



Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Services

E-NEWSLETTER, PANDEMIC EDITION, SPRING 2020

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Jeff Billard, Board Chairperson, Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Services

Greetings to clients, supporters, and friends of Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Services (KBCLS), I'm Jeff Billard, your recently elected board chair. I am very proud to be working with the fantastic group of people at KBCLS who advise, represent, reach out, educate, and develop our community from Bloor to Lake Ontario, from Ossington to Yonge. Can you believe that an office of fewer than 10 people offers services to over 11 square kilometres of downtown Toronto?

We are barely into spring, and what a year it has been! COVID-19 has affected most businesses, communities, and people in one way or another, and Toronto (and the rest of the world) has been adopting a "new normal." Over the past month, KBCLS has worked to shift as many employees as possible to a work-at-home model. This is not just to ensure their safety, but yours as well.

Due to this, as you may have noticed on our website, kbcls.org, all KBCLS enquiries and intakes will be handled by telephone (416-924-4244, ext. 21) or email (kenbst3@lao.on.ca) for the time being. Our services are still available, our incredible KBCLS staff are still able to help you, or help you find the help you need, but the physical office space is not open to the public. And if you call, make sure you have a pen and paper ready to take down notes of important information provided in our voicemail message.

We hope you are staying healthy and positive in these challenging times. The KBCLS board and staff look forward to eventually seeing you in person.

TUESDAY, APRIL 28 JOIN THE ONLINE TENANTS TOWN HALL

Organized by Jessica Bell, MPP, University-Rosedale

Featuring KBCLS Housing Lawyer, Melissa Jean-Baptiste Vajda

Go to: <https://www.jessicabellmpp.ca/onlinetownhalls>

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NEWS DIGEST

RESIDENTIAL TENANTS: EVICTIONS ARE SUSPENDED! (But you are still responsible for the rent)

During the COVID-19 Emergency, the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) is suspending all hearings related to eviction applications, unless the matter relates to an urgent issue such as an illegal act or serious impairment of safety; and the issuance of eviction orders, unless the matter relates to an urgent issue such as an illegal act or serious impairment of safety. Hearings related to eviction applications will not be scheduled by the LTB at this time. As well, limitation periods and procedural time periods relevant to tribunal proceedings are also suspended. The suspension is retroactive to March 16, 2020. The LTB may still hold some hearings by teleconference or in writing. For more information, call 416 645-8080 or [CLICK HERE](#).

CANADA EMERGENCY RESPONSE BENEFIT: DO YOU QUALIFY FOR \$2000 PER MONTH?

Find out if you qualify for the Canada Emergency Responses Benefit. Those who do qualify can get \$2000 a month for up to four months. You need to make sure that you do qualify before applying for CERB because everyone who applies will get it, and then the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) will audit later and take back the benefits from those who did not qualify. You do not want to end up owing CRA thousands of dollars! For more information about CERB, [CLICK HERE](#).

EMERGENCY HELP FOR PEOPLE RECEIVING OW AND ODSP

Call your caseworker to see if you can receive one-time discretionary emergency assistance of up to \$100 for individuals or \$200 for family unit to cover increased costs due to COVID-19, such as buying more cleaning and disinfecting supplies. For more information about Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program, [CLICK HERE](#). Some people receiving OW and ODSP who work, or were working prior to Covid-19, may also qualify for federal emergency assistance under the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). They should see if they qualify. (See above).

ODSP APPEALS BY TELEPHONE

All ODSP Hearings are being done by telephone. We are requesting adjournment if a client has difficulties due to lack of cell phone minutes, language challenges or other personal difficulties. However, Social Benefits Tribunal (SBT) staffs are not granting postponements. Caseworkers have often had to go before the SBT adjudicators to ask for an adjournment. SBT also suggests written submissions as another option to telephone hearings, which is not a popular idea for either side. Case Presenting Officers (CPO) are attending more hearings and we continue to receive notices about CPOs attending future hearings. Thus far, unrepresented clients are often granted adjournments if they contact the SBT themselves and make the request for adjournment in writing.

(NEWS DIGEST, continued on following page)

HOMELESS OR HUNGRY?

Call 211 for information on a shelter or drop-in near you or visit www.tdin.ca to see the Toronto Drop-In Network's list of Open Drop-Ins, Drop-In Meal List, Including Shower, Bathroom, Laundry and Computer Access.

(News digest continued)

WORKERS HAVE RIGHTS!

If you are still working, you need to know that, under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, employers have to keep workers safe. As a worker, you have the right to refuse unsafe work. If you have concerns about your health and safety that your employer is not addressing, you can file a complaint with the Health and Safety Contact Centre at 1-877-202-0008. For more information about your rights as a worker, [CLICK HERE](#). And for information about the Campaign for \$15 and Fairness that is fighting to strengthen your rights and improve your working conditions, visit www.15andfairness.org.

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE MATTERS

The Immigration and Refugee Board is closed to the public and all hearings have been suspended until further (exception for detention related matters). Those who have a lawyer should make sure to contact the lawyer if they have questions or are confused about what is happening with their case.

Basis of Claim forms: If your Basis of Claim form was due between February 15, 2020 and April 15, 2020, the deadline has been extended to May 30, 2020.

Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA): The Reporting Centre at 6900 Airport Road is currently closed to the public. Anyone who has an in-person reporting obligation can do so by email. On the morning you are due to report, you must email all pertinent information such as your name and your client ID number) to: enquiries222@cbsa.gc.ca

Pending Permanent Resident Applications: Applications are still being processed but deadlines to submit requested documents have been relaxed. IRCC is giving applicants 90 days to comply with requests for documents and information. In addition, the IRCC website states, "no application in progress will be closed or refused because of documents missing due to COVID-19".

To manage the outbreak of the corona virus disease (COVID-19), the Prime Minister announced travel restrictions that will limit travel to Canada. Find out how these restrictions affect immigration, refugees, citizenship and passport applications. [CLICK HERE](#) for more information.

Also visit: <https://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en> and:

<https://help.unhcr.org/canada/applying-for-asylum/seeking-asylum-in-Canada-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

**And of course, you can contact us about any of the issues we have mentioned here.
Call 416-924-4244, ext. 21 or email kenbst3@lao.on.ca**

For up-to-date information about Covid-19 and the different levels of governments' responses to the pandemic, please visit:

Toronto: <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/>

Ontario: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/>

Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

WE CAN DO SO MUCH BETTER THAN GOING BACK TO NORMAL!

Tim Maxwell, Community Initiatives and Communications, Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Services

There are millions of people wondering when the COVID-19 lockdown will be over, asking, “When will we get back to normal?” In response, there are a growing number of people calling for a “new normal”, expressing the hope that we will move on to something much better than what we had before the pandemic took so many lives and drastically disrupted our society and the economy.

For our clients and a great many other community members, normal was not so great: Tenants facing renovations and struggling to pay rent; social assistance recipients trying to survive on wholly inadequate benefits, having to visit food banks and drop-ins to eat; workers being deprived of hard-fought-for protections and better wages; immigrants and refugees facing racism and discrimination in housing and employment while being scapegoated for the lack of affordable housing and decent jobs. Just to mention a few examples of “normal”.

Then along comes the death and destruction of COVID-19. Workers are divided between “essential” and “non-essential”. Of course, “essential” does not necessarily translate into more pay, just a requirement to go to work with increased exposure to the virus. Everyone who is not essential is told to stay home, and many “essential” workers who can work at home are encouraged to do so to “stop the spread”.

“Stay home. Wash your hands. Do not touch your face. And if you go outside, stay two metres apart from anyone with whom you do not share a home.”

Those are hard enough directions for most of us to follow consistently, but totally impossible for people who are homeless. You need to have a home to stay home. And you need clean running water to wash your hands. (BTW: Many First Nations communities have been without clean water for decades and remain so even now!) Many of the places where homeless people could wash their hands, like libraries, community centres and restaurants, are closed, along with “park amenities”. They have nowhere to “go”! And if they can get into a shelter, they cannot stay two metres apart from the other people there.

For those who can stay home, we hope that it is indeed a safe place to be. Unfortunately, for far too many women and children, the lockdown has imprisoned them with their abuser.

NOT SAFE AT HOME?

*If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 911. Keep in mind that, according to the **Assaulted Women's Help Line**, you should never talk to anyone about abuse in front of their suspected abuser. Unless she specifically asks for it, never give her materials about domestic abuse or leave information through voice messages or emails that might be discovered by her abuser. However, abuse thrives in secrecy, so speak up if you can do so safely. Call for more information or help anytime, day or night: **1-866-863-0511**.*

For our elders who were not able to go out much before COVID-19, they can no longer expect regular visits from family and friends. And if they are in Long-Term Care, they are, no doubt, terrified as they watch so many around them die a premature, lonely and agonizing death.

With millions of lives affected by COVID-19 all over the world, there are a multitude of individual and collective tragedies being lived out every day and night. While we are often told that “we are all in this together”, some are doing much better than are others.

According to Seth Fiegerman on CNN Business, *“Amazon disclosed ... that the median pay for its employees was just \$28,446 in 2017. Put another way: half of Amazon's employees earned less than that amount. (...) Jeff Bezos, Amazon's CEO and the world's richest man, received a total compensation of about \$1.68 million last year -- or 59 times the median Amazon employee compensation.”* Meanwhile Amazon workers have been striking over serious health and safety concerns in the workplace.

Closer to home, the average wage for Loblaw's workers in Canada in March was \$14.01, according to Payscale.com. With a recently announced temporary increase for working during this emergency that adds \$2.00 per hour, the workers are a far cry away from amassing the kind of wealth held by the Weston family, owners of Loblaw's, Shoppers Drug Mart, and so much more. The net worth of the Weston family is well over \$13 billion dollars.

With millions of people in Canada now unemployed and thousands of businesses closed, the federal government has launched a series of programs to provide emergency assistance to workers and businesses, and, soon, to students as well. The Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) programs have been evolving weekly, as they are found to be leaving too many people ineligible and in great need of support. This has re-ignited the campaign for Universal Basic Income (UBI), with 50 Canadian senators urging the government to restructure the CERB:

According to these senators, *“Restructuring the CERB as a minimum basic income would quickly get support to Canadians in dire straits that need assistance now. Doing so would also free up valuable time and resources needed to craft and implement further changes to the CERB and to renew eligibility of individuals for the CERB in the next months and beyond.”*

(To read the full letter, go to: <https://ubiworks.ca/50senators/>)

However, long-time anti-poverty organizer and Packer Visitor in Social Justice at York University, John Clarke, is one of many opposed to UBI, as it would simply “subsidize” employers paying lower wages. In his blog, Clarke says:

“Confidence in the objective of fighting for living wages and improved public services has been weakened because we have not been able to prevent a move in the opposite direction. So, the notion emerges of simply topping up wages out of public revenues and accepting the proliferation of low wage precarious work. (...) Our only immediate way forward, lies in a struggle for workers' rights, living wages, and strengthened social programmes (including those that provide income support).”

(To read the full article, go to: <http://johnclarkeblog.com/node/37>)

Regardless of whether the CERB evolves into UBI, there will still be millions of working people who will need and deserve decent wages and working conditions, as well as health benefits and paid sick days. UBI will not resolve that issue. Nor will it resolve the issue of our need for safe, secure and affordable housing.

As UBI can be said to “subsidize” employers' lower wages, rent supplements could be seen as subsidizing higher rents demanded by landlords. While rent supplements answer an immediate need for some, they do not build new affordable housing units and give public money for private profit. With a vacancy rate of less than 2 percent in Toronto, we need to build more affordable rental housing. Developers are not building affordable rental housing, so government must, or provide funding to the non-profit and cooperative sector that knows very well how to build and manage decent affordable housing.

In addition to building housing, there is so much more we could be doing than just “getting back to normal”. Business as usual will not be an option for the millions of unemployed workers and thousands of former small business owners who will not be able to restart their closed businesses anytime soon.

One of our local City Councillors, Mike Layton, in an article in The Star (April 21, 2020) lays out an excellent argument for a “new normal”, a “Green New Deal”:

“We can either go back to business as usual, or we can build a greener, more resilient economy that leaves no one behind. The choice we make now will determine how prepared Canada is for the other global crisis: the climate crisis. (...)

As with the current crisis, which hit our most vulnerable the hardest, the climate crisis disproportionately affects seniors, women, BIPOC, and people living in poverty. We must, therefore, ensure our approach to the climate crisis leaves no one behind. This is our opportunity to chart a new course, a transformative path.”(...)

While we need to restart the economy quickly, we must steer the ship in the right direction. If not, the health of our people and planet will not be the only victims of the climate crisis; our economy will be driven once again into chaos.”

(To read the full article, go to: <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2020/04/21/why-we-need-a-green-new-deal-in-the-covid-19-recovery.html>)

An article by Alex Ballingall, published in The Star a few days before Councillor Layton's article, says a majority of Canadians support a Green New Deal:

“A new poll suggests many Canadians support the idea of a huge public spending blitz to address climate change, similar to what politicians in the United States have dubbed a ‘Green New Deal’”.

A majority of respondents to an online poll by Abacus Data — 61 per cent — said they either support or somewhat support such a proposal, described as “a massive government jobs program and investment in clean energy, green technology, and electrification. (...)

Support from respondents inched up to 66 per cent when asked how they feel about the plan if it requires “corporations and the wealthy” to pay higher taxes.”

(To read the full article, go to: <https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2019/04/17/majority-of-canadians-support-a-green-new-deal-poll-finds.html>)

Requiring corporations and the wealthy to start paying their fair share of taxes is a very good place to start the post-pandemic recovery. Then the local, provincial and federal governments will not have to “go back to normal” or worse, austerity on steroids, cutting services and programs that serve the people. We can do so much better than going back to normal!