



“No Room for Students:” Closing the Rent Loophole That’s Driving Us Out

CUSA’s call to reform the *Residential Tenancies Act*
and restore rent fairness in Ontario



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ontario's rental housing system is failing postsecondary students. Across the province, students are being priced out, and pushed out—becoming some of the hardest-hit victims of Canada's housing crisis.

Ontario's system of rent control is to blame. Sitting tenants are protected by annual rent increases proportional to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and the guidelines determined by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.¹ Further increases subject to exemptions before Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB), there is no existing regulation to limit rent increases when a unit is vacated.² This process is known as vacancy decontrol, and is permitted by deliberate loopholes in the existing Residential Tenancies Act. The Carleton University Students' Association, henceforth known as "CUSA", is wholeheartedly committed to student housing affordability. We believe access to safe, secure, and affordable housing is a matter of social justice and equity. By allowing landlords to reset rents at market rates upon the vacancy of a tenant, students across the country are meant to fit the bill for rent gouging, renovations, and a housing supply shortage.

Restoring a system of vacancy control in the Province of Ontario is a crucial step on the path to solving our housing crisis, and creating a fairer system of market rentals for all Ontarians, especially postsecondary students.

THE PROBLEM

By the Numbers:

7 out of 10

The number of students in Canada who spent 30% or more of their income on housing in 2021.³

\$2,239

The average market rent in Ottawa in May of 2025, 7th highest among Canada’s major urban areas.⁴

9%

Cumulative rent increase in Ottawa between Oct. 2022 and Oct. 2024.⁵

45%

The number of students who are unable to cover basic necessities, including housing.⁶

25%

The typical difference between the median rent for an apartment versus what a student will end up paying.⁷

25%

The minimum turnover rate for student renters, at an average stay over four years, compared to 13.6% in the standard market.⁸

Painting a Picture: The Student Renter

Hundreds of different statistics, market figures, and testimonials could be used to paint a picture of the dire situation faced by most student renters. Due to the nature of their studies, students generally find themselves in shorter lease agreements when compared with the average renter, necessitating greater re-leasing among the student population. The units students find themselves in to begin with are often units priced far above median rent. The unique situation of student-renters with regard to their leasing habits makes them far more susceptible to changes in the market, and afforded fewer protections under the current rent increase guidelines when units change hands more frequently.

Over 90% of Ottawa’s students are private-market renters, with only ~8,500 on-campus residences available for students across Carleton University and the University of Ottawa.⁹ This consistent shortage of on-campus housing makes students far more vulnerable to rent gouging and the prime targets of rent increases well above the provincial increase guidelines. Most students also live with at least one roommate (72%).¹⁰ Recent data shows that more than one in

five renters (21.7%) living with roommates were in overcrowded situations.¹¹ This suggests that for a sizable portion of students, living in an overcrowded dwelling alongside other students is a day-to-day reality.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

Prior to 1975, the Ontario government enacted rent freezes on an ad-hoc basis in response to tenant protests or economic downturns. More often than not, these prohibitions on rent increases applied to new tenants in the same unit.¹²

In 1975, Ontario's Progressive-Conservative government, led by Premier Bill Davis, introduced the *Residential Premises Rent Review Act*, 1975, which established the first universal system of rent control for most tenants in Ontario. In practice, the RPRRA limited rent increases roughly proportional to inflation.¹³ In 1985, the *Residential Tenancies Amendment Act*, passed by the Liberal government of David Peterson, significantly tightened rent control and introduced Ontario's first system of vacancy control.¹⁴

Subsequent regulations contained in the *Rent Control Act*, 1992 introduced indexes to peg rent control costs to capital expenses.¹⁵ This measure was expanded to 100% of capital expenses in 1998, following the passage of the *Tenant Protection Act*, 1997 under the government of Premier Mike Harris.¹⁶ The legislation also ended short-lived vacancy control measures in Ontario, allowing landlords to charge whatever markets could bear for rent.¹⁷

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The immediate re-adoption of vacancy control in the Province of Ontario, by adding an explicit amendment to either s. 120 or s. 126 of the *Residential Tenancies Act* to **limit rent increases for new tenants to the prescribed annual increase by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing** (2.5% in 2025).¹⁸

2. Amend s. 6.1 of the *Residential Tenancies Act* to **eliminate the post-2018 rent control exemptions**, making all units built after this date subject to rent control guidelines.

3. Create a **province-wide rental registry** to document rent increases and protect students from potential "renovictions" or unfair rent hikes.

AFTERWORD

While vacancy decontrol may seem like little more than a technical detail in Ontario's housing legislation, its enablement through the Residential Tenancies Act makes it one of the primary drivers of the housing crisis we currently face in the province. We strongly believe that Ontario's rental system should reflect the fact that housing is a human right, not solely the asset of speculative landlords. By allowing rent control to apply for new tenants, and eliminating post-2018 exemptions to rent protections, we can shape a future that's fairer for student tenants, and all renters.

ENDNOTES

- 1 *Residential Tenancies Act, 2006*, S.O. 2006, c. 17, s. 120(2), <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/06r17>.
- 2 *Ibid.*, s. 126(1).
- 3 UTILE, *Flash 2021: Enquête sur le logement étudiant au Canada*, 2021, p. 7. <https://www.utile.org/nouvelles/flash-2021>.
- 4 Nesto, *Ottawa Housing Market Outlook: January 2025*, 2025. <https://www.nesto.ca/home-buying/ottawa-housing-market-outlook/>
- 5 Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, *Fall Rental Market Report: Ottawa*, 2024. <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/housing-markets-data-and-research/market-reports/rental-market-reports-major-centres?selected=ottawaDiv>
- 6 TD Bank Group, "Nearly Half of Canadian Students Are Unable to Adequately Cover Basic Needs Such as Food and Housing," *TD Stories*, 2024, para 3. <https://stories.td.com/ca/en/news/2024-08-27-nearly-half-of-canadian-students-are-unable-to-adequately-co>.
- 7 UTILE, *Flash*, 2021, p. 5.
- 8 Peak Hill Capital, *The Canadian Student Housing Opportunity*, 2024. <https://www.peakhillcapital.com/the-canadian-student-housing-opportunity>
- 9 University of Ottawa, *Housing and Residence*, <https://www.uottawa.ca/campus-life/housing>; Carleton University, *Housing and Residence Life Services*, <https://housing.carleton.ca/residence-facts/>.
- 10 UTILE, *Flash*, 2021, p. 21.
- 11 Statistics Canada, *Measuring unmet housing need and housing instability in households with roommates and extended family*, by Aaron Gorski, David Heisel, and Jerry Situ, *Housing Statistics in Canada*, no. 46-28-0001, 2025. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/46-28-0001/2025001/article/00001-eng.htm>
- 12 John C. Bacher, 1993, *Keeping to the Marketplace: The Evolution of Canadian Housing Policy*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- 13 *Residential Premises Rent Review Act, 1975*, SO 1975, c 61. https://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3646&context=ontario_statutes.
- 14 *An Act to Amend the Residential Tenancies Act*, c 36 s. 125. https://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1364&context=ontario_statutes
- 15 *Rent Control Act, 1992*, S.O. 1992, c. 11. s. 15. <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/92r11>
- 16 *Tenant Protection Act, 1997*, S.O. 1997, c. 24. s. 138. <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/97t24#BK166>
- 17 *Ibid.*, s. 129.
- 18 Government of Ontario, *Residential Rent Increases*, 2024-25. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/residential-rent-increases>

