

## **Enforce existing laws, instead of creating more bureaucracy**

*By Kevin Russell, Executive Director, Rental Housing Providers Nova Scotia*

Safe, secure housing for everyone is a shared expectation. Nobody would argue otherwise.

But what is the best way to get there?

Recently, advocates from Dalhousie Legal Aid and Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives called for a new provincial Rental Housing Registry and Licensing Program. No other province in Canada has such a program in place.

Will adding more rules actually help tenants?

Nova Scotia isn't short on tenant protection laws. The Residential Tenancies Act lays out clear rights and responsibilities for tenants and rental housing providers alike, covering issues like rent, evictions, notice periods, maintenance obligations and resolving disputes. At the municipal level, Halifax Regional Municipality has the Respecting Standards for Residential Occupancies by-law, spelling out essentials like adequate heat, working plumbing, and healthy and safe living conditions.

Where things often break down is not the wording of the provincial law or municipal by-law, but what happens after a problem is reported.

Tenants talk about waiting months for their property issues to be solved. Housing providers face prolonged procedural bottlenecks through the Residential Tenancies program when dealing with significant property damage caused by renters. In both cases, the frustration is similar: less about what the law says, and more about how quickly and effectively the law is actually enforced.

Existing laws are also being applied unequally.

Public discussion often focuses a lot on rental housing providers. Yes, there are some rental housing providers that break the law and they should be held accountable.

However, the housing provider side is not the whole story. There are also tenants who do not pay rent, blast music until 2:00 am, don't control aggressive pets or bring criminal activity to the building. When these happen, other tenants get affected, and housing providers are often left waiting for enforcement that comes too late, if it comes at all. Not because the law fails them, but because it is not applied evenly.

The case of rental property owned by Carlo and Loretta Simmons makes that clear.

The Dartmouth housing providers followed all steps under the Residential Tenancies Act to reclaim their property so that their adult daughter could live there and attend university to become a registered nurse.

Despite following the letter and spirit of the law, the tenant refused to leave and a Small Claims Court adjudicator blocked the move based on their own personal judgment. The Simmons family had to appeal to the Nova Scotia Supreme Court, which ruled in their favour. The court also rejected the claim by activists like Dal Legal Aid that there is an imbalance in the law in favour of rental housing providers over tenants.

The Simmons family should never have had to go that far. The law is in place and is supposed to treat everyone fairly.

But where is the enforcement?

Think about it. If enforcement of existing laws is already struggling today, how would adding more rules, more licensing, more registration magically make it stronger and protect everyone tomorrow?

Additionally, layering additional paperwork onto existing laws only adds pressure to a housing system that is already stretched thin.

Most rental housing providers in Nova Scotia are small, family-managed operators. They do not have legal departments. Additional administrative burdens increase costs, reduce reinvestment in properties, and push some owners out of the rental market altogether.

When that happens, tenants lose. Units are sold, supply shrinks. And when supply shrinks, anyone searching for a rental will feel it. Fewer options with higher prices.

If we are truly serious about better housing quality, stronger tenant protections, and long-term stability, the solution is not creating new rules or red tape that won't get enforced.

Let's enforce the laws we already have, like the Residential Tenancies Act, consistently and equally.

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