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BC Tenants' Rights Advocates Unite to Call for Ban on Evictions

Vancouver, B.C. - Yesterday, Canadians were given a clear and direct order from Prime Minister Trudeau: "go home and stay home." But how can renters stay home when threatened with losing their homes through evictions?

Tenants' rights advocates in BC are calling on the provincial government to ensure renters can stay in their homes by issuing a complete moratorium on all evictions and enforcement of evictions. The Community Legal Assistance Society (CLAS) along with the Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre (TRAC), First United Church Community Ministry Society (First United) and Disability Alliance BC (DABC) are urging the government to take these extreme measures to ensure the safety not just of renters, but of the community as a whole.

"This is not just a tenants' issue. Evicted tenants trying to secure new housing are forced to have significant contact with others when viewing rental units, hiring movers, taking public transit and by opening up their current rental units to prospective tenants," said Didi Dufresne, legal advocate at First United. Vulnerable renters facing the threat of homelessness would add additional pressure to shelters and other community services.

Ontario and Quebec have led the charge in Canada by halting evictions over a week ago - a week which saw the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in BC more than quadruple in number. Bans on evictions in other jurisdictions and a recommendation to social housing providers for a moratorium on evictions for non-payment of rent from BC Housing have led to confusion among BC's renters about their rights during this time. "We have had calls from tenants wondering if they can be evicted right now," said Zuzana Modrovic, a lawyer with TRAC. "They see what is happening in other places and the messaging to self-isolate and some assume that they can't be evicted. Unfortunately, for most tenants, that is not the case. Aside from the few organizations like BC Housing that have recommended a halt on evictions for non-payment of rent, there is nothing in place right now to prevent the majority of tenants from being evicted."

Allowing any evictions to continue during this time conflicts with the measures taken by various levels of government to enforce social distancing. Parks and recreation facilities across Metro Vancouver have been closed. Government health officers are repeatedly asking people to maintain social distances. Businesses that violate the City of Vancouver's State of Emergency Bylaw by failing to comply with social-distancing orders could be fined as much as \$50,000, and individuals could be fined up to \$1,000. Yet evictions, which necessitate close social interaction, are continuing.

Many renters rely on in-person service delivery from both legal advocates and the Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB) which provides dispute resolution services for landlords and tenants. As health officials and government leaders continue to urge individuals to socially-distance, legal advocacy organizations are increasingly challenged to provide client services, and may eventually be left with no other choice but to shut their doors, possibly leaving many renters to

navigate complex legal matters on their own without any legal supports or services. The RTB has already ceased in-person services and is delivering services either by phone or online only. While some renters may still be able to navigate the transition to a world of online-only services, this transition will adversely impact vulnerable renters who are not able to access these services.

“A complete ban on evictions and enforcement of evictions is the only way to effectively protect our communities from COVID-19,” said Danielle Sabelli, CLAS lawyer. “We are hopeful the BC Government will be announcing this ban tomorrow.”



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Media contact:

Brenda Jones, APR
brenda_jones@shaw.ca
Cel. 604-312-1070