



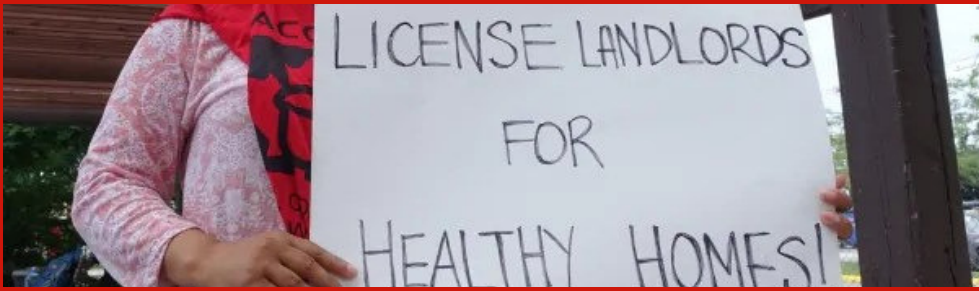
# HOUSING HORROR STORIES

*The Tenants' Case for Landlord Licensing in Ottawa*

WHAT IS  
LANDLORD  
LICENSING

TENANT  
TESTIMONIALS OF  
SLUMLORDS

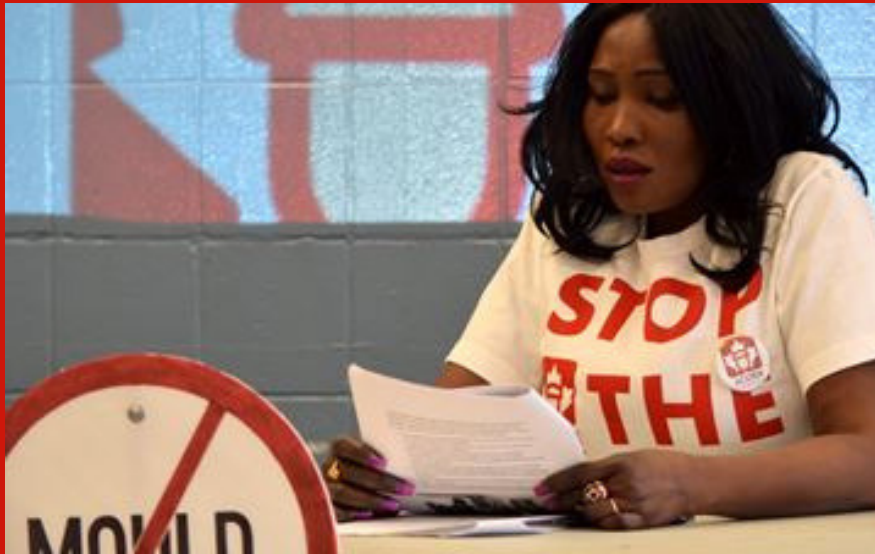
HOW THE CITY  
CAN PROTECT  
TENANTS



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# INTRODUCTION

Ottawa ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) is an independent organization of low- and moderate- income families with 28,000+ members across the city. ACORN Canada has over 130,000 members in 24 neighbourhood chapters across the country. ACORN believes that social and economic justice can best be achieved with a wide membership base who are invested in their organization and focused on building community power for change.

This collection of tenant testimonials shows that the City of Ottawa needs to do more to improve housing conditions.

Tenants are living in substandard conditions without the necessary support to allow them to stand up to landlords and have their needs met. The Property Standards By-law has more procedural steps and delays than most by-laws in addition to any notice of violation being unenforceable.

The City's review on regulating rental accommodations is a good first step in addressing tenants' very real concerns regarding the state of their housing. It is Ottawa ACORN members' hope that this sample of housing horror stories will demonstrate to our city that substandard housing conditions is a systematic issue that warrants urgent attention. We need landlord licensing NOW!



# WHAT IS LANDLORD LICENSING?

## THE CURRENT SYSTEM

Currently, inspections of buildings are complaint based. Complaint based inspections don't work for many reasons: tenants don't know to call 311, tenants don't know their rights, tenants are afraid of landlords and the threat of eviction, complaints are dropped once a new tenant moves in, there are language barriers, or tenants eventually become unwilling to sacrifice their time and energy complaining when they fail to get results.

## PROACTIVE ENFORCEMENT

Landlord licensing could make it so that there are annual inspections of all buildings in the City of Ottawa, and would impose remedial actions and financial penalties on landlords that fail to comply with set requirements. This would ensure that tenants have a system that is proactive and landlords are keeping up with cleaning, maintenance and pest control. Landlords would be forced to comply with a list of requirements, including:

- Providing the City of Ottawa with contact information for the property;
- Providing the City with property descriptions including the year property was built,
- Providing details regarding year(s) property was renovated, type of construction, total number of floors, total number of units, and an estimate of occupied units;
- Providing the City with a copy of building insurance and other applicable insurance;
- Developing and maintaining a capital repair plan for good long-term upkeep of buildings;
- Developing an indoor/outdoor maintenance plan including a pest management plan, ice/snow removal, heating systems and elevators, and objectives for ensuring maintenance plan is followed;
- Informing tenants in writing if garbage or waste is provided by the City or a private company;
- Providing information on common or shared systems including, but not limited to, heating/cooling, elevators, alarms, parking, laundry areas, amenities, windows, security, and sprinklers;
- Complying with safety standards for heating/gas/fuel systems and appliances, ensure good working conditions of systems and appliances;
- Ensuring up-to-date fire and electrical safety plans and maintenance;
- Ensuring regular elevator maintenance and repairs;
- Posting service disruptions, notices, or work orders on a central board (e.g. lobby or building common area);
- Posting schedule in public area for cleaning of indoors and outdoors common spaces;
- Ensuring tenants have information on how to submit work orders to the landlord;
- Creating a mandatory program to receive and follow up with tenant requests; and
- Conducting an annual walkabout of the property and inspection of all common areas

# WHAT DO ACORN MEMBERS WANT?

Ottawa ACORN members want the landlord licensing program to be mandatory for all landlords in the City of Ottawa owning property with three units or more. All information regarding the licensing program must be shared with tenants in writing, and easily accessible in print and online. The program should include:

- The development of a tenant stakeholder group, including ACORN members, to increase engagement and education;
- An application process for property owners that includes clear stipulations regarding the obligations of landlords;
- Clear guidelines that are actively promoted by the City on landlords' responsibilities to tenants and how tenants can access their rights;
- Landlords should receive a copy of minimum property standards that property owners must adhere to;
- Early identification of potential health and safety risks through inspections;
- Increased compliance with property standards through annual inspections by the City and re-inspection programs to be determined with consultation from City By-law;
- Program reporting and work orders for non-compliance posted on City of Ottawa website; and
- Financial penalties for property owners that are non-compliant with work orders and/or property standards that are systematic rather than discretionary.



## METHODOLOGY

This collection of tenant testimonials is a result of tenant interviews conducted by Ottawa ACORN's paralegal placement student, Christina Gharabeygi, from July 15th-August 9th.

The report covers 24 low income tenants living primarily in private rentals but also in Ottawa Community Housing. The stories are of ACORN members who were contacted and interviewed either in person or on the phone.

Consent was sought from all members whose stories have been shared in the report.



## Tanya N.

A very busy single mother, Tanya has recently moved due to unacceptable behaviour from her previous landlord. She lived at her former place of residence for five years, and in that time, she suffered a great deal in the hope of providing her child with a stable home.

For weeks after she moved in, she had no flooring and kitchen. She cooked with a toaster oven and hotplate. She did not receive a rent rebate for her troubles. Mold destroyed many of her possessions and there were no doors on the cupboards in the kitchen, a constant danger to her then toddler. She had to throw out many of her child's favourite stuffed animals due to the mold, a very big deal to a little one. In her former home, her landlord would only do repairs after 10:00 pm, when it was convenient for him, in contravention of the Residential Tenancies Act.

After she dared to complain about the conditions she was dealing with, her landlord began a campaign of intimidation and harassment aimed at forcing her to vacate the property. Her cat was suspiciously injured during this time, vet bills costing her hundreds.

Life was absolutely miserable, so Tanya did what anyone would do: she moved. She moved, and saved her sanity, but this former landlord will never be held accountable for the lack of good faith he showed in his interactions with her.

**“There’s no motivation for landlords in this area to maintain their buildings.”**

She now has a better landlord, but lacks access to a nearby grocery store, making her treks on the bus very difficult. Financially, she’s in a hole. She works several jobs as a single mother, and wears many hats. She is everything to her child: mother, provider, playmate, and best friend. While she works herself to the bone to provide for her little one, and her parents help where they can, she is still drowning. Tanya, and other mothers like her, are raising the next generation of Canadians. Yet, no matter what she is giving to this country through the formation and care of her child, she is rewarded with bare bones survival. Is this fair? Is this just? She believes that measurable and enforceable maintenance standards are required.

**WHY SHOULD LANDLORDS BE LICENSED?**

**"Because landlords provide an essential, basic service, and should be held accountable."**



## Shannon L.

A former columnist for the Ottawa Citizen, Shannon should be enjoying her retirement. Instead, she's renting a single room in Almonte after being renovicted from her home of 37 years in Centretown. By-law came in after her ceiling caved in. What was supposed to be a short renovation saw all her belongings being put into storage by her landlord. Now, eight months later, she is one week away from losing all her worldly goods due to a \$1000 storage fee which her former landlord will not pay, and which she cannot afford. Stored away (and about to be thrown into the trash) include family photos, clothes, dishes, and other important goods.

Speaking from her room in Almonte, dressed in rags, and obviously distressed Shannon says,

"I'm gutted. I've lost everything. I'm the walking dead."

In the 30+ years she lived, she says, very few repairs were done. Every year there are inspections done, but sometimes repairs are simply just not done. Over time, the paint started to peel, the phone jack disintegrated etc. The By-law order which threw her life into total disarray said 'patch, paint and put down flooring'. Instead her landlord seized this as an opportunity to unofficially evict her. Her landlord allowed the building where she lived to become decrepit after failing to keep up with repairs for years. A few years ago, there was a rat infestation in her building.

Shannon has reached out to the City, the Landlord Tenant Board, and various other politicians to get help, both during her tenure at her residence, and afterwards. All the solutions presented to her require money, which she does not have. Proper inspections and enforcement of inspection orders over the years could have prevented both the rat infestation and the ceiling caving in. Something must be done for Shannon and others like her who are losing everything due to evictions resulting from renovations.

**WHY SHOULD  
LANDLORDS BE  
LICENSED?**

"Landlords need to provide proper housing. It's all in the RTA, but no one is enforcing it."



## Vinny T.

V.T. has been living in his rental unit for the last 14 years. During this time, he has struggled with many challenging issues. His health has inexorably declined; his main supports are his brother and sister-in-law. V.T. suffers from bipolar disorder which greatly limits his ability to care for himself. His housing situation has only increased his stress levels and created more problems for him. Since 2014, he has dealt with bed bugs. While his unit has been sprayed several times, the bed bug problem persists.

At one point, V.T. began to suffer from anemia, muscle cramps, and shortness of breath. Upon testing, it was discovered that he was rendered anemic due to blood loss suffered

from the bed bug infestation. He lost so much blood that he had inadequate oxygen levels.

With carefully timed blood and iron transfusions, his health began to improve. It seemed that the bed bugs were eradicated, and his transfusions were gone for some time. Unfortunately, the bed bugs returned and now his health is again suffering.

His mental health has also suffered due to the social isolation he experiences not being able to invite friends over to his house. He is unable to access government resources to get help due to the bed bugs. His entire life is on hold while this problem persists. He lives on Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), but the amount he receives is barely enough to cover his living expenses and rent.

\*\*vinny T. is a pseudonym since the member did not feel comfortable using their real name for fear of retaliation by the landlord.

**WHY SHOULD  
LANDLORDS BE  
LICENSED?**

"Why are restaurants licensed, but landlords, who have such a major impact on people's lives, not?"





## Odette W.

Odette is a loving mother of three; she's lived in Ottawa Community housing (OCH) for the last three years. During this time, her basement has had a persistent flooding problem. Whenever it rains, even a little bit, her basement floods. She spends hours every week just mopping up water. This takes time away from her family responsibilities.

She feels that her home is otherwise good, and she is happy to have a place to live.

She does, however, worry about mold and other possible health consequences for the children as a result of the constant floods in her basement. As a result, the basement is basically off-limits. OCH has sent two contractors to fix the leak, but they can not seem to find the source and no improvement has been made with this issue for the past three years.

Luckily, Odette has not yet had to fight pests in her home, and she recognizes this for the blessing that it is. She believes that landlord licensing will help tenants to feel more secure, and provide landlords with a better understanding of their responsibilities.

**WHY SHOULD  
LANDLORDS BE  
LICENSED?**

"Because it will help people in the long-run, and help maintain high standards."



## Nikki D.

Nikki has been living in the west end of Ottawa with her husband for the past five years. She wears many hats as a singer, gardener, and writer; she is truly passionate as a food justice activist. Having previously worked as a construction worker and janitor, a disability forced her out of the workforce full-time. Now living on ODSP, she struggles with housing insecurity.

She lived in some truly horrible accommodations when she was younger; apartments where roaches and bed bugs were endemic, where repairs languished for far too long.

The building she currently lives in is the best one to date but there are still issues. Nikki gets straight to the point when she says,

"Why is it that [landlords] aren't already licensed? There is no guarantee of quality of service. How is it that I get better service at the Dollar Store?"

She further points out, "It should be in the best interests of landlords to keep everything tip top."

She has dealt with property managers who did as little as possible to minimize costs and save time. Even in the better buildings, there are still problems, as Nikki says, "Let's make landlord licensing a reality so that there is a reasonable provision of quality and service across the board in Ottawa area rentals".

## WHY SHOULD LANDLORDS BE LICENSED?

"Landlord licensing is really just the bare minimum that is necessary to protect tenants' rights."



## Mary T.

Mary has lived in downtown Ottawa for the last seventeen years. She helps care for her grandchildren during the day. The four of them are crammed into a two bedroom apartment with many issues. Mary laments the disrepair in her home, saying that maintenance standards in the building have been steadily declining for the last ten years.

When she calls for repairs, she usually has to wait 10 days before she hears back. She recently had repairs done on her windows because they didn't work properly. Her closet doors are broken, but because there is a 2 year waiting list, she was told that she can't have new ones. Getting anything out of the closet is an exercise in futility. Because the doors aren't on the rails, she has to lift the door up, then somehow manage to get the needed items. Her granddaughter recently injured her foot on the same closet door and had to go to the hospital.

While she doesn't complain about anything, she does point out that the parquet flooring is always popping up, and the baby just picks them up and chews on them haphazardly. These things are a danger to the grandchildren, and she feels embarrassed by her home.

She's been on the waitlist for a four bedroom since 2011. She comments,

"When you're poor, apparently all you have is time. But I'd rather be doing other things than chasing my landlord down for repairs. More maintenance and higher property standards are also useful".

## WHY SHOULD LANDLORDS BE LICENSED?

"Because there would be more control and protection for good tenants."



## Madeleine L.M.

Madeleine is a senior citizen in her seventies, a caretaker to her two adult autistic children and 104-year-old mother. She pays \$1,660 for a three-bedroom rental in Orleans. Former homeowners, they've struggled with rentals for the last six years. Repairs, flooding in the basement, wiring problems, as well as mold have been chronic issues.

Her whole family suffers from health problems which are complicated by the mold. Their last place of residence caused many problems, but fear of not obtaining a reference from their past landlord kept them from going to the Landlord Tenant Tribunal, even though they qualified for a rent reduction.

The constant fear of being turned down by prospective landlords is a specter haunting most tenants. While landlords are obviously in the business to turn a profit, it seems that many landlords are failing in their responsibilities to tenants.

Her experiences with landlords so far reveal a striking pattern of neglect, and lack of diligence. Some landlords view their rental properties as sources of passive income, and want to put very little effort into maintenance, or repairs.

While her current landlord is much more considerate than her previous landlord, she still struggles to get things fixed in a timely manner. She once waited two weeks to have a simple repair done. They're frustrated, but the options are limited.

# WHY SHOULD LANDLORDS BE LICENSED?

"It will force landlords to respond and not neglect our issues".



## Kim M.

Kim is living in a difficult housing situation in Hintonburg. She's had to deal with rodents, mold, flooding, and a landlord who has completely shirked his responsibilities. Her housing situation is contributing to her ill-health. Already a heart patient, she now suffers from seizures, COPD, and a collapsed lung due to the stress she has been experiencing. Of her recent housing struggles, she says:

“My abusive landlord had the nerve in one text message to say to me , ‘What do you expect, you live in the basement.’ He’s come in [to my apartment], without my consent or permission... he refuses to do any maintenance, repairs...

. ..he won't give me rent receipts. These landlords are getting away with things that [fit] under the criminal code. My landlord has been in my apartment illegally!"

This is not the first time Kim has found herself in a subpar housing situation. A former nurse, her disabilities have left her living on social assistance and derailed her career.

Every day is a struggle. With recent provincial cuts to legal aid, and ODSP/Ontario Works, it is unlikely that her situation will soon improve. Drastic changes are needed to protect the most vulnerable members of our society. Landlord licensing will ensure that Kim, and many others like her, will at least have a decent place to live.

**WHY SHOULD  
LANDLORDS BE  
LICENSED?**

"Some landlords are breaking laws, violating human rights, privacy rights, and tenant rights."



## Kathy T.

Kathy, a 69 year old widow, should be enjoying her golden years. She is a lung cancer survivor, and is also raising her granddaughter, who has Asperger's Syndrome and diabetes. Life is tough for them, but also gratifying, as they find ways to survive and give back to their community. Living on her pension, she survives by going to the food bank.

Unfortunately, Kathy's housing situation has done nothing but add stress to her life. A cockroach infestation that has ruined many of her belongings, so she will be moving with her granddaughter this month. Her rent will go up, taking money out of her measly grocery budget. There are stairs in her new home, a small thing, but when you only have one lung, a big thing. Her current home has multiple stories, and almost no functional elevators. A former cook, Kathy was a proud homeowner until her cancer and two

back to back automobile accidents bankrupted her. She lost her home, and began the never ending cycle of renting.

The government has let her down in many ways. She has to pay out of pocket for many of her granddaughter's diabetes supplies including: lancets, needles and keto strips. These materials are not covered by ODSP but indispensable to someone suffering from diabetes. She believes that rent control is needed, as many are having to move out of Ottawa due to the astronomic climb in rental rates these last few years. Very few can afford to pay \$1800 for a two bedroom. Social assistance rates must be increased she adds, as no one can live on the current Ontario Works (\$721/per month total) or ODSP (\$1,152/month) allocations.

When a one bedroom is \$1200, and a single person on Ontario Works receives a maximum of \$721, where exactly is this person going to live? The problem is going to become worse if there is no control over rent increases in this Province.

**WHY SHOULD  
LANDLORDS BE  
LICENSED?**

"To stop landlords from passing on the costs of running their businesses to tenants."



## Kat F.

Kat was born with cerebral palsy but this hasn't stopped her from being a force for good in her community. She is an anti-poverty activist, an ACORN member, and a leader in her community. With ACORN she's helped to get the Equipass (to make public transit affordable for low income people), and an additional \$15 million for housing passed in the City of Ottawa.

She's been living in her building for the past 33 years. While she can usually get her repairs done, such as window and balcony replacements, there are other issues in the building. She feels that she must be very vigilante in her building, always making sure everything is running OK. She is very sensitive to the ups and downs of her neighbours, and this stress all piles on top of her already loaded plate. Her sleep is frequently disrupted due to problems in the building.

She has also dealt with a bedbug issue due to an infestation in another unit.

She's had to ask for help several times from the City of Ottawa, property managers, etc. During the last bedbug infestation, she had to throw many of her belongings. This was a very distressing time for her. She considered going to the Landlord Tenant Board but was too busy coping with the disaster in her home to do so. "It did my head in!" she says. She was not compensated for the damages, and feels that she was not helped during this process. She says simply, "I was traumatized."

Once one issue is resolved, another one always creeps up.

**"I have to pick and choose my battles; I can't do everything."**

At a certain point, she had to take a break from her apartment and went to stay with friends. She also laments the lack of support for people who are freshly off the street, dealing with addictions or mental health issues. While she is grateful to have a place to live, she believes more can be done to help the most vulnerable members of our community.

# WHY SHOULD LANDLORDS BE LICENSED?

"It's like running any other business; we're only making it hard for bad landlords."



## Karen V.

Karen is living in horrible conditions, and is in survival mode. She states, "I'm in anguish, just incredible amounts of psychological, mental, and physical suffering." After a ten year long wait, she was excited to be offered an apartment with OCH, to have a chance at a new beginning. What she discovered in her new rental unit was straight out of a horror movie. It was infested with bugs.

When asked if she has problems with repairs or pests in her unit, she balks. The problems she is living through are not insignificant little problems, like a broken cupboard or the need for a new paint job. The property management company has sprayed but the problem persists. The constant biting, itching, scratching, and crawling of the bugs on her skin caused her to become suicidal.

Several hospitalizations followed, which gave her a chance to recover a bit before being thrown right back into her own personal hell. Her mental health has deteriorated, and she now suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of her living conditions. Sometimes, she can't take it anymore and stays with family or friends. She is socially isolated when she returns home. She dares politicians to "...come and live in my place for a month."

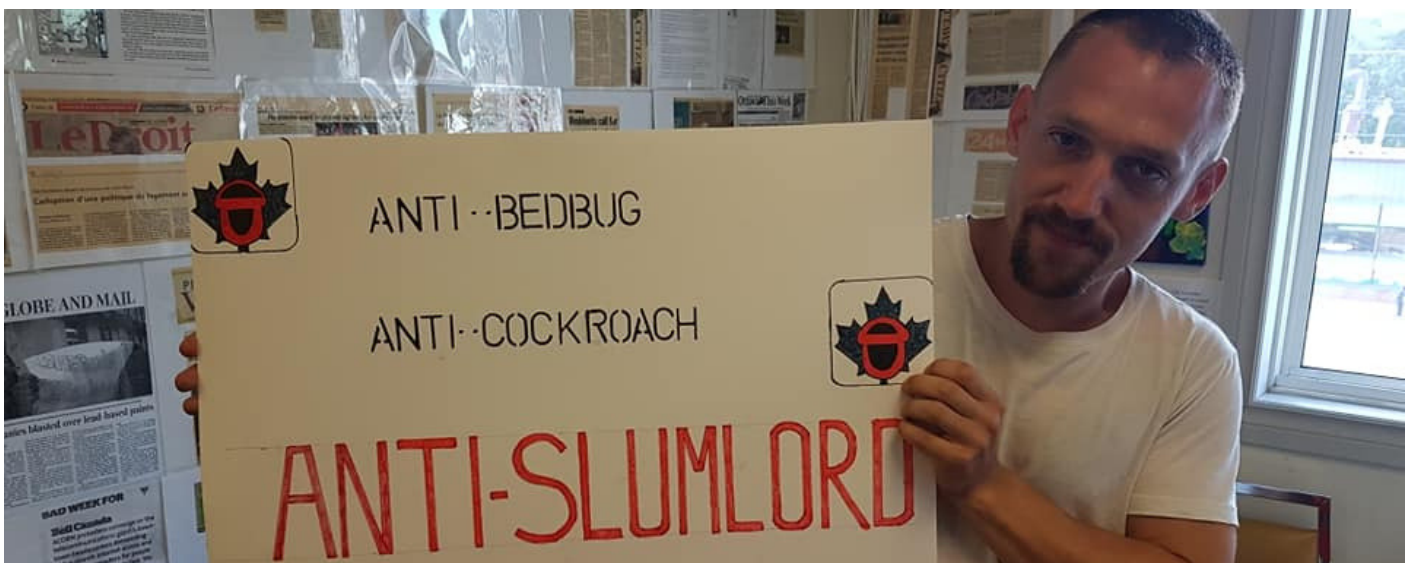
She has suffered the loss of goods that have been damaged due to bug activity; of greater importance are the years she has lost as a result of this situation. When asked what the City of Ottawa can do to improve conditions for residents, she says, her voice heavy with grief,

**"Please, just do your jobs!"**

**WHY SHOULD  
LANDLORDS BE  
LICENSED?**

"Landlord licensing is definitely a good idea, as there is a great need for it."





## Jesse C.

Jesse is a polite, young family man. Previously a small business owner, he is currently living with a disability which limits his ability to work. Nevertheless, he is committed to providing his family with the best. Their current housing situation has done nothing but create stress and conflict in their lives. They've lived in Vanier for a year and in that time have experienced some truly mind-boggling things.

The home is a war-zone: exposed wiring, mold in the cupboards, a fuse box that exploded in a child's room, leaving smoke and a scorched wall behind... the list goes on. There are no checks and balances when it comes to landlord powers in this City, and Jesse's story is sadly proof. He explains about their living situation.

“ [Living here] has ruined our lives to the point of separation.”

One of their small children suffers from severe dust and mold allergies, and eczema. During recent repairs, no efforts were undertaken to prevent dust and mold being released into the air, which has caused a painful, inflammatory reaction in the child. Her skin is now covered in bulbous, painful sores which will take weeks to heal.

The landlord knew ahead of purchasing the building, as stated in a recent Globe and Mail article discussing the sale, that repairs were needed.

Now, it seems that they are trying to do minimal repairs and rent out the units for approximately \$700 more per month. While it is true that all businesses are there to make profit, profit must be balanced with what is in the best interests of the public. Landlord licensing will at least be a beginning for providing some system of keeping rogue landlords in check.

**WHY SHOULD  
LANDLORDS BE  
LICENSED?**

"All the building blocks are there, but better enforcement is needed."



## Jenny K.

Jenny has been through hell in the past few years that she's lived in OCH. Due to a set of unpredictable circumstances, she found herself homeless in 2012 and living in her car. After a long wait, she was able to finally get into OCH housing. Like anyone else, she was very excited about her new home.

Things started to go wrong from the beginning. There was no parking spot, so she spent an additional three months homeless until one was found for her. Soon there were repairs needed, such as a simple paint job. Somehow, her belongings were damaged during this process, her curtains ripped out, and paint getting on her new dresser. There was also the problem of mold and asbestos.

She had her baby in 2014, and things got even worse. Due to a combination of risk factors at home,

her newborn baby was hospitalized and almost died.

She spent 7 horrible days in the hospital while doctors frantically did tests, and tried to figure out what was wrong with her baby. OCH decided the house was too dangerous for the fragile child and moved them to a new house. This one had a caved in ceiling and flooding in the basement. Mold was once again a problem. He improved, but as time went by, she noticed her son, a sweet, precocious child, was having trouble remembering things he had learnt, throwing up regularly, and black mucus was being discharged from his nose.

She made a decision to leave the home, and go to a shelter. Things did not improve and she was shortly kicked out of the shelter as she already had housing, however unsafe it was. After two years of couch-surfing with her baby, she is back in her old, unsafe home. She is frustrated, and extremely worried for her child.

**WHY SHOULD  
LANDLORDS BE  
LICENSED?**

"the way things are right now, it's breaking people, affecting children ... and assuring that nobody ever moves out of housing."



## Charlie S.

Charlie lives in a three-bedroom apartment in the west end with her son. Repairs have been needed since they moved in four years ago. There have been bed bugs, and mice in her home. Emergency renovations in the wintertime left her living in a hotel for three months, which she paid for out of pocket while still paying her rent.

A former IT Specialist, disability has forced Charlie to quit her lucrative career. Now suffering from three different kinds of arthritis, and

recovering from a mini-stroke, she is facing the terrifying prospect of becoming homeless in a few months as her savings run out. Her credit cards are maxed out, and stress is compounding her ill-health.

She is facing bankruptcy as a result of her housing problems and a car accident last year. She feels suicidal, and trapped. She is a resilient woman who has repeatedly tried to reach out to the City and her Councillor with no success. What is Charlie to do now? Why can't she enjoy her retirement in peace without worrying about homelessness after a lifetime of hard work?

\*\*Charlie is a pseudonym since the member did not feel comfortable using his real name for fear of retaliation by the landlord.

# WHY SHOULD LANDLORDS BE LICENSED?

"Landlords need to get their act together. Do you think they would live like this?"



## Grace I.

Grace is an immigrant from Africa. She has lived in Canada for ten years, raising her family on her own. She is a proud college graduate with a diploma in Early Childhood Education. She has worked hard, and yet, rental prices being more than minimum wage, she is still struggling with finding safe, affordable housing. She has moved three times in the last few years, after being one of the hundreds of tenants mass evicted from Herongate. Her current home is expensive and also in dire need of repairs. She says,

“The window is broken. It’s an old house. It’s leaking downstairs. The dryer is broken. If I do the wash, I have to set my clothes outside.”

She has lived through a bed bug infestation, repairs that took months or were simply never addressed, and garbage allowed to accumulate and rot in the summer sun. She feels unsafe where she lives now. She has resorted to sending her children an hour away to school, simply stating, “I want the best for my children.” When her kids walk home from work late at night, she always goes to pick them up on foot, no matter how weary and fatigued she is feeling.

There have been many issues in terms of inadequate housing. Her children miss their friends from the old neighborhood. Moving from one inadequate housing situation to another has left Grace feeling exhausted, her body rebelling at the heavy burden she carries on her shoulders. She believes landlords are getting away with too much.

**WHY SHOULD  
LANDLORDS BE  
LICENSED?**

“They’re getting away with too much. They can’t be misbehaving, cheating the government, leaving repairs undone.”



## Ginette O.R.

Ginette, a contractor, has lived in a small, unassuming building in Little Italy for the last four years. She loves her posh neighbourhood but unfortunately, none of the charm of the neighbourhood carries into her apartment building. Her home has been inadequate for many years, but the landlord has done nothing to remedy the various issues.

She is justly frustrated. Her oven has been broken for four years. She laments that she can't bake cookies or a turkey. Special holidays are ruined due to the broken oven. The backdoor is also in desperate need of replacement. Her toilet leaked water for months before the landlord took the initiative to fix it, and she "shares" her home with bed bugs.

A colony of mice have made their nest in her walls. These kinds of pests are not without health ramifications. Worst of all, her mailbox is broken, and she can't receive deliveries at her address as the buzzer is broken.

Frankly, there doesn't seem to be anything that isn't broken in this apartment building, a great shame to the owners of this property. She doesn't feel safe where she is, but can't afford to move. She says,

**"Everything that's happening here is pretty dangerous."**

She believes that something has to be done about the epidemic levels of bed bugs in this City, and that landlords need to be reminded of their responsibilities.

**WHY SHOULD  
LANDLORDS BE  
LICENSED?**

**"...to protect tenants so that they have a more acceptable standard of living."**



## Donna V.

Donna has been in OCH since 2014. She waited many years for the opportunity to live in subsidized housing, but has suffered tremendously as a result of her living situation. She has dealt with electrical problems, cockroaches, bedbugs, flooding, mould, and worst of all, a serious fire caused by the electrical issues. The fire caused massive damage to her previous residence, also in OCH. She is now facing the possibility of developing throat cancer as a result of all the chemicals she inhaled that night while she was saving the lives of fellow residents.

Already a three time cancer survivor, Donna has her hands full with her other health problems. She has osteoporosis, fibromyalgia, an autoimmune disorder, and now suffers from an anxiety disorder related to the fire.

Following the fire, she was transferred to a different home where she is dealing with a bedbug infestation. A fastidiously clean person, this is difficult for her to live with. In her new home, she has dealt with flooding, which turned into mold in her apartment. The flooding caused pneumonia as well. Donna was forced, in spite of her ill health, to clean up the flooding herself. There is a horrible odour in her home, and she is unable to eat most of the time.

She has developed a digestive disorder as a result of months spent throwing up for hours at a time. She feels that the property management company has not dealt with these issues appropriately. She states simply, "I'm doing their job!"

She is socially isolated as a result of these horrible living conditions, and her family can no longer visit her at home. She is under tremendous stress, and wonders how long she can continue to suffer like this.

**WHY SHOULD  
LANDLORDS BE  
LICENSED?**

"Better inspection procedures and follow-through are needed."



## Dave L.

A seasoned chef, Dave spent the majority of his life in the kitchen. Thirteen years ago, he was suddenly diagnosed with cardiomyopathy and atrial fibrillation. Despite his illness, he is a “miracle patient” according to his doctor. Most others with this heart condition have not been so lucky.

Dave is getting by as best as he can, but difficult dealings with his former landlord left him scrambling to find a place last fall. The only thing available to him was a rooming house. At first, he admits, it was hard.

He says, “I had to convince myself that it wasn’t so bad.” Dave felt bullied by his former landlord. Promises were made and not kept. Repairs left undone, problems not adequately addressed. He laments,

“They always said that they would get right on it, but didn’t”

Repairs at his current home take forever, although the situation there is marginally better. Dave, like many seniors, has suffered a lot; can we not at least offer our seniors a comfortable retirement in healthy, affordable housing?

**WHY SHOULD  
LANDLORDS BE  
LICENSED?**

“It would be beneficial to many people.”



## Cordelia D.

Cordelia is an ACORN member in Vanier. She's living with her two sons in a difficult housing situation. Her landlord is not involved in day to day activities, and the property managers refuse to do most repairs.

Most distressingly, she's had her apartment sprayed for bedbugs several times over the last three years. The treatments are ineffective as the landlord refuses to do the entire complex at once, citing cost. This has been damaging to her finances as she has lost 3 beds, and 2 dressers as a result of the bedbugs. Cordelia explains about her struggle with having basic repairs and maintenance done, "They don't want to do them. Doesn't matter how I ask, how nice I am. They just refuse to do them."

Cordelia believes that there is a disconnect between landlords and their tenants. She says,

**"My landlord doesn't care. She doesn't have to live in my place. She doesn't have to sleep in my bed."**

Her housing situation is making her feel depressed, and stressed out. Like many members, she feels that the cost of housing is too expensive, the properties barely maintained. The new provincial changes to the definition of disability for ODSP are always on her mind. Unfortunately, for many of the Province's most vulnerable citizens, the new Conservative government has made their lives even more difficult.

**WHY SHOULD  
LANDLORDS BE  
LICENSED?**

**..."there should be a registry of good landlords and bad landlords."**





## Betty G.

Betty has lived in Vanier for a long time, but her current housing situation has her fed up. Bed bugs have been an issue for years, and though the landlord hires exterminators to spray them, the problem persists. The elevator frequently breaks down, and it's hard on her arthritic back and hands. She always has a smile on her face, but deep down, it's obvious she is suffering. The water heater is not working these days, forcing her to take her baths in lukewarm water.

She doesn't complain, though, and doesn't understand why landlords aren't already licensed if every other business is. She says with a sigh.

“The City needs to build more affordable housing”.

The housing issues in Ottawa are not going to disappear. These problems have persisted for ages. It seems that our government is fine with allowing the problems to fester instead of dealing with them. The question is, why?

**WHY SHOULD  
LANDLORDS BE  
LICENSED?**

"so they'd be forced to fix their buildings and address pest issues. If hotels are licensed, why aren't landlords?"



## Alexandra H.

Alexandra has lived in OCH since she was 18 years old. She is a young woman in a wheelchair currently taking computer courses; her long-term goals include working for the Department of National Defense as an administrator. A bright young woman, Alexandra is, like many, dealing with a difficult housing situation. She is grateful for a place to live, but things could be better for her and her fellow residents.

In the last few years she's had to deal with many obstacles at her home. Repairs that took too long, blocking access to her oven, ice left to pile up in the winter, a hazard at the best of times, but when it started melting in

through the wall in the spring, there was the risk of ruining her walls and heater. Worst of all, she has had her unit sprayed for cockroaches. The treatment seems to have worked for now, but it is always in the back of her mind. The building's garbage room is on the first floor; the fan was broken when she moved there in 2011; 8 years later it's still broken. There is a foul stench always present on the main floor as a result.

Alexandra's mental health has suffered as well; she now experiences anxiety from her housing situation. She believes that landlords need extra incentives to maintain property standards, do repairs in a timely manner, and fulfill their obligations to their tenants.

## WHY SHOULD LANDLORDS BE LICENSED?

"to provide increased security to tenants and greater accountability for landlords."



## Estelle L.

Estelle has led a very full life, and now in her seventies, she should be able to relax and enjoy the fruits of her labour. A former addictions therapist, she studied at Concordia University and dedicated her life to helping others. Unfortunately, Estelle was born with thalassemia, a crippling, genetic blood disorder which results in malformed hemoglobin. "I was born tired," she jokes. She struggles with anemia, and the constant, bone weary fatigue that accompanies it. Her energy is limited, and she spends her days battling the constant problems in her building.

She's been living in OCH housing for the last six years. Her building has twenty-one floors but one of the two elevators is always out of order. There are many problems with maintenance in the building, as well as cockroaches and bedbugs. Her relationship with her landlord is strained. She feels that she is just a "...means to an end." She notes that cleanliness is a problem in her building, saying that the "...upper floors are never washed."

Many residents of OCH buildings feel that they are living in difficult housing conditions, and sadly, Estelle's situation is no different. Should our seniors have to live in these kind of conditions?

## WHY SHOULD LANDLORDS BE LICENSED?

"It would provide an opportunity for landlords to acquire the necessary skills to become a landlord.."



## Margaret A.

Margaret lives in Heron Gate with her four children and a dog. She has lived in the community since 2012, but moved to her current unit in 2015. Rent is unaffordable at \$1,300, but she has been unable to find cheaper accommodation that meets her family's needs and has been on the social housing waitlist for six years. Margaret moved from her previous building because of problems with cockroaches and water supply. She struggled to find housing because rents were so expensive, but she was determined to find a safe place for her kids to call home. Although her current housing isn't perfect, and often needs repairs, she's happy living in the community that she has built with her neighbours over the past few years.

In 2015, Margaret joined ACORN because local community members were being evicted in the winter and during school time. She helped fight against these unfair evictions and win a number of concessions for tenants.

However, earlier this year she learned there was a plan to evict her building. In May, Margaret and her neighbours were told that 150 households were being evicted and were to be vacated by September 30th. These low-end market rentals are being demolished to make way for luxury units; the landlord, Timbercreek, has no plans to replace the affordable housing that will be lost in the process.

Margaret doesn't want to leave her community, and her children are worried about what this means for them. Her daughter has been crying about leaving neighbourhood friends. She attended school herself and has found that her schoolwork has been affected by the situation. She has tried to look for alternative housing, but cannot find anything within her budget. Since she found out about the eviction, Margaret has been calling the Social Housing Registry constantly, but has been told she needs to keep waiting for housing. She has heard that many people wait for around ten years for social housing, so she isn't hopeful.

**WHY SHOULD  
LANDLORDS BE  
LICENSED?**

"Without action, the City is at risk of destroying the diverse neighbourhoods that make Ottawa home for many."



## Mavis F.

Until she was evicted by Timbercreek, Mavis lived in Herongate for over 30 years of living there. She recalls that when she and her husband had moved in the 1980's, the community of large townhouses built was a clean, well maintained property, full of middle class families who had lived there for years. Her children grew up there with great neighbours and lovely gardens.

That all changed when first, Trans Globe, and then Timbercreek, bought Herongate. General cleanliness, lawn and shrub maintenance, and garbage pick up became haphazard, and infrequent. Repairs took ages to get done, and only after repeating nudging. Sometimes the grass could be over a foot tall before it was cut. As an ACORN Tenant representative, while she was able to push for some improvements, her own section didn't get much attention. There were missing roof shingles, broken windows, broken paving stones, exposed electrical wires, and 7 dead pine trees. She had to cut the trees herself since they posed a fire hazard.

She had heard rumours that Timbercreek was planning on demolishing part of Herongate, however she was denied any information about it from the management. Suddenly, in mid-2015, meetings with Timbercreek ceased, and maintenance got worse and garbage piled up again. She was shocked to get the eviction notice in September. Many of her low income neighbours were forced to dump their good furniture in the garbage, as they had no money for moving trucks.

Even though she was able to find a suitable home in late November of 2015, it was definitely smaller and more expensive. She fears for the Herongate tenants facing this second Eviction. There are now fewer low cost homes, and even fewer to accommodate larger families. Many are having difficulty finding anything suitable, and quite reasonably, are asking for more time to search. She asks Mayor Watson and his Council, "Why did you approve a 65 storey housing monstrosity that families can't use, especially when there is so much need for low cost housing in Ottawa".

## WHY SHOULD LANDLORDS BE LICENSED?

"It's about fixing the relationship between landlords and tenants...making it more equal and respectful".



# Conclusion

This collection of 24 odd stories of tenants across Ottawa have a horrific tale to tell. They speak volumes of the extreme pain, anguish and fear that these low-income community households are experiencing on a daily basis. While many are frustrated they are not defeated; as ACORN members they continue to fight for their basic rights of cleanliness and safe housing conditions. Lack of maintenance has made the situation of people suffering from mental health conditions or other forms of disabilities even worse. On top of it, the constant fear of renovations, demovictions and the proposed changes to social assistance programs have all exacerbated the issue for our most vulnerable communities.

With the regulating rental accommodations review, the City has a real opportunity to ensure that every tenant, regardless of income, has access to a safe, healthy home. If tenants' rights are to be respected and upheld, it is absolutely necessary to treat landlords like every other business. If restaurants, taxi drivers and hair salons are licensed, why aren't landlords?

ACORN members want a landlord licensing/registration program similar to Toronto's Rent Safe Program. We demand:

- Proactive, annual inspections by the City and re-inspections for non-compliance
- Online/Physical postings in common areas of landlords who pass or fail inspection.
- Timelines for repairs based on severity.
- Non-compliance from timelines to result in the City completing the repair and billing the landlord.
- Requiring landlords to register with the City and provide maintenance plans and objectives for achieving them.

ACORN members are calling on city staff and councillors to support landlord licensing in the fight for everyone's right to safe, healthy homes!