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HUMAN RIGHTS

Rejection of tenants violation of code

An Ontario panel says landlords can't turn people away simply because they don't earn enough.

Canadian Press

TORONTO — Landlords who turn prospective tenants away because they don't earn enough money are discriminating against low-income people, the Ontario Human Rights Commission said Monday.

Landlords commonly look at a number of criteria when screening apartment applications, including a requirement that rental payments not exceed 30 per cent of an applicant's income.

But the commission said Monday the practice violates the Ontario Human Rights Code because it discriminates against low-income people, particularly young people, welfare recipients, women and the elderly.

UNREASONABLE: Philip Dewan, president of a land-

Dewan, president of a landlords' lobby group, said the commission's position is unreasonable since landlords are only trying to "minimize their losses."

"To say that a lender should not be able to use normal commercial criteria to decide whether or not a customer can pay for something is quite bizarre," said Dewan, president of the Fair Rental Policy Organization of Ontario.

"Rental housing is no different than any other product — you've got to make sure your customer can afford to buy it."

But tenant groups argue landlords have an obligation to ensure their "product" is available to all groups and that no one is left out.

"They're asking only to be given a chance and to not be ruled out simply on the basis that they happen to be on social assistance," said Bruce Porter, co-ordinator of the Centre for Equality Rights and Accommodation.

He said hundreds of thousands of Ontarians are denied housing because they don't meet minimum income rules.

OBSTACLE: Acting chief commissioner Alok Mukherjee said the practice acts as an "artificial barrier" for some people in their search for affordable housing.

"At this time we have seen nothing but anecdotal evidence to show that demanding a person pay a maximum of 30 per cent of income will give a landlord any greater protection from a tenant not paying the rent," he said.

The commissioners have asked Citizenship Minister Elaine Ziemba to establish a board of inquiry to look into the practice.

It will then be up to the board to rule on the issue, though its decision can be appealed to the courts. Both sides on the debate figure that's where the matter will ultimately be resolved.