasing face-to-face contact with tenants, improving communications, ensuring staff are clear in their roles in eviction prevention, making processes simpler and fairer for tenants, and building stronger relationships with agencies and partners. The report also identifies opportunities where we can work with stakeholders and partners to strengthen the social housing system. It's a good report.

Toronto Community Housing is one of the few housing providers with a policy for eviction prevention. Although more than 8,000 households each month find themselves in arrears with \$4 million in rent owing, we still have an eviction rate for arrears of less than one per cent. No private landlords in the city have a rate this low. Our eviction prevention policy was built on strong tenant input. We recognize that many people living in housing have nowhere else to go for secure, permanent housing. That's why we work with tenants to ensure that eviction is a last resort. As Justice LeSage points out, there were other missed opportunities that could have been taken to satisfy ourselves that it was the last resort for Mr. Gosling.

Our policy requires staff to work with tenants to ensure they meet their responsibilities, and to find solutions to keep tenants housed. We use prevention strategies such as early intervention, education, communication, and individual plans to help tenants stay housed and to limit the number of evictions for not paying rent to as few as possible. I must ensure that the spirit of the policy is in fact embodied in the day to day actions and behaviors of staff.

I would like to thank the staff who have responded with their hearts and determination to take action. Through the hard work and commitment of many staff over the past several months, we have already begun making changes in several areas identified by Justice LeSage:

Face-to-Face contact - Face to face contact is a requirement on matters relating to rent collection and arrears. This includes strengthening the connection between tenant committees and a building's Supervisor and Tenant Services Coordinator. One Operating Unit has established set hours for when Tenant Services Coordinators will be available at the building to meet with tenants. We are working to train and support community volunteers who will welcome new tenants into buildings. Pilot projects for these "welcoming committees" are already underway in three buildings. A personal contact pilot with participation from 2 - 3 Operating Units was implemented in January, 2010. The pilot explores

the effectiveness of “front-ended” staff intervention into tenant arrears cases prior to the serving of termination notices. The process emphasizes early and repeated personal contacts.

Integrated Team Case Review - We have adopted an integrated team approach to eviction prevention at the building level, bringing together Community Health and Operating Unit Staff. This “case review” ensures ongoing communication between front-line staff working together to problem-solve when a tenancy is at risk.

Eviction Prevention Training - A comprehensive Eviction Prevention training plan to further educate staff on their collective roles and accountability in preventing evictions was developed. The training featured participation of intact building teams including Superintendents, Tenant Service Coordinators and Operating Unit Managers, as well as community health field teams that provide support to staff in accessing resources. A team of cross-functional experts created a case study for the training that attempts to address current potential disconnects. Eviction prevention teams are now up and running in every Operating Unit. Their work is tracked through a new reporting template and groups meet monthly to review. We have launched a 3-year training plan for the integrated teams, to ensure all staff that interact with tenants are clear on our policies, procedures and accountabilities, in particular with regards to vulnerable tenants. The teams receive ongoing support from workshops on topics such as effective communication, compassion fatigue and mental health, as well as tools and tips to improve how they identify, address, and track vulnerable tenancies. Since November 2009, we have held six Eviction Prevention Summits for 200 staff, and we reconvened these employees for a major summit in April 2010 where they heard tenant stories, clarified their roles in supporting tenants, and shared best practices to work with tenants towards successful tenancies.

Mixed Company Case Scenarios - A team of staff has re-enacted real life case studies of difficult situations with the support of a theatre company that focuses on issues of social change. This production visited every Operating Unit; inviting staff to analyze together best possible responses. 424 staff members have attended. Four vulnerable tenancy scenarios were dissected from an integrated team perspective.

Vulnerable Tenant Protocol - Toronto Community Housing has developed a ‘Vulnerable Tenant Protocol’ that clarifies staff roles and accountabilities in providing services, including eviction prevention support, to vulnerable tenants. To assist staff in assimilating and applying the work practices embedded within this Protocol, Toronto Community Housing will develop a series of streamlined, plain language tools (e.g. points of contact checklist) that staff will be able to use to track their compliance with the Eviction Prevention policy. The protocol and

tools are embedded in the Staff Evictions Prevention Training. This summer, we are conducting needs assessments on "high needs buildings" and we have launched training for the teams who support these buildings. Ultimately all front-line staff in our organization will participate.

Eviction Prevention Processes – Some letters related to arrears have been revised to ensure they include the name of a contact person in the Operating Unit. Letters related to "opportunity to comment and internal review" now include the rent calculation. The translation page has been modified to be simpler and clearer. Letters and forms are being reviewed for clarity and tone. Assistance from CLEO has been sought along with our internal communications unit. Staff are working on modifications to the Tenant Management System that will support the proposed changed processes for eviction prevention.

Annual Rent Reviews – Annual review forms are being reviewed for clarity and ease of use. The annual review process is being reviewed to add personal contact at escalation points, to add controls or a review step, and to simplify the tenant's part of the process. The annual review package is under a "senior lens" review.

Lease Signing – at lease signing and annual rent review, the emergency contact sheet has been expanded to include contact names of both informal and formal support providers.

Consents – The Consent to Disclose form was finalized and distributed to Eviction Prevention Teams to allow for communication between community supports and staff.

City of Toronto Partnerships - A staff / City / agency resource has been explored that could assist in responding to vulnerable tenant concerns. Staff are also reviewing the possibility of submitting a request for proposal for "care management services" to qualified supportive agencies, such as CCAC. Staff is also working with the City of Toronto's Long-Term Care Home and Services Supportive Housing Program to learn the full range of resources and services they can provide to tenants and/or in Toronto Community Housing buildings and to establish a presence in buildings.

Legal Clinics – Staff have been working to convene regular eviction prevention meetings with legal clinics. The meetings' objective is to collectively case manage complex tenant arrears cases, some of which, might require legal clinic feedback and expertise in drafting mediated repayment agreements. Toronto Community Housing has been working to establish a collaborative working relationship with legal clinics to reduce the need for evictions and setup legal clinics for tenants in all 13 operating units. This will build on the best practices between legal clinics and frontline staff which currently exists in some parts of the portfolio, where local legal clinics go to communities to provide counsel to individuals whose tenancy is in jeopardy (arrears, vulnerability, loss of subsidy) as well as other relevant housing issues that the tenant might have (i.e.,

maintenance). Legal clinics also provided an orientation to Toronto Community Housing staff during the Eviction Prevention Summit to ensure that relevant staff were oriented to the clinics and key local partners whose services would be critical in supporting tenants.

Mental Health – Mental Health Partnership Table convenes Toronto's leading mental health organizations to increase participation at local and provincial consultation tables, support the senior's strategy and engage in a funding campaign. A formal partnership is under development with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. CAMH recently provided a workshop about the mental health challenges our staff most typically encounter with tenants, and we intend to repeat this module in the next round of training. The Board recently approved the Mental Health Framework which will guide staff actions.

Partnership Agreements – Underway is the review of partnership agreements with agencies to ensure that the appropriate agencies and partners have access to Toronto Community Housing spaces to deliver direct services and respond to individual tenant needs as well as the wider community. Partnership agreements are being reviewed to reduce costing, administrative processes, or policies that create barriers. This will create an environment with increased access to space for service delivery.

Anti-Ableism Committee – the AAC and staff are currently reviewing current peer support models. A presentation was conducted in January and a consortium of organizations (Gerstein, Kasman Centre/Culture of recover.org) and Ann Thompson, a well known recovery model trainer and York University Professor, are putting forward recommendations to Toronto Community Housing.

Asset Mapping – Community Health teams have developed asset mapping tools to identify issues and resources in buildings and communities, including on-site agencies, community partners, supportive housing referral agreements, and City Councillors, MPPs, MPs, and Toronto Police Services. This also helps to identify the services provided and key contacts of partners in Toronto Community Housing communities. Staff have developed a building-level planning tool to develop a plan to address issues identified in buildings and triage buildings.

Justice LeSage's report will add fuel and momentum to this process. It provides clear direction in other areas where we need to improve our processes, operations and culture to better serve tenants.

As CEO, I know this organization needs to continue to work hard to ensure we have the trust of our tenants, partners, and the public. We must prove to our tenants and the people of Toronto that we can make substantive changes to improve our organization. That's something we absolutely have to deliver on to earn their trust.

A clear and aggressive implementation is required. Our process for developing our implementation plan will involve staff, tenants, the unions, stakeholders, shareholder,

community agencies and partners. We want to work together to achieve lasting solutions that improve our organization and the social housing system. Our process will be inclusive and collaborative, and focused on achieving lasting and effective solutions.

In July we will launch our three-year strategic plan, the Community Management Plan 2010-2012. It includes a vision for the organization and states a clear and straightforward mission: *"We provide affordable housing, connect tenants to services and opportunities, and work together to build healthy communities."*

We developed the Community Management Plan through a community consultation process that gathered comments and ideas from more than 1,000 people. It focuses on: strengthening people, strengthening places, and ensuring a strong foundation for good business practices.

One of its key strategies is promoting successful tenancies. In the plan, we state that "as a compassionate landlord, we will help connect tenants to the services they need. We will work together with our partners to provide support for tenants who are vulnerable."

The plan also states that "people are our business: when tenants succeed, we succeed." At every step in the process, we need to work to find solutions that keep tenants housed.

My job as CEO is to be a relentless driver of change within this organization. My goal is to show the value of Toronto Community Housing and the positive contribution we make to the city and its residents. Toronto Community Housing is a large, complex organization—Canada's largest social housing provider. We offer 164,000 residents a home, a sense of security and hope, and a place to connect with services and opportunities. Working with many partners, we help build strong, healthy communities. People are the reason we are in business. When tenants succeed, we succeed.

I look forward to the discussion at the June 29<sup>th</sup> Board meeting to establish the next steps to move us forward.



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Keiko Nakamura  
Chief Executive Officer

**Staff Contact:** Keiko Nakamura.....416-981-4203  
Chief Executive Officer keiko.nakamura@torontohousing.ca