



BRITISH COLUMBIA

July 3, 2024

Reference: 67984

Leslie Gaudette, President
Barb Mikulec, First Vice-President
Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC
PO Box 26036 RPO Langley Mall
Langley BC V3A 8J2
Email: coscobcpresident@gmail.com

Dear Leslie Gaudette and Barb Mikulec:

Thank you for your letter of April 30, 2024, regarding the ongoing housing challenges facing BC seniors. I share your concerns regarding the urgent need for more housing throughout British Columbia, and support for those struggling with the cost of living and rent. I apologize for the delay in responding.

As you noted, the Province recently announced a one-time rental benefit for Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) recipients as well as a number of program improvements, including:

- increasing the income limit for eligibility for SAFER from \$33,000 to \$37,240, so more seniors will be eligible for rental assistance;
- increasing the minimum benefit from \$25 to \$50 a month or \$600 a year;
- increased rent ceilings, which help determine the amount of rental assistance for applicants, and can now be reviewed and amended annually; and
- launching a public awareness campaign to ensure more seniors are aware of the program.

For further information, the news release can be found here:

news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2024HOUS0050-000477

Page 1 of 3

We recognize that more is required to help make rents affordable for BC seniors with low to moderate incomes. BC continues to invest in other programs, such as the Senior's Supplement to top-up federal income programs. More information on this supplement can be found here: www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/seniors/financial-legal-matters/income-security-programs/seniors-supplement

The Province recognizes that many renters, especially those on fixed incomes, struggle to afford their rent. To help keep rents affordable, in 2018, government limited annual rent increases to the inflation rate, compared to the previous formula of the inflation rate plus two per cent. In addition, in recognition of the increased cost of living due to rising inflation rates renters have experienced in recent years, government capped the rent increase amount at two per cent for 2023 and three and a half per cent for 2024, well below the rate of inflation.

I agree that BC needs greater investment in affordable and subsidized housing to close the gap between supply and demand for those options. Last year, we launched our Homes for People action plan, which includes a commitment to create subsidized rental homes for 6,000 more families and seniors through an expansion of the Community Housing Fund, with additional housing investments through the Indigenous Housing Fund. These homes will be delivered over the next ten years and are in addition to homes funded through Building BC starting in 2018. More information on the Homes for People action plan can be found here: news.gov.bc.ca/files/Homes_For_People.pdf

We recognize that investments in new affordable and subsidized housing have struggled to keep up with growing needs, in part due to simultaneous loss of affordable housing through re-development. Accordingly, the province also made a historic investment of \$500 million to create the Rental Protection Fund (rentalprotectionfund.ca/), to support the community housing sector in acquiring existing, occupied rental buildings. The Rental Protection Fund Society is comprised of three members — the Aboriginal Housing Management Association, the BC Non-Profit Housing Association, and the Cooperative Housing Federation of BC.

Leslie Gaudette and Barb Mikulec
Page 3

Further action is needed to support individuals already experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Through our Belonging in BC Homelessness Plan (news.gov.bc.ca/files/BelongingStrategy.pdf), BC is investing in new units of Complex Care Housing, temporary housing, supportive housing, and rent supplements with supports to improve access to housing for individuals with greater support needs. We are also investing in the BC Rent Bank program (bcrentbank.ca/) to help people with low incomes maintain and access rental housing, preventing homelessness and evictions. Within Belonging in BC, we acknowledge that seniors have distinct needs that need to be considered as part of a coordinated system of provincial supports.

Thank you again for writing, for your recommendations, and for your advocacy in support of seniors in British Columbia.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ravi Kahlon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ravi Kahlon
Minister of Housing