

Almost one million Canadians petition for rent & mortgage freeze

Written By ALYSSA PARKHILL

When campaigners at Leadnow started a petition due to the high volume of renters concerned about not being able to pay rent by the April 1 deadline, they weren't expecting such an overwhelming response.

Along with a coalition of other organizations, nearly one million people have signed on to the call for rents and mortgages to be cancelled on April 1, until people can safely return to work, said Claire Gallagher, senior campaigner at Leadnow.

Leadnow, Ms. Gallagher says, is an organization that puts together campaigns to build and bring together a united country, community by community. According to their website, We use digital tools and proven organizing techniques to help hundreds of thousands of people take action at times and in the places that matter most. We take direction from our community and look for moments to match their values with an opportunity to make a difference. We're always striving to find new ways to have an impact.

Rent is due April 1. Canadian's concerns of not being able to make payments have motivated them to unite and lobby the provincial and federal government to take action.

The provincial government made it clear that renters and tenants should work together to come up with a solution that works on both ends. Premier Doug Ford continues to encourage renters to pay the amount owed, if they can. Although, the provincial government understands priorities within a household.

If you have a choice between putting food on your table or paying rent, you're putting food on your table. The government of Ontario will make sure no one gets evicted. We stand by that, and we're going to take care of these people, said Premier Ford in a press conference last week.

One Toronto renter and small business owner, Joe Rutherford has his own petition travelling online on change.org to cancel all rent and mortgage payments amid the COVID-19 pandemic with almost 800,000 online signatures.

Cancelling rent and mortgage payments for the duration of the COVID-19 virus pandemic would relieve financial pressure, allow citizens to stay home from work without the added concern of losing their housing and limit the spread of the virus, said Rutherford.

Premier Ford urged residents who continue to work, to pay rent on the first of April claiming, if you have a job, then we expect you to pay rent. This is for the people that just can't afford it. I heard there was a petition going around saying 'just don't pay rent'. That's wrong. That's hurting people across the board. We're standing up for the tenants here so please don't take advantage of it.

Countries such as France and Italy have suspended all rent payments due to the virus spread. Provinces in Canada such as Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia and Nova Scotia have taken one step to protect renters by banning evictions. But is it enough?

According to Ontario.ca, Tenants who pay their rent must do so, to the best of their abilities. Landlords are entitled to collect compensation from a tenant for each day that an eviction order is not enforced. However, tenants who are asked to self-isolate or who can't work may have difficulty paying their rent.

The campaign is supported and in joint effort by ACORN Canada, Change.org, FMTA, BCGEU, Vancouver Tenants Union and North99. The petitions were all sent to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau electronically on Monday, March 30 in hopes to give the federal government an understanding on the concerns and worries of Canadian renters.

‘These are unprecedented times and governments need to do what it takes to help people. What we’re saying is, rather than go to bail outs for billionaires and the oil industry, regular people need to be supported - renters, local business owners, families,’ said Gallagher. ‘We know it’s possible because we’ve seen it happen in other countries like France and Italy who have already cancelled rent and mortgage payments.’

The federal government are providing a ‘one-time special payment’ for over 12 million low and middle-class income families across the country, who are in need of financial assistance. The only issue is, Canadian’s won’t see this payment until the beginning of May.

Bolton resident and small business owner Crystal Larouche claims she didn’t pay her rent because ‘within a blink of an eye, my money stopped. It was rent or food. So, I picked food.’

Canadians now wait with fingers-crossed that Prime Minister Trudeau hears them loud and clear and will put their words into actions.

For more information, visit leadnow.ca.