

Bill 30

Mr. Chair, members of the Law Amendments Committee:

Because there are some new members to this Committee and to the Legislature, before I speak to Bill 30, I would like to share some background about IPOANS – the Investment Property Owners Association of Nova Scotia.

We have been the voice of responsible investment property owners in Nova Scotia since 1978.

Our approximately 160 members manage more than 45,000 rental property units across the province.

Our members are urban, suburban and rural.

Our members pay taxes, employ Nova Scotians with good salaries and give back to their communities in many ways.

Unfortunately, when it comes to the public debate on housing, our members feel like they have been a political punching bag of all three parties represented in this legislature.

I want to be very clear – my comments aren't directed towards the dedicated, hard-working, non-partisan public servants that work at Service Nova Scotia, Housing Nova Scotia and other related agencies.

They do their best in a housing system that is broken and that has been neglected by elected officials of all parties.

Good, responsible investment property owners are sick and tired about being targeted by politicians to get votes.

To be clear, bad landlords should be singled out. IPOANS did so ourselves at the beginning of September in a full-page ad in the Chronicle Herald.

But where are the RTA amendments to protect good landlords from bad tenants? We never hear politicians act on or give voice to the good landlords who must deal with bad tenants.

Bad tenants who exploit the flaws of the Residential Tenancies Act to live rent free, only to trash their unit when forced to leave.

Bad tenants who destroy property, costing thousands of dollars in repair costs.

Bad tenants who take away the right of other tenants – their neighbours – to enjoy their home.

Bad tenants who set up criminal operations in their apartment.

Bad tenants who refuse to leave, then refuse to pay their rent.

Bad tenants who verbally abuse and threaten landlords or those who work for them.

In recent weeks, a female employee of an investment property owner was threatened by a tenant, requiring the intervention of police.

Last week, I sent a letter to MLAs asking you to cool down the rhetoric before someone gets hurt or worse. Your words matter

Our members recognize that some tenants, sadly, have addictions or mental health issues or have disabilities. Some are clients of the Department of Community Services trying to make ends meet on incomes well below the poverty line.

These tenants require help. They require professional support from the government – the kind of services that landlords and their staff are not equipped to provide.

Unfortunately, successive provincial governments have been missing in action to help both the tenants and the landlords.

None of the changes proposed in Bill 30 will address any of these issues.

But that's what happens when legislation is written without listening and consulting to the people who work in housing, who understand housing and who have expertise in housing.

It's no secret that tenants and housing activists say the Residential Tenancies Act favours landlords, while landlords say the Act favours tenants.

This conflict reflects that the Residential Tenancies Act is a broken act that's in desperate need of modernization.

Instead of striking a balance between tenants and landlords that fosters positive relationships, the Act pits each party against each other often resulting in a toxic relationship throughout a tenancy.

In the last election, IPOANS asked all three parties whether they would consult with us before undertaking changes to the Residential Tenancies Act.

All three parties said yes.

The PC Party said this, and I quote:

“We look forward to consulting with stakeholders in these sectors upon forming the government before making any decisions on how housing is delivered in Nova Scotia.”

One meeting the Friday before Bill 30 was tabled with no detail and no engagement is not meaningful consultation.

Frankly, many of the problems that landlords and tenants face come down to lack of enforcement of the Residential Tenancies Act.

Good landlords try to seek action on bad tenants through the Residential Tenancies Act.

Good tenants try to seek action on bad landlords through the Residential Tenancies Act.

But the Nova Scotia government does not have sufficient resources to enforce the Act, either against landlords or tenants.

That's why we proposed in the last election that Nova Scotia follow the lead of the British Columbia NDP government two years ago and create a compliance and enforcement unit.

A properly staffed compliance and enforcement unit would help prevent lengthy processes as the ones landlords undertake to deal with bad tenants – as well as the kind of issues we saw in a recent court case involving a bad landlord.

This legislature can make all the changes it wants to the Residential Tenancies Act...

And the politicians can make all the statements they want about cracking down on bad landlords...

But none of it will matter or make a difference without enforcement.

In conclusion, I would note to Committee members that half of the rental apartment units in Nova Scotia are owned by small business.

Last week, members of the Legislature said all the right things about Small Business Week.

Regardless of the nice words, the small businesses who are landlords aren't being listened to or respected.

IPOANS members are committed to housing solutions.

We urge elected officials to listen to us, work with us and engage with us. Housing solutions that work can only happen with the experts who build and provide housing.

Thank you.