FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
20 November 2026
Media Contact: Ty Riches | +1 (289) 808-3515 | toacorn@acorncanada.org

ACORN Calls for Ombudsman Investigation into Toronto's Handling of Years-Long Property Standards & Building Safety Violations at 500 Dawes Road, Systemic Problems in Enforcement Administration

Complaint seeks independent examination of municipal enforcement failures, delayed intervention, underutilization of remedial action, and systemic weaknesses in Toronto's rental housing enforcement framework

(Toronto, Ontario) – Toronto ACORN and the Dawes ACORN Tenants' Association are calling for an independent investigation by Ombudsman Toronto into the City of Toronto's handling of longstanding property standards and building-safety violations at 500 Dawes Road in East York.

WHAT: Press Conference
WHEN: Tuesday, November 24, 2026 at 10:00AM
WHERE: In front of 500 Dawes Road

The complaint raises serious questions about how the City responded to years of documented deficiencies, repeated failures to comply with municipal orders, and conditions that ultimately resulted in a significant prosecution before the Ontario Court of Justice. It also asks the Ombudsman to examine whether the City's enforcement system has the procedures, resources, accountability mechanisms, and institutional coordination necessary to address persistent non-compliance across Toronto's rental housing stock.

The complaint follows the June 19, 2026 decision in *Toronto (City) v. Havcare Investments Inc.*, 2026 ONCJ 374, in which Justice of the Peace Scarfe imposed fines totalling $950,000 across thirteen counts. In particular, the Court substituted fines of $400,000 for each of two counts concerning serious deficiencies involving the building's balcony guard systems and underground parking garage.

The Court's decision described conditions presenting risks of fatal or permanently disabling injuries, including a detached balcony guard, deteriorated and missing balcony guard components, falling concrete, exposed reinforcing steel, structural deterioration, and

damage to a garage support column. The Court also recorded that the relevant unsafe-building orders had been ignored.

> *"The Court's decision confirms just how serious some of the conditions at 500 Dawes were and continue to be. The question we continue to ask is why it took so long for the City's enforcement response to reach this point, and whether the City did everything within its authority to protect tenants along the way"*
> — Ryan Endoh, Chair, Dawes ACORN Tenants' Association

A building's enforcement history raises questions about the City's response

The complaint examines the City's history of inspections, orders, enforcement decisions, prosecutions, and efforts to secure compliance at 500 Dawes Road. It asks the Ombudsman to reconstruct the chronology of the City's response and determine when municipal officials had sufficient information to pursue more significant enforcement measures.

A particular concern is the January 2025 discharge of an earlier underground parking garage unsafe-building order, followed by subsequent enforcement proceedings concerning significant structural deficiencies in the same garage. The complaint asks the Ombudsman to examine the evidence supporting the earlier Certificate of Satisfaction and whether the City adequately verified that the order's requirements had been met.

The complaint also seeks an examination of the City's use of remedial action

Unlike prosecution, which imposes penalties for offences, remedial action can allow the City, where statutory requirements are satisfied, to undertake necessary work itself and recover permitted costs from the responsible property owner. For tenants living with unresolved deficiencies, this distinction is critical: penalties do not necessarily repair a building.

The complaint questions whether the City has relied too heavily on repeated inspections, orders, and prosecutions without sufficiently considering direct municipal intervention where an owner persistently fails to comply.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
20 November 2026
Media Contact: Ty Riches | +1 (289) 808-3515 | toacorn@acorncanada.org

It asks the Ombudsman to investigate how remedial action is assessed, funded, procured, approved, and coordinated between City divisions, and whether operational or financial constraints have prevented the City from making effective use of this enforcement tool.

Beyond 500 Dawes: a broader problem with Toronto's enforcement framework

The complaint draws on a policy report prepared by the Tenants' Association, *Strengthening Property Standards Enforcement: Higher-Order Enforcement Tools, Legal Considerations, and Policy Options*, dated April 14, 2026.

The report examines the legal and operational framework governing municipal enforcement, including property standards orders, prosecutions, remedial action, injunctions, and interdivisional coordination. It identifies a potential gap between the enforcement powers available to the City and the way those powers are operationalized in practice.

The complaint asks whether Toronto has a formal escalation framework for buildings with persistent or recurring violations, repeated failures to comply with orders, poor RentSafeTO evaluations, and a prolonged history of enforcement activity.

It also raises concerns about the City's ability to track a property's complete enforcement history across Municipal Licensing and Standards, Toronto Building, Legal Services, and other divisions. Where multiple divisions are involved, responsibility for securing actual compliance must be clear, and decisions not to pursue available enforcement measures should be properly documented and subject to review.

The complaint asks the Ombudsman to examine whether Council directions and previous policy initiatives concerning RentSafeTO, enforcement escalation, administrative penalties, and remedial action have translated into meaningful operational improvements.

Tenants faced barriers obtaining records about the City's own prosecutions

The complaint also documents difficulties encountered by the Association's Chair when attempting to obtain court records concerning proceedings between the City and Havcare.

The records request began with an in-person visit to the Ontario Court of Justice in late 2024 and was followed by a formal written request to City Court Services on February 20,

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
20 November 2026
Media Contact: Ty Riches | +1 (289) 808-3515 | toacorn@acorncanada.org

2025. Despite repeated correspondence, requests for clarification, and assurances that documents would be available for collection, the process continued until July 10, 2025. The documents ultimately obtained represented very little of the material originally sought.

The Association had explained that the records were needed to understand the City's enforcement history and assist tenants in exploring legal remedies before the Landlord and Tenant Board. The complaint asks the Ombudsman to examine the administrative barriers, delays, communication failures, and division of responsibility between Court Services and City Legal.

The concern is not about judicial independence or the decisions of judges. It is about whether the City's administrative processes provide members of the public with transparent, accessible, and reasonably responsive assistance when seeking court records.

The circumstances of vulnerable tenants must also be considered

The Court's June 2026 decision also recognized that a significant portion of the residents at 500 Dawes Road receive Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program and may have limited resources and housing options.

The complaint asks the Ombudsman to examine whether City-administered social assistance, housing supports, or City-supported referral arrangements have been connected to accommodation at the property, and whether relevant City personnel had access to information about its enforcement history and safety concerns.

These questions are raised for investigation and are not presented as established findings about individual tenants or specific payment arrangements. The complaint emphasizes that tenants must not be penalized or deprived of assistance because of their landlord's conduct. It instead asks whether the City's housing-support functions and regulatory enforcement responsibilities are adequately coordinated to protect residents who may have few alternatives.

A call for accountability and meaningful corrective action

The complaint comes just over a year after Ombudsman Toronto's May 2025 investigation, *An Investigation into the City's Response to a Vital Services Outage in a Multi-Tenant Home*. It asks whether administrative shortcomings identified in that investigation (including delays, unclear responsibilities, inadequate coordination, and failures to follow through on

existing obligations) are also reflected in the City's broader rental housing enforcement practices.

The Association is asking the Ombudsman to investigate the City's handling of 500 Dawes Road while also considering whether systemic recommendations are necessary to improve enforcement across Toronto.

Are Toronto's enforcement resources being used effectively?

The complaint also raises questions about the operational and financial efficiency of the City's approach to persistent property standards violations. At 500 Dawes Road, years of inspections, orders, follow-up activity, engineering assessments, legal proceedings, and prosecutions have required substantial public resources. Yet serious deficiencies continued to persist, requiring further enforcement intervention.

This raises a key question: is the City's existing enforcement approach achieving compliance in the most timely, coordinated, and cost-effective manner possible?

Where an owner repeatedly disregards municipal orders, the continued reliance on additional inspections, notices, and prosecutions might generate significant administrative and legal costs without necessarily resolving the underlying deficiencies. In circumstances where the City has statutory authority to undertake remedial work and recover the permitted costs from the property owner, it is reasonable to examine whether earlier intervention could have achieved better outcomes for tenants while making more effective use of public resources.

Accordingly, ACORN is also asking the Ombudsman to consider whether the City's processes have resulted in avoidable duplication, prolonged administrative activity, inefficient allocation of resources, or unnecessary costs to taxpayers.

Depending on the findings and the nature of any issues identified, ACORN believes the Ombudsman may wish to consider referring relevant matters to the Auditor General of Toronto, or recommending an independent audit, to examine the efficiency, economy, and effectiveness of the City's property standards enforcement operations and the administration of remedial action.

> *"We cannot continue measuring the success of enforcement by the number of orders issued, inspections completed, or prosecutions pursued. We need to ask whether those activities are actually achieving compliance, how much public money is being*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
20 November 2026
Media Contact: Ty Riches | +1 (289) 808-3515 | toacorn@acorncanada.org

> *spent in the process, and whether there are more effective ways to intervene. If the City's approach is consuming significant public resources while tenants continue living with serious unresolved deficiencies, then we have to examine whether the system itself is working efficiently. This is not just about accountability to tenants. It is also about accountability to the ratepaying public."*
> — Ryan Endoh, Chair, Dawes ACORN Tenants' Association

ACORN's Demands to the Ombudsman:

- A complete review of the City's enforcement history at 500 Dawes Road, including inspections, orders, prosecutions, compliance decisions, and remedial interventions.
- An examination of the January 2025 discharge of the earlier underground garage order and the evidence supporting that decision.
- Verification of whether the outstanding orders and safety concerns, including those relating to the balcony guard system and parking garage area, have been remedied and whether the City has obtained sufficient evidence of compliance.
- An assessment of whether the City adequately considered remedial action and other higher-order enforcement tools when the owner repeatedly failed to comply.
- A review of the City's funding, procurement, staffing, and administrative arrangements for undertaking remedial work, including any operational or financial barriers to its effective use.
- An examination of whether the City's enforcement approach has resulted in unnecessary duplication, prolonged administrative activity, avoidable expenditures, or inefficient allocation of enforcement resources.
- Consideration of whether the City's property standards enforcement operations and remedial-action processes would benefit from an independent audit examining their economy, efficiency, and effectiveness, including whether a referral to the Auditor General of Toronto is warranted.
- Recommendations for a formal escalation framework for persistent non-compliance across RentSafeTO and related enforcement programs.
- Improved coordination, recordkeeping, management oversight, and public accountability across the City's enforcement and housing-support divisions.

> *"Tenants should not have to become ad-hoc investigators, legal advocates, and enforcement monitors just to get their homes brought into compliance.*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
20 November 2026
Media Contact: Ty Riches | +1 (289) 808-3515 | toacorn@acorncanada.org

The City has inspectors, engineers, lawyers, enforcement powers, and the ability, in appropriate circumstances, to undertake remedial work. We need to understand why serious problems can persist for years despite all of those tools being available.

I want to acknowledge the important work Mayor Olivia Chow has done in advocating for stronger building compliance and the use of remedial action, as well as the leadership of City Council in bringing greater attention and focus to these issues. That political leadership matters. Mayor Chow has helped move the conversation towards stronger enforcement and greater accountability. But political direction and Council's stated priorities must translate into action across the City's administration.

Accordingly, the focus of this complaint is not just on what Council has directed, or what the Mayor has advocated for, but on what happens next within the City's bureaucracy. We must now turn our attention to the City's senior administrative leadership and ask whether its divisions, officials, and enforcement structures are carrying out the directions of Council and are enforcing our City's by-laws effectively. Where are the delays occurring? What barriers are preventing available tools from being used? Who is responsible for ensuring that persistent violations are escalated and that remedial work is actually undertaken? These are questions that tenants should not have to answer themselves.

This is about more than the history of one building. Toronto needs an enforcement system that does more than issue orders and prosecute offences. It must be capable of ensuring that the underlying problems are actually fixed, and that tenants are not left living with the consequences of prolonged non-compliance. We recognize the political leadership that has brought these issues to the forefront. Now we need answers, accountability, and action from the City's administrative leadership to make those commitments a reality."
— Ryan Endoh, Chair, Dawes ACORN Tenants' Association

ACORN is asking Ombudsman Toronto to conduct an independent examination, identify any administrative or systemic failures, and recommend corrective measures to ensure that the City's enforcement framework is timely, coordinated, transparent, and effective.

The Toronto Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) is a part of ACORN Canada, a mass membership organization, structured like a union for the community, with over 190,000 low- and moderate-income

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
20 November 2026
Media Contact: Ty Riches | +1 (289) 808-3515 | toacorn@acorncanada.org

members nationwide. ACORN Canada is an affiliate of ACORN International, organizing the working class in more than 20 countries around the world. Learn more at acorncanada.org and acorninternational.org.

The Dawes ACORN Tenants' Association represents tenant residents on Dawes Road in East York and has been organizing around maintenance, property standards, building-safety concerns, and tenant rights.