

# Engaging with Provincial and Territorial Governments

A Guide for Renters and Community Leaders



## About us

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The Canadian Centre for Housing Rights (CCHR) is Canada's leading non-profit organization working to advance the right to housing. Founded in 1987, CCHR has worked tirelessly for 35 years at the intersection of human rights and housing. We advance the right to housing by serving renters to help them stay housed, providing education and training about housing rights, and advancing rights-based housing policy through research, policy development, advocacy and strategic litigation.

## About this guide

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This document guides for renters and community leaders on how to effectively engage with their provincial or territorial government to advance the right to housing in their communities. It includes an overview of how provinces and territories regulate the rights of renters, and how provincial and territorial legislatures introduce laws that can impact the right to housing. It also includes a guide for for renters and community leaders on how to be involved in these processes by writing a letter to their local member of legislative assembly or petitioning the legislative assembly.

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Engaging with the provincial and territorial government is an important part of advocating for the right to adequate housing. Provinces have the power to pass laws on housing matters and to create policies that impact housing rights directly. For example, each province and territory has its own Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) which regulates the rights of renters and the relationship between renters and landlords. Through effective advocacy, an RTA can be strengthened so they can create housing standards that align with the National Housing Strategy Act (NHSA) and international law.

Provinces can also mandate municipal governments to establish bylaws to address housing standards which can advance the right to adequate housing. Examples of such bylaws include inclusionary zoning, building codes, property maintenance standards, and accessibility standards.

## THE ROLE OF MEMBERS OF LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLIES AND RIDINGS

A legislative assembly is a body elected in each province and territory to create and pass laws on local matters. Each member of the legislative assembly (MLA) represents the constituents in their local district, which is called a riding. MLAs can support and introduce bills that impact the right to adequate housing and housing rights.

## FOLLOWING UPCOMING BILLS AT THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

After a bill is introduced, it must go through a formal process before it becomes law.

- It must go through a first and second reading where MLAs can debate it.
- It then gets reviewed by a committee, which can call witnesses and changes can be made.
- It then goes back to the legislative assembly where members vote on it.

Each legislative assembly has a website that posts information about the bills that have been introduced and are going through this process. Some bills will be referred to as Private Members' Bills if they were introduced by a legislator that does not form part of the current government in power.

Some bills that are introduced have a direct impact on the right to adequate housing and housing rights. For example, at the Nova Scotia Legislative Assembly, the New Democratic Party introduced a Private Members' Bill that recognizes housing as a human right, called the Housing as a Human Right Act.

Consult the website of the legislative assembly in your province or territory to stay informed about bills that are introduced.

## HOW TO WRITE A LETTER TO YOUR MLA

Individuals can send a letter supporting bills that will help advance the right to adequate housing. MLAs may have the opportunity to read these types of supporting letters out loud when the bill is being debated.

Individuals can create a petition with their community to ask their provincial government to take a certain action. Finally, individuals can also attend committee meetings where they can share their thoughts on a particular bill.

### Letter checklist

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#### Introduction

- Briefly introduce yourself and your community.
- Be clear about your request. For example, requesting that a particular housing issue needs to be addressed.

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#### Background

- Clearly state the issue you wish to address, why resolving it is important, and how that would help your community.
- Try to include facts, numbers and references on the causes and impacts of the housing issues your community is facing. Use simple language and make sure that the facts you refer to are correct.

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#### Recommendations

- After sending the letter, follow up by calling the MLA's office to emphasize the importance of the issue to you.
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## HOW TO PETITION YOUR PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

Individuals or organizations can petition their legislative assembly to take action on a particular issue. Petitioning the legislative assembly can be an effective way to bring attention to systemic housing and homelessness issues and push policymakers to address them. Individuals must ensure that a petition is drafted correctly before collecting signatures from the community. Individuals must then find an MLA to present the petition to the legislative assembly.

The specific rules and processes to present a petition are different across provinces and territories and you can find these requirements on your legislative assembly's website. A key factor to consider when writing a petition is language and tone: most legislatures ask that petitioners avoid the use of argumentative, critical or biased language.

[Learn how to tailor your communications in a petition to the government.](#)



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