

Dear Minister Selina Robinson:

My name is Tom de Grey. I'm writing this letter to express my views on the proposal for Vacancy Control for dwellings under the SRA Bylaw recently unanimously passed by the City of Vancouver Council. Tying rent control to the unit instead of the tenant in Single Room Occupancy Hotels (SROs) would help a great deal making me and my neighbours to feel more secure in our homes. I understand that you received a letter from the Mayor of Vancouver (attached) and I want to underscore my support for everything he said. I am an active volunteer with the SRO Collaborative and I sit on it's board of directors in the role of Vice President. Also I was a member of the City of Vancouver SRO Task Force Committee in 2016 and 2017 which recommended vacancy control in the SROs. The purpose of this letter is to provide a more personal perspective of how Vacancy Control in SROs will reduce the inflows into homelessness. I would like to talk about my felt experience in this situation, which is shared with my neighbours.

The story of my home is significant to this issue. I live in old Strathcona, in Keefer Cabins with 12 units that rents at approximately \$384 per month. I am on income assistance and I'll soon have my old age pension. A "cabin" was historically a common type of simple rooming house for very low income people in Vancouver. It is 118 years old and it is, to my knowledge, the last remaining example of it's kind. Slightly more than 15 years ago, the owner received a federal RRAP grant - money - to do much needed renovation to the structure by agreeing to keep the rent at welfare rate for 15 years. That agreement ran out this July and the renovations made my place more valuable on the market. Since then, my SRO has started to be aggressively converted to market priced rentals. This situation is not just bad for me and my neighbours - it is catastrophic. People that live in SRO hotels are predominantly retired or disabled and live almost exclusively on fixed incomes. The building has been well maintained in spite of my almost uniquely low rents. I am a licensed contractor and a certified carpenter and, as such, I am qualified to give professional testimony in the Supreme Court. I think it is an urban myth that SROs can't be kept up to legal maintenance standards with the current rents.

My tenure at Keefer Cabin has not been happy. My neighbors and I have been harassed and threatened frequently and illegal evictions are common. Since the expiration of the agreement there is a strong profit motive for removing us - the older tenants. This tendency has accelerated. The agreement expired in July and already 3 long term tenants have been removed, all by very dubious means involving harassment, intimidation and out-right lying. These dwellings received a quick cosmetic renovation and were rented out at 2 or 3 times the previous rent. This is massive increase is not affordable to any of us. Practically none of us have anywhere else to go and all of us are very stressed as we anticipate future attempts to drive us out.

I believe the emotional effects of this situation on the low income population has not been taken fully into account. Having no security of tenure whatsoever and being copiously harassed is intensely stressful and unhealthy on a deep level. Feeling safe in one's home is essential to

health and happiness, especially for vulnerable and elderly people. Privacy is also fundamental to a secure home. I've caught my building manager peeking in my window more than once. He even went through a period where he would yell at me for no reason every time he saw me. There is never a reason for things to escalate to yelling. My neighbours would all tell similar stories about their interactions with the manager.

Vacancy control would remove the profit motive that underlies the real purpose for this negative behavior. Vacancy control would be a game changer for us, and I'm sure, for many other people living in SRO's across the Downtown eastside. I have read that homeless people have half the lifespan of an average Canadian. But how often do we contemplate the unnecessary suffering involved? The population of people in SROs under the threat of conversion share in this suffering. The change in the law that the City of Vancouver Council has proposed will only affect 3,800 small dwellings, but the tenants that live in them are all implicitly under the threat of homelessness. Landlords have always had the capacity to institute large rent increases, if it can be justified to the "Residential Tenancy Board". Things are getting worse daily and it is critical that this change be implemented and as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

Tom de Grey