

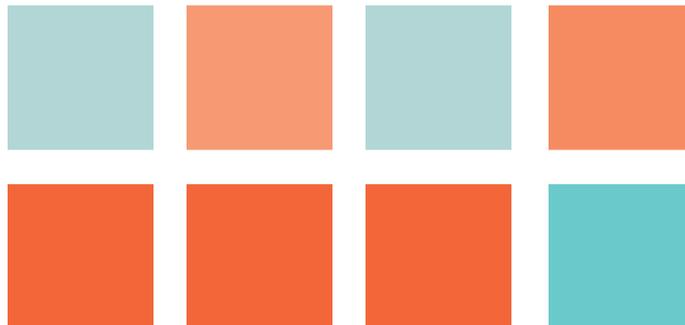
RNAO Speaking Notes:

Bill 140, An Act to enact the Housing Services Act, 2010, repeal the Social Housing Reform Act, 2000 and make complementary and other amendments to other Acts

The Standing Committee on Justice Policy

Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario

March 24, 2011



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Immediate Past President, RNAO Board of Directors**

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Social Housing Reform Act, 2000 and make complementary and other
amendments to other Acts**

Submission to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy
Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario
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Good afternoon. My name is Wendy Fucile and I am the Immediate Past President of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) is the professional association for registered nurses who practise in all roles and sectors across this province. We work to improve health and strengthen our health-care system.

RNAO appreciates the opportunity to present this submission on Bill 140 to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

Ontario's registered nurses know that access to safe, affordable housing is a fundamental human right and a key determinant of health.

There is an urgent need to tackle access to affordable housing. We need to work together on this crisis because it is tipping too many Ontarians into deeper and more sustained poverty. In 2009, despite an economic downturn average rents increased three times the rate of inflation across the province. One in five tenant households are paying 50 per cent or more of their income on rent.

At the beginning of 2010, there were more than 140,000 households on municipal waiting lists for social housing. This is a staggering increase of almost 10 per cent in just one year. The social housing wait times are often more than five years in many areas. There are more than 14,000 families on the up to 21-year wait time for Peel. It's hard to know how many really need social housing as many are too discouraged by the long wait times to even fill out an application.

Dangerously low social assistance rates, precarious low-waged employment, and lack of access to affordable housing means that people living in poverty in Ontario routinely have to decide between paying the rent or buying food. The result is that 402,000 Ontarians a month were forced to turn to food banks in 2010.

People who are homeless or precariously housed are sicker and die sooner than the general population. A Street Health Nursing Foundation survey found that the daily lives of homeless people were stressful, isolating, and dangerous where people are often hungry, chronically ill, and unable to access the health care that they desperately require.

For every person who is homeless in Canada, there are 23 households that are vulnerably housed and at high risk of becoming homeless. Dr. Hwang at the Centre for Research on Inner City Health explains, “those who are vulnerably housed often suffer from the fact that they are hidden away from the public eye and forgotten.” The Wellesley Institute uses the metaphor of the housing insecurity and homelessness iceberg—where the biggest part of the problem is mainly hidden from view. While the visibly

homeless need critical attention, we must also meet the urgent needs of the hidden homeless, those in substandard housing, in inadequate housing, and in unaffordable housing, whose rent exceeds 30 per cent of household income.

Despite the compelling and growing need, Ontario is the worst among the provinces in terms of jurisdictional investment in affordable housing. In the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009, Ontario spent \$64 per capita on affordable housing, about half the provincial average of \$115 per person. Nurses find this to be shameful reality in a country as wealthy as Canada, and in a province as privileged as Ontario.

To enable every Ontarian to live poverty-free and with dignity, all levels of government have particular responsibilities and a moral imperative to work together for the common good. If other levels of government are lagging in their actions, it is still critical that the provincial government move ahead with increased, predictable, and sustainable funding.

RNAO's recommendations are as follows:

- **Immediately enshrine the human right to adequate housing in federal and provincial legislation.**
- **Immediately implement the recommendations of the Ontario Human Rights Commission to address discrimination in rental housing.**
- **Implement the LeSage Report recommendations for “significant legislative amendments” to address rent and subsidy calculations as well as the arrears process with respect to rent-geared-to-income and other rules that are punitive.**

- **Introduce inclusionary housing by amending the Planning Act as a fair and fast way to create stable, affordable, and equitable housing.**
- **Introduce and fund in the upcoming budget a universal housing benefit for all low-income Ontarians, whether receiving social assistance or not, to address the gap between tenant incomes and housing costs.**
- **Invest in the upcoming budget in a minimum of 10,000 affordable housing units each and every year for the ten years. To ensure that housing is accessible to people with disabilities, all new affordable housing units must be designed and built using principles of universal access and accessibility.**
- **Fund in the upcoming budget a program for regular maintenance and repair of new and existing affordable housing in order to address aging, substandard housing stock.**
- **Increase in the upcoming budget the funding for access to supportive community-based housing and services for those with physical, cognitive and/or mental health and/or addiction needs so that Ontarians may live with dignity at home.**
- **Prevent the privatization and sell-off of social housing by amending legislation to protect it as a public asset.**
- **Improve fairness for tenants by creating an independent panel to review disputes such as canceling a rental subsidy.**
- **Introduce a fair, transparent, and independent appeals process for housing providers. Under existing legislation, non-profit organizations and co-ops have not had the ability to seek an independent review of Municipal Service Manager actions or decisions that did not involve costly court proceedings.**

Thank you for the opportunity to convey the abiding concern that Ontario's registered nurses continue to have about Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy, Bill 140, and unmet needs for affordable and healthy

housing. We look forward to working together with government and a wide range of stakeholders in our community, especially those most affected by housing challenges, so that everyone is secured with a safe, affordable place to call home.