

THE LEGAL CLINIC HAS TURNED 25!

The Legal Clinic has provided legal services for a quarter of a century as a non-profit charitable corporation funded by Legal Aid Ontario. Our staff have given advice to thousands of persons in Waterloo Region with low income and fought numerous battles regarding tenants' and income support issues. We celebrated our 25th Anniversary on September 14, 2005 in the soup kitchen at the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Kitchener. Turnout was great and many organizations displayed presentations as both clients and members of KW's social organizations attended, along with the local MP and MPP. Dr. Karumanchery, the former chair of the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association's Anti-Racism Committee, was our guest speaker with a most informative and thought-provoking presentation on diversity. We now hope for many more years of successfully serving our community. Do not hesitate to call if your income is low and you need our legal expertise!



RECENT CHANGES IN SOCIAL ASSISTANCE LEGISLATION

Working while on Ontario Works

Starting August 2005, recipients of OW are allowed to keep 50% of net income from a job or combination of part-time jobs they have in addition to their OW benefits. Other exemptions or deductions may also apply (eg. childcare costs). Before August, a flat amount was exempt depending on household size. This means that if you, for example, have a part-time job and make \$500 per month, before August, you could only keep \$143 as a single person as a flat amount. Since August, you are allowed to keep \$250 in this scenario. If you made \$200, however, the old rules left you with \$143 whereas now you would only be able to keep \$100. Several organizations have protested against this policy and some OW workers have spoken out. However, at the moment, this is how benefits are calculated. It is meant to encourage more participation in the paid work force but that is not an option available to all recipients.

Community Start-Up Benefits from ODSP and OW

Before 2005, a recipient of ODSP or OW could apply for community start-up benefits (CSU) every 12 months. The benefit is intended to cover moving expenses, furniture, and a last month's rent deposit. Now, one can only receive these benefits every 24 months unless in exceptional circumstances. For a single person, the maximum is \$799 and, for a person with children, \$1,500. However, OW and ODSP recipients may now be eligible for help from the Waterloo Region Rent Bank for rental arrears and last month rent deposits if their CSU benefits have been used-up. Contact the Rent Bank at 743-2246, ext. 225.

WE CAN HELP WITH:

- Landlord/Tenant
- Ontario Works/ Ontario Disability Support Program
- Workplace Safety and Insurance
- Canada Pension Plan
- Criminal Injuries Compensation
- Employment Insurance

Call us: (519) 743-0254
Must qualify financially

WE CANNOT HELP WITH:

- Family Law
- Criminal Law
- Immigration

For help in these areas, call
Legal Aid: (519) 743-4306

SOMETHING WORTH READING:

The series, "Below the Line" by The K-W Record on poverty issues, appearing for 15 weeks in every Saturday issue. It started on September 10 and will end on December 24, 2005.

SUBMETERING

What is it?

Submetering means that a hydro meter is installed for each unit of a building which allows the landlord to determine how much energy each tenant has used. Based on this information, the landlord can then charge tenants for their hydro. However, such process involves a separate company to monitor the usage and bill the tenants, all for an additional administrative charge as well.

At a time of increasing utility costs, it is no surprise that landlords have been lobbying to have submetering allowed in Ontario by a change to the *Tenant Protection Act*. However, even without any such change, some landlords have installed submeters anyway and tried to impose the system on existing tenants who already have tenancy agreements in which their rent includes utilities. The landlord may offer to reduce the current rent by some amount in compensation for this change and ask the tenants to consent. While some tenants may be able to save under this process, more will not, especially with the added administrative charge imposed. It also removes any incentive for the landlord to improve energy conservation. Tenants cannot improve their building insulation or fix drafty windows or replace old appliances with energy-saving ones. Many tenants also specifically rent a unit in which utilities are included in the rent as their incomes are limited and it helps with budgeting.

What can you do if it happens?

Landlords are not allowed to impose these changes on existing tenants without the consent of the tenant. **Tenants do not have to consent.** If you meet our financial requirements, you can seek advice at our Legal Clinic. You will receive advice, support and access to the most recent legal developments to protect your position. There is also an **information event** being held by RENT on **October 24, 2005 at Room 508, 99 Regina St. S. from 7 to 9 p.m.**, which you can attend if you are interested in the issue and wish to learn how to protect your rights.

Waterloo Region Community Legal Services

170 Victoria Street South, Kitchener, Ont. N2G 2B9

Tel: 519-743-0254 Fax: 519-743-1588 www.wrcls.ca

Office Hours: Kitchener - 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Friday

Cambridge - Monday 1:30 to 4:30 p.m.

- Friday 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

(at Cambridge Self Help Food Bank - 54 Ainslie Street South, Cambridge)

RENT INCREASE GUIDELINE

The guideline increase of rent is determined by the Ontario government each year for January to December of the coming year. The increase for 2006 is:

2.1 %

This means that your landlord can increase your rent by 2.1 % without asking for special permission at the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal. A proper written Notice to you will suffice at least 90 days before the increase is to take effect. This increase is only legal every 12 months. Be aware that this rule applies for most but not all units.

Should your landlord increase your rent by a higher percentage or should you have questions around rent increases, call us for some advice if you meet our financial requirements. Otherwise, call RENT or ACTO; please see their contacts below.

Renters Educating and Networking Together (RENT)

Call Community Information Centre at 579-3800 & ask for RENT

Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO)

Call toll-free 1-866-245-4182

www.acto.ca