



## Renter Assistance Programs

**Question asked in the 26<sup>th</sup> Legislature of Alberta, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session by Ms. Laurie Blakeman, Hon. Member from Edmonton Centre, Shadow Cabinet Minister for Health and Wellness**

**May 31, 2007**

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The homeless and eviction prevention fund is a temporary measure designed for renters who need one-time immediate assistance, and it's only good for a month. Everyone else is directed to the municipal affairs rent supplement programs, which are income tested. This program won't help Albertans who are spending anywhere from 40 to 80 per cent of their income on rent but are still not considered low income, so in other words anyone over \$26,000 for a one bedroom or \$33,000 for a two bedroom. My first question is to the minister of housing. What is the government doing to help these Albertans? If there are no temporary rent controls, what else can these renters do?



**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, we do have the temporary support that comes through Employment, Immigration and Industry. What does take place is with the rent supplements we take individuals that have the most need and address those concerns. We did add \$285 million to the budget of housing to address those concerns.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of EII. The homelessness and eviction prevention fund requires renters to either be in arrears or to have notice of eviction from their landlords. Why would this government rather force renters into debt and possibly ruin their credit rating in order to receive support? Why aren't temporary rent caps an option?

**Ms Evans:** The issue of rent caps is something that our ministry is not directly responsible for, but I think there's been quite a significant amount of discussion in this Assembly. Let me just say that we have located 65 people, helping them establish new residence and 273 families – 273 – that have been given assistance to avoid eviction. So we are providing that support and assistance.

**Ms Blakeman:** These programs are not working. They're too narrow. Again, to the minister of housing. Rather than address the rent crisis in this province, this government's short-term solution is to pay landlords the rent that Albertans cannot afford. Why does this government prefer to subsidize landlords rather than implementing temporary rent caps that protect Albertans against unaffordable increases?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this government's solution is making sure that there are more rental units available and that we have some stability in the market and making sure that there are more units that are being built. Also, I want to say that we have changed the program as well to try to accommodate individuals who need to have rent supplement, and we deal directly with those individuals and support them for rent supplement instead of dealing all through landlords.

*Alberta Hansard, May 31, 2007*



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**Question asked in the 26<sup>th</sup> Legislature of Alberta, 3<sup>d</sup> Session by Dr. Bruce Miller, Hon. Member from Edmonton Glenora, Shadow Cabinet Minister for Employment, Immigration and Housing, Affordable Housing Task Force Member**

**May 31, 2007**

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, despite numerous appeals for detailed eligibility requirements for the homeless and eviction prevention fund, the minister responsible still has not made clear whether renters in need of assistance will be income tested or asset tested. Rather the minister claims that this fund has flexibility because the director has discretion on a case-by-case basis. So my question to the minister is: when renters contact any of the 59 Alberta Works offices and seek benefits, what are they going to be told? Given that not all cases will go straight to the director, what guidelines are in place for front-line staff to follow? What are the guidelines?



**Ms Evans:** Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the comments I could make is that family size, family situation, pending employment, these are all things considered. If a worker needs their truck for work, obviously that's not going to be counted as a negative situation because they have that particular asset. I think it's very responsible to enable the workers to look at the individual circumstances that are facing the families. The policy is to give the director flexibility. That director, in turn, can work with the workers that are counselling people on their needs for income supports and provide them accordingly.

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, can the minister assure us that there's going to be fairness here and consistency between offices? I mean, where is the line between discretion and inconsistency here?

**Ms Evans:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member wouldn't be attempting to speak deleteriously about our staff in between the offices. Our staff take the policy and strive to interpret it in the fairest possible way. We recognize the pressures of families. We have spoken to all of the 59 centres assuring them that we want them to be compassionate and considerate of the plights of Albertans. So I'm anticipating that this is a very consistent policy with some kind of capacity for compassion.

**Dr. B. Miller:** Mr. Speaker, we get information from front-line staff that the information they receive from the department one day is different from the information they get the next day. So the question of consistency is really important. I mean, clients are really in need. It's really confusing to them what this program is all about. This government has had plenty of time to come up with and communicate a really clear plan, but Albertans are still confused by flawed and inconsistent programs and policy. Will the minister admit that this government's constant scrambling is impacting services to people in need?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, I think that the 65 families that found new residences and the 273 families that were saved from eviction, they wouldn't say we were constantly scrambling. They would say we are responding. I'd like names, dates, applications that weren't properly dealt with – because that seems to be the inference from the member opposite – so that I can on an individual basis explore them.

*Alberta Hansard, May 31, 2007*