



Office of the Vice President External Affairs

July 20, 2022

The Honorable Murray Rankin
Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Housing

Re: 2023 British Columbia Rent Freeze

The Alma Mater Society (AMS) of the University of British Columbia (UBC) Vancouver represents over 60,000 undergraduate and graduate students and is incorporated under BC's Societies Act. In our efforts to improve the quality of students' educational, social, and personal lives, we advocate for affordable, accessible, and equitable post-secondary education in BC. As such, we are calling on the provincial government to mandate a Rent Freeze for 2023.

The current maximum allowable rent increase for residential tenancies in BC is the 12-month average percent change in the all-items Consumer Price Index for the province, which means rent can be increased proportionally to inflation. To support British Columbians, the province enacted a Rent Freeze at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was extended until January 2022 when the maximum rent increase was capped at 1.5%¹. However, if the province were to not act given the current British Columbia inflation rate standing at 8.1%², **people will lose their housing**. The rent spikes that will result from a 8.1% rent increase will devastate the most financially vulnerable among us, especially students.

At UBC alone, 57% of students report experiencing financial hardship related to just the cost of housing³. Students have had to make impossible choices between housing, food, tuition, and textbook costs. In fact, 62% of UBC students report high housing costs as the reason why they

¹ BC Government. "Rent Increases". Retrieved from:
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/housing-tenancy/residential-tenancies/during-a-tenancy/rent-increases>.

² BCStats. "Consumer Price Index" June 22, 2022. Retrieved from:
https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/data/statistics/economy/cpi/cpi_highlights.pdf.

³ UBC Vancouver Alma Mater Society. "2022 AMS Academic Experience Survey Report".



Office of the Vice President External Affairs

are worried they might not have enough money to purchase groceries⁴. When comparing AMS Food Bank usage from 2019 pre-pandemic to 2022, usage has increased 7.8 times over⁵.

We appreciate the previous steps taken by the provincial government to address the ongoing housing crisis, including the landmark decision in 2018 to change the rent increase policy to cut the annual allowable rent increase to keep in line with just inflation, rather than 2% + inflation⁶. When announcing this, Premier John Horgan said, “We have to eliminate the risk of such huge increases for renters. Our new approach strikes a balance between giving relief to renters while encouraging people to maintain their rental properties.”⁷. This is still very much the case and we urge the provincial government to continue addressing the growing housing affordability needs of British Columbians.

Rising Housing Costs

Vancouver is one of the most expensive places to live in North America and the top in Canada⁸. The majority of UBC students (58%) live off-campus, which is similar to many other BC post-secondary institutions, meaning that rental prices are critical to a vast majority of students⁹. With inflation putting pressure on all sectors of the economy and many new changes in government policy reflecting post-pandemic readjustment, it is important to keep in mind the still-present effects of COVID-19 on housing affordability. Therefore, it is imperative that the government implement a rent freeze to allow students to fully recover.

While we recognize that the province is currently planning on calculating a rental increase cap based on the average inflationary values over the past 12 months, an increase above 8% could

⁴ UBC Vancouver Alma Mater Society. “2022 AMS Academic Experience Survey Report”.

⁵ UBC Vancouver Alma Mater Society Services. “2007-2022 AMS Food Bank Usage Report”

⁶ Shaw, Rob. “BC considers capping rents as inflation threatens to “shock” renters”. *DailyHive*. June 22, 2022. Retrieved from: <https://dailyhive.com/vancouver/bc-rent-cap-inflation>.

⁷ Shaw, Rob. “BC considers capping rents as inflation threatens to “shock” renters”. *DailyHive*. June 22, 2022. Retrieved from: <https://dailyhive.com/vancouver/bc-rent-cap-inflation>.

⁸ Bernard, Renee & Steacy, Lisa. “Vancouver has Canada's highest average rents, largest annual rate increase: report”. *CityNews*. February 18, 2022. Retrieved from: <https://vancouver.citynews.ca/2022/02/17/vancouver-rental-rates-highest-canada/>.

⁹ UBC Vancouver Alma Mater Society. “2022 AMS Academic Experience Survey Report”.



Office of the Vice President External Affairs

very well still happen. This calculation would lead to the most significant increase in rental prices that the province has seen in two decades, almost double the highest increase of 4.3% in 2012¹⁰. Minister Eby said himself that even if the increase was capped at around 5-6%, a historic high would already be reached¹¹ – pointing to a further need for a rent freeze.

Historical Precedent

During the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government successfully mandated a rent freeze to assist the most vulnerable people in society, including students. The AMS thanks the province for its continuous investments in public post-secondary education, as illustrated in the rent freeze first introduced in March 2020. Moreover, the province has been a leader in supporting its citizens throughout the pandemic, modifying and extending the rent freeze as needed through to January 2022. This allowed the most financially vulnerable British Columbians to continue to be able to house themselves, without added debt or insecurity.

However, as stated, there is still a need for this support to continue. During the pandemic, young adults aged 18-30 years old ranked highest amongst age groups for job loss, where 13% of youth were unemployed. This is a worrying increase from the 2021 7.8% youth unemployment rate¹². Unsurprisingly, 42% of young adults also reported increased financial difficulty post-pandemic¹³. These changes in financial stability are expected to result in an increased number of homeless/temporarily housed young adults in the province. This is all while students are experiencing the added cost of post-secondary education, which only exacerbates their hardships. A rent freeze would significantly support young adults' ability to afford living in the

¹⁰ BC Government. "Rent Increases". Retrieved from:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/housing-tenancy/residential-tenancies/during-a-tenancy/rent-increases>.

¹¹ Shaw, Rob. "BC considers capping rents as inflation threatens to "shock" renters". *DailyHive*. June 22, 2022.

Retrieved from: <https://dailyhive.com/vancouver/bc-rent-cap-inflation>.

¹² BC Centre for Disease Control. "Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Health and Well-Being of Young Adults in British Columbia" July, 2021. Retrieved from:

http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Professionals-Site/Documents/COVID-Impacts/BCCDC_COVID-19_Young_Adult_Health_Well-being_Report.pdf.

¹³ BC Centre for Disease Control. "Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Health and Well-Being of Young Adults in British Columbia" July, 2021. Retrieved from:

http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Professionals-Site/Documents/COVID-Impacts/BCCDC_COVID-19_Young_Adult_Health_Well-being_Report.pdf.



Office of the Vice President External Affairs

province, and it would better protect not only students, but all British Columbians across the province.

The Value of Completing Post-Secondary Education to Students and the Province

Students are in a unique and difficult position— with a demanding and full-time academic workload, they are left with little time to earn income, despite facing additional financial barriers such as rising tuition and food costs. Like most British Columbians who report inflation as a primary cause of concern, students are not immune to the financial challenges that inflationary pressures create and exacerbate. And so without the relief of a rent freeze, many students will be displaced or made homeless, making it near-impossible to continue and finish their education.

In recognizing that advanced education is vital to cultivating labor force growth, promoting upward income mobility, and contributing to the public good of all British Columbians, there is a clear and growing need for a reinstated rent freeze to ensure students and all the other vital members of our workforce and society are protected. This would complement the StrongerBC Economic Plan in working to make life more affordable and ensuring that a properly trained workforce exists for future job opportunities and placements¹⁴. BC's 2021 Labor Market Outlook shows that nearly 80% of projected job openings will require some form of post-secondary education or training, and 48% of these positions will be filled by youth¹⁵. It is now more important than ever to support students' ability to continue their studies and attain their post-secondary degree, all of which is not possible without adequate and affordable housing.

UBC's Housing Model

To further illustrate the benefits of a rent freeze, we point to UBC's Housing Action Plan, approved by the UBC Board of Governors, wherein Policy 11 was specifically created to help address housing affordability concerns for students based on several pricing principles and practices, most notably *"At or below market rental rates; relative to the local marketplace per*

¹⁴ BC Government. "StrongerBC". Retrieved from: <https://strongerbc.gov.bc.ca/>.

¹⁵ Work BC. "BC Labour Market Outlook 2021 Edition". Retrieved from: https://www.workbc.ca/getmedia/c43af36f-f408-4990-9ae1-c5b5f5f7be7a/BC_Labour_Market_Outlook_2021_9MB.pdf.aspx.



Office of the Vice President External Affairs

*CMHC data and peer university across Canada*¹⁶. This model allows UBC to be self-supporting and fully recover costs while also having one of the lowest comparable housing rates in British Columbia despite the area's higher than average rental prices¹⁷.

As the focus of this letter is on housing affordability for students who live off-campus, we believe the province can take a similar stance wherein costs are eventually recovered but not at the expense of students. As will soon be mentioned, there are still protectionary measures for landlords who need them, but through this, financially vulnerable groups are also set up for protection.

The Need for Rent Freeze Generated Protection

While the AMS recognizes that landlords – like all British Columbians – are also facing inflationary pressures, recent changes to the Residential Tenancy Act (RTA) provide greater financial support for landlords. These updated protectionary measures allow landlords to apply for additional rent increases in certain circumstances of financial loss¹⁸, even if the province mandates a rent freeze.

This recognizes that rent increases are dictated by market demand and supply instead of actual cost increases to own and operate a rental property. Landlords, with the value of their property and the fact that many commercial landlords have made excessive profits over the last few years, are more likely to be financially secure than their tenants– which is especially true for young tenants like students. On the other hand, when compounding increases to rent and additional costs of living, it is becoming more difficult for students to thrive and subsequently contribute to the province's economy.

¹⁶ UBC Campus and Community Planning. "The University Community on Campus: UBC's Housing Action Plan" April 19, 2018. Retrieved from:

<https://hr.ubc.ca/sites/default/files/wp-content/blogs.dir/37/files/HAP-Consolidated-Update-April-2018-BoG.pdf>.

¹⁷ UBC Housing and Community Services "2021 Rental Comparison Rates"

¹⁸ BC Laws. "Residential Tenancy Act" June 9, 2022. Retrieved from:

https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/02078_01.



Office of the Vice President External Affairs

British Columbia is undoubtedly a wonderful place to live. However, it is becoming increasingly inaccessible to those that wish to study or begin their careers here. The AMS looks forward to having further conversations with the British Columbian government to ensure costs of living continue to be affordable and accessible for students.

The Alma Mater Society (AMS) of UBC calls on the British Columbian government to mandate a 2023 Rent Freeze, to better protect students and British Columbians alike.

Erin Co

Vice President External Affairs

Alma Mater Society (AMS) of UBC

The Alma Mater Society (AMS) of UBC is situated on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam) People.