

Court File No.

**ONTARIO
SUPERIOR COURT OF JUSTICE**

B E T W E E N:

**CENTRE FOR EQUALITY RIGHTS IN ACCOMMODATION,
JANICE ARSENAULT, ANSAR MAHMOOD, BRIAN DUBOURDIEU
and JENNIFER TANUDJAJA**

Applicants

- and -

**ATTORNEYGENERAL OF CANADA and
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF ONTARIO**

Respondents

APPLICATION UNDER Rule 14.05(3)(g.1) of the *Rules
of Civil Procedure*, R.R.O. 1990, O. Reg. 194 and under
the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*

**AFFIDAVIT OF LINDA CHAMBERLAIN
(Sworn May 17, 2010)**

I, **LINDA CHAMBERLAIN**, of the City of Toronto, in the Province of Ontario,
MAKE OATH AND SAY:

1. I was homeless for thirty years. From age thirteen to forty-seven, I lived on the street, in shelters and, on occasion, in rundown rooming houses. When I got my first real apartment thirteen years ago, I couldn't believe it was mine. I didn't unpack my boxes for a year because I was so sure that I would be thrown out. It felt like I was awake for the first time in my life. I was forty-seven years old.
2. I am sixty years old now, single, with no children. I live at 179 Broadview Ave, apartment 410 in Toronto. I've lived there for the past 13 years. The building is run by Mainstay Housing, an organization that provides supportive housing for people with

mental illness. I have been diagnosed with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and alcohol addiction.

3. In this affidavit, I have been asked to describe my experiences with homelessness and inadequate housing as well as the impact on my life of finding supportive housing.

Background

4. I spent part of my childhood on a farm outside St. John, New Brunswick. After my father died in a farm accident, we went to live with my mother's parents in St. John. But my grandfather died soon after and my grandmother went into the hospital.

5. My mother took me out of school to take care of my two younger sisters so that she could go to work. I was in grade two. I didn't know how to use the stove so I would make meals for my sisters like peanut butter sandwiches or sugar sandwiches. I never had the chance to go back to school.

6. When I was thirteen years old, my paternal grandmother visited us from Toronto. She took me back to live with her in her house near Howie and Queen Street West. I hadn't even been there for a week when my grandmother told me that this wasn't a "free ride" and that I needed to find a job to pay my room and board.

7. I had no skills and could barely read. I couldn't even read the street signs. I stayed on Queen Street so that I wouldn't get lost, walking up and down. I saw a sign in a shoe store window. I went in and asked them if they had any jobs. I told them I was 17 or 18 years old and they gave me a job.

8. As I was both illiterate and innumerate, it was hard for me to use the cash register and find the shoe boxes in the back. A man I worked with would get the shoes for me and I would put them on the customer's feet. Then he would make up the bill for me.

9. The day I got my first pay, my grandmother was waiting for me. She told me to hand it over to her. But I refused. Instead, I took my suitcase and fled, using the money to rent a room.

Homelessness

10. One day the man who helped me at work didn't come in. I couldn't find the shoes or work the till. I was fired. Soon I couldn't pay the rent and I lost my room. I ended up sleeping in a park. I slept in a plastic bag to try to keep warm and dry. It was terrifying. I was surrounded by strange noises and, when I cried at night, I would try to keep quiet because I was scared that someone might hear me.

11. When I was sleeping in the park, I never knew what time it was. In the morning, I would wait until I heard cars on the road and then I knew it was safe to come out. I would try to get into hotels to use the washrooms. If I couldn't get in I would go to the toilet in a plastic bag. I went to soup kitchens but I remember that I was often hungry and thirsty.

12. I became a transient, moving from one place to another, picking up odd jobs here and there.

13. I moved from shelter to shelter, from one rundown rooming house to another. I remember one rooming house in particular. It was terrible. I had no privacy. At night there were violent fights and I was terrified. Some of the tenants used drugs and left used needles on the floor.

14. When I was eighteen, I began hearing voices. I actually called the police, thinking there was someone hiding in the place where I was staying. The police took me to the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, now part of the Centre for Addictions and Mental Health (CAMH). I was there for six months. When I was discharged, the hospital didn't ask where I was going to live or what I was going to do. They didn't ask me if I had any means of support. I didn't even know that social assistance existed. I didn't have enough money to pay for the medications I was prescribed.

15. During this time, for a year and a half, I was in a relationship with a man who was physically abusive. We shared a room in a rooming house. He beat me black and blue but I was afraid to leave because I didn't have any other place to go. It was a bad home but it was a home, nonetheless.

16. I didn't know it was illegal for a man to hit me until I saw a show about domestic violence on television. After I found out, if he started hitting me, I would call the police. But he would always say that I was mentally ill and didn't know what I was talking about. The police always took his side. I started drinking to try to cope with the violence.

17. I seemed to end up in the Clarke every six months. It was a revolving door. Often I had no place to go when I was discharged. If I had some money I would wander the streets looking for a room in a rooming house. Otherwise I would head to a shelter.

Finding Stable Housing

18. In 1991, I got a great doctor who told me about Progress Place, an outreach centre for people with mental illness. At Progress Place I took classes to learn to read and write. My lack of literacy and numeric skills had been a barrier for me throughout my life, preventing me from finding or keeping a job and from knowing my legal rights. Progress Place also taught me daily living skills. Progress Place made me feel wanted, accepted and needed.

19. Progress Place put me on a waiting list for supportive housing. At first, I told them to take me off the list. I didn't believe I would ever get my own place. It seemed like an impossible dream and I was afraid to get my hopes up, only to have them dashed. They didn't take me off the list, though and, after five years I was given a spot in supportive housing provided through Mainstay Housing.

20. When I got my apartment at Mainstay Housing, it felt like I was awake for the first time in my life. I was 47 years old. I had a clean home, my own space, and a feeling of safety after thirty years of living in shelters, on the street, or in rooming houses. At first I thought it was a mistake; that I wasn't good enough; that it was too good to be true. I didn't unpack for the first year I lived there because I was so afraid that I wouldn't be able to stay.

21. The rent at Mainstay is geared to income. I went from paying \$550/month (more than 50% of my income) to live in a filthy, dangerous rooming house where I had no

privacy and had to share a bathroom and kitchen with other tenants, to paying thirty percent of my income towards rent for a safe, clean, tranquil home.

22. Suddenly, I was able to take a bath, brush my hair and teeth and sleep in clean sheets. It was like a dream. I learned how to use the garbage chute and turn on and off the heat. Having my own place allowed me to get my health under control. I went from being on ten to twelve medications to taking no drugs at all.

23. Since getting my own place my life has turned around. I've worked part-time at CAMH as a peer support worker and I am involved in many volunteer activities. I am a past president of the Board of Directors at Mainstay Housing. I am involved in educating people about mental health issues through Voices from the Street and advocating for housing for people with mental health issues through the Dream Team. For the past two years, I have run a group that finds people to take care of pets when someone is admitted to hospital - so far we have housed over two thousand cats and five dogs. I have also started doing stand-up comedy and I play the drums. I have been recognized for the work I do, receiving a CAMH "Courage to Come Back Award", a 2007 Tenant Achievement Award from the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association, and a 2009 Ted Tremain Award of Excellence from CAMH recognizing staff achievement.

24. When you don't have a home you lose all of your dignity and self-esteem. You feel like an outcast from society. I thought it was my fault that I was homeless. I was in so much emotional and spiritual pain that I just wanted to die.

25. Adequate, affordable housing is the first step to recovery from addictions, from mental illness, from a lack of self worth. After you have housing you can start to address the issues in your life and move in communities of your choosing. Without housing I wouldn't have found my life. For a long time I didn't think I would make it past forty. Now I feel like I'm sixty going on twenty. I hope I live until I'm eighty.

26. I've made this affidavit to the best of my ability and in support of the right to housing case, and for no other or improper purpose.

SWORN BEFORE ME at
the City of Toronto this 17th
of May, 2010.

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LINDA CHAMBERLAIN

A Commissioner, etc.

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Proceeding commenced at Toronto

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