

June 12, 2019

Today, the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO) was informed that our funding from Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) is reduced by 25% from last year's budget, over the next two years. A cut this deep will have an immediate impact on ACTO's services and cannot be viewed as anything but a direct attack on tenants by the provincial government. Since opening our doors in 2001, ACTO has been at the forefront of tenant rights advocacy. Our work has helped tenants challenge illegal evictions, protect them from unaffordable rent increases, assist low-income renters pay their electricity bills, and safeguard affordable rental housing supply from predatory rental schemes like Airbnb. Federally, ACTO was instrumental in the creation of the National Housing Strategy, including the recognition that housing is a human right.

We are disturbed that our successes have made us a target for short-sighted and ill-informed cuts. The Auditor General did not find problems with the clinic system, yet legal clinics are bearing a disproportionate burden of the budget cuts to Legal Aid Ontario. The Attorney General continues to make false statements about legal clinics despite never visiting or consulting with legal clinics. By holding decision-makers accountable to renters and challenging decisions that undermine tenant rights, ACTO and housing advocates across the clinic system, have become victims of the government's 'red-tape' stance on dissent. This is particularly concerning in advance of the government's fall release of landlord-friendly amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act. Tenants, now more than ever, need a robust clinic system to resist the degradation of their rights in the midst of a housing crisis.

ACTO remains committed to representing the voice of Ontario renters in spite of the damage caused to our legal clinic. Nearly half of renters in Ontario cannot afford their rent and too many low-income tenants struggle to keep a roof over their head. Amidst the growing income inequality across our province, we will continue to challenge the status-quo and push for safe, secure and affordable housing for all Ontarians.