



Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario
Centre ontarien de défense des droits des locataires

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Homeless legal challenge reveals damning evidence of rights violation on National Housing Day

On Tuesday, November 22, formerly and currently homeless Ontarians marked National Housing Day by serving the Attorney General of Canada with nearly ten thousand pages of evidence establishing that the governments of Canada and Ontario have violated their *Charter* rights.

"National Housing Day commemorates the 1998 declaration by the Big City Mayor's Caucus that homelessness in Canada had reached crisis proportions," said Tracy Heffernan, Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario lawyer, representing the applicants. "After thirteen years of rising homelessness and dozens of reports by experts in Canada and the United Nations, it is shameful that homeless people need to go to court to have the government protect their human rights."

The evidence includes testimony from fourteen national experts in housing, homelessness, health, equity research and policy, as well as the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing. Cathy Crowe, a Registered Nurse and Honorary Doctor of Science in Nursing with over twenty years experience working with homeless people, is among the experts.

"The homeless experience greater exposure to upper respiratory disease; more trauma, including violence such as rape; more chronic illness, greater exposure to illness in congregate settings; more exposure to infectious agents," Crowe testifies in her affidavit. "In 1996, three homeless men froze to death on the streets in Toronto. A Coroner's jury found that the men died from "Homelessness".

The applicants seek a Court declaration that Canada and Ontario have violated their rights under section 7 and section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* by creating and maintaining conditions that lead to and sustain homelessness and inadequate housing. They also argue that the governments have an obligation to implement effective housing strategies that will reduce homelessness and sub-standard living conditions.

There are an estimated 150,000 to 300,000 homeless people in Canada and almost 4.2 million men, women and children live in homes that fail to meet federal standards for acceptable housing. Housing activists across the country are holding events today to bring attention to the lack of a national housing strategy. Events are taking place in Toronto, Vancouver, Regina, Winnipeg, St. Johns, and Ottawa. See: <http://redtents.org/>

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