



# RENT SAFE IN MISSISSAUGA

A REPORT





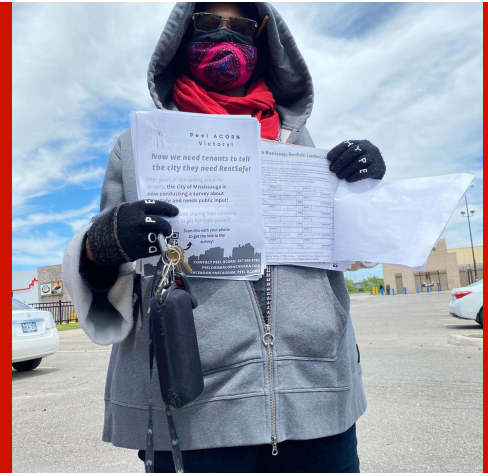
# OVERVIEW

Peel ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) is an independent national organization of low-to-moderate income families with 3,200 members concentrated in the Cooksville, Malton, and Downtown Brampton neighbourhoods. ACORN believes that social and economic justice can best be achieved with a city-wide membership who are invested in their organization and focused on building community power for change. Since our inception in 2004 in Canada, York South Weston, our membership has been pushing property owners, management companies, and municipalities to ensure that all tenant families have basic health and safety standards upheld in their rented homes. Peel ACORN was formed in 2017 when community members got together to fight for change. While their first organizing campaign was around a low income transit pass, healthy homes quickly became the number one issue for community members at our meetings. As ACORN members organized in Malton and Downtown Brampton, the call for municipal enforcement of property standards gathered steam. After the creation of a 'RentSafe' program in Toronto, due to the hard work of ACORN members and housing advocates there, Peel ACORN members had proof that a municipal enforcement program was possible and winnable in their city. After the municipal elections of 2018, where ACORN members were able to make housing issues an important topic, ACORN was pleased to see newly elected city councillor Dipika Damerla bring forward a motion to consider a 'RentSafe' program in Mississauga which would be modelled after the Toronto program.

This report highlights the issues tenants in Peel are facing, the demands from low and moderate income tenants for a 'RentSafe' program, what was won and the next steps as Peel ACORN continues to organize and fight for healthy homes for all.



# THE NEED FOR RENT SAFE IN MISSISSAUGA



Tenants all over Mississauga pay their rent on time, but unfortunately are not receiving quality repairs and maintenance of their homes. Numerous studies over the years have shown that lack of adequate housing has implications for the health, education and life expectancy for low and moderate income people. At ACORN meetings taking place across the Region of Peel, ACORN members would come together and talk about their issues getting repairs done. Tenants fear retaliation when reporting issues to their landlord, and don't know how to get city bylaw officers to enforce issues. In 2018, the City of Mississauga received anywhere from 200 to 400 complaints about apartment buildings and units, which the director of enforcement has said is relatively low. The City of Mississauga previously relied on complaints to investigate, leading to a lack of information about the true scale of the problem. ACORN members have organized speak outs and actions at their buildings, or visited buildings for outreach and found issue such as: broken elevators, dimly-lit parking garages, pest infestations, black mould, dirty common areas, filthy ventilation systems, lack of heat in winter, unclean garbage chutes, significant plumbing issues inside individual units, and "uncaring attitudes" from landlords.

A lack of vacant units, and a lack of vacancy control, in Mississauga has forced low and moderate income tenants to stay in substandard apartments. When they do inevitably move out due to lack of safe conditions, the landlords will do repairs and then increase the rent to market rates, which leads to the destruction of affordable housing.

As well, ACORN members heard stories again and again that tenants who complain about issues do not always receive follow-up and would often be confronted with impossibly long waiting lists to have their complaints heard at the Provincial Landlord and Tenant Board.

For these reasons, ACORN members came up with collective demands to inform the creation of a 'RentSafe' program in Mississauga.





# DEMANDS FOR A RENT SAFE PROGRAM

ACORN members, through meetings in 2019 and 2020 came up with collective demands to bring to policy makers and politicians in Mississauga. They also came up with an organizing plan to put pressure on key decision makers in order to make sure these demands were won. Their demands were as follows: create a RentSafe Program that implements a landlord registration system that gives the city the tools it needs to ensure that all apartment units in the city are up to livable standards. Ensure that the program includes the following:

- A review / update of Mississauga's Property Standards Bylaw to ensure all unhealthy apartment conditions are bylaw violations.
- Significant financial penalties against Landlords who violate Property Standards Bylaw.
- Proactive inspections of apartment buildings, including outreach to tenants to ensure in-suite issues are addressed.
- A cost recovery model that ensures the cost of inspections are paid for by the landlord through an annual per-unit-fee.
- Clear display of problems found during inspection in public areas, similar to Toronto's DineSafe.

# ORGANIZING FOR VICTORY

*"Right now, there are only real incentives for tenants. We have to pay high rent on time every month to keep a roof over our heads, even if that roof is leaking, or we can easily be evicted. But landlords do not need to respect tenant needs, be available for tenants or complete their responsibilities without fear of consequences. We want there to be real, enforceable consequences for landlords just like there are for tenants."*

ACORN Leader Robin Vanderfleet made it clear that the relationship between tenant and landlord is completely unequal.

ACORN members held numerous actions, outreach days, and lobby meetings with city councillors in order to win RentSafe. At each community meeting, members would discuss issues, and plan actions at buildings with maintenance issues. At these actions, collective demands would be delivered to the landlord, media would be invited out to highlight issues in the building and the need for a 'RentSafe' program and tenants would be invited to join ACORN as well as call the city with their maintenance issues. ACORN members would also plan outreach days to either doorknock in buildings in their neighbourhood and collect petitions, or petition at street corners with high visibility and high foot traffic.

In Summer 2021 Peel ACORN members spoke with staff at public engagement sessions about why a 'RentSafe' program is essential. Tenants explained the fact they should not need to fight so hard for basic services and for their dignity to be respected by landlords. Following these community engagement sessions, Mississauga City staff released their recommendation report in Fall 2021 on the Apartment Building Standards and Maintenance program, otherwise known as RentSafe. This report made it crystal clear that tenants' voices were heard. **Over 90% of the city's survey were supportive of the program and only 4% opposed.**





During the final few months before a final vote at council, ACORN members met with half of the elected city councillors to present their demands, and delivered demand letters to all councillors.

On Monday, November 29th Peel ACORN members deputed at Mississauga City Council's Budget Committee to convince councillors to pass the Apartment Building Standards and Maintenance Program pilot, otherwise known as Rent Safe. This was the culmination of over 4 years of campaigning for this program that proactively enforces property standards so that landlords are forced to protect the health and safety of tenants and to respect their rights.

Five members shared their stories with city council about why healthy homes are so important.

More ACORN members followed Robin with similar stories. Stories of tenants like Janice McNamee who lives in a building owned by the multi-billion dollar corporate landlord Capreit. Part of Capreit's business model is to ignore repairs and harass tenants. This is profitable for them because it pressures tenants to leave their already high-rent units so that Capreit can then do repairs—which were essential when the tenant lived there—and then rent it out to a new tenant at double the rent.

All these stories, coupled with all the ACORN actions over the years, were extremely successful in persuading councillors who were far from in agreement on this program when it was first proposed in 2019.

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Following the deputations on Nov. 29th, city council voted unanimously to pass Rent Safe.





**This new program which will arrive in 2022 will include:**

- A 5-year pilot program
- Registering landlords of 337 buildings.
- The program is fully-funded through landlord registration, fines, and inspection fees. There will be no added costs to taxpayers or tenants' rent.
- There will be annual inspections of units to ensure minimum standards are being met.
- 10 Dedicated Rent Safe by-law staff

The tenants and the community at large are well positioned to push for more changes in 2022 throughout the region of Peel, and we are already meeting with Brampton city councillors to push for a RentSafe program in Brampton.