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January 17, 2025

CELA Publication #1609

Submission to Toronto Budget Committee

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**RE: Toronto Budget Committee
Support for Cooling for Low-Income and Vulnerable Individuals**

The Toronto Heat Safety Coalition is writing to support the proposed pilot program to provide air conditioning to vulnerable households in advance of the heat-season in the summer of 2025. The program seeks to provide 425 portable air-conditioning units to low-income families.

Background

Climate change is causing extreme heat to worsen in Toronto. The staff report to address item PH17.5 - Establishing a Framework to Address Excessive Indoor Temperatures in Leased Residential Premises, passed by Toronto City Council in December 2024, highlights the very serious health risks caused by indoor extreme heat. The people most at risk of exposure and health impacts from excessive indoor heat are low-income tenants who cannot control the temperatures in their apartments. Seniors, children, people with certain disabilities, and people taking certain medications are particularly at risk. Social isolation and poor quality housing are also risk factors.

Perhaps most shocking in City staff's report is the finding that there are variations between surface temperatures in different neighbourhoods of Toronto of up to 15 degrees Celsius. The overlap between the people most at risk, and those people living in disproportionately impacted neighbourhoods, is putting some of Toronto's residents further at risk.

We commend the City of Toronto for passing the staff report, which endorses establishing a maximum indoor temperature standard of 26°C to protect tenants from excessive heat, with implementation considerations and next steps to be outlined in a Q4 2025 staff report.



Free Cooling Devices are too Hard to Access

The City of Toronto's efforts to address excessive indoor temperatures are welcome. However, those efforts will not be in place this summer. The current programs available for tenants to access free air-conditioners through discretionary benefits applications under Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program, and the Toronto Hardship Fund, are too difficult to access and require a prescription from a healthcare provider.

Support for Pilot Program for Cooling for Low-Income and Vulnerable Individuals for Summer 2025

We are writing to support the inclusion of a pilot program in the City of Toronto's budget which would provide 425 portable air conditioning units to tenants in multi-family buildings. This is a new program which will help to protect vulnerable individuals from the worst health impacts of extreme heat. It will provide cooling indoors in individual homes, where the risks of extreme heat are highest.

We recommend ensuring that the program is very easy to access and requires only proof of income to be eligible. We also recommend that the program is designed to cover the upfront cost of the portable air conditioner, rather than requiring low-income tenants to be reimbursed for a purchase, as upfront costs are a barrier to access.

The need for in-suite cooling is vast in Toronto. We look forward to working with the City of Toronto to ensure this program is a success. We expect that expansion of this program will be necessary in the coming years, alongside implementation of an indoor maximum temperature standard of 26 degrees Celsius, to protect the residents of Toronto from extreme heat as climate change worsens.

Thank you,

Ty Riches, Toronto ACORN

Kimber-lee Wargalla, Advocacy Centre for the Elderly

Scott Baird, Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario

Robert Latanzio, ARCH Disability Law Centre

Robb Barnes, Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment,

Jacqueline Wilson, Canadian Environmental Law Association

Zee Bhanji, Low-Income Energy Network

Michael Green, Seniors for Climate Action Now! Toronto

Sarah Buchanan and How-Sen Chong, Toronto Environmental Alliance