

APARTMENTS

Legislation to help Cheyenne tenants

London may direct rent deposits to landlords' unpaid utility bills.

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TORONTO — Help is on the way for a group of London tenants fighting a landlord who won't pay his utility bills, but they could lose their heat and hot water in the meantime.

Legislation introduced at Queen's Park on Tuesday will allow the City of London to direct rent deposits to landlords' unpaid utility bills and recover the money from property taxes.

TOO LATE: But the legislation, sponsored by MPP Irene Mathyssen (NDP — Middlesex), likely won't be passed until May 19 at the earliest,

10 days after a scheduled cut-off of natural gas to two Cheyenne Avenue apartment buildings whose tenants inspired the special legislation.

A Union Gas spokesperson said it's obliged to proceed with the cut-off of gas used to heat water and apartments in the buildings at 95 and 105 Cheyenne Ave. because landlord Elijah Elieff owes the gas company at least \$3,648.

CIVIC INTERVENTION: But Bill Haskell couldn't speculate whether the looming legislation might convince civic and health authorities to step in and pay the delinquent account, as they did this winter when Elieff refused to pay a \$5,000 gas bill.

"I hate to get into scenarios like that," said Haskell, the utility's London customer-information manager. "It would depend on the circumstances."

Landlords are required to heat

their buildings until sometime in May, when outdoor temperatures rise sharply.

Neither Elieff nor London city solicitor Bob Blackwell could be reached for comment Tuesday.

Mathyssen's bill is similar to legislation passed for the City of Ottawa to govern delinquent landlords.

The bill now goes to an all-party committee of MPPs for review, unlikely before May 19 because of tight scheduling, then back to the legislature for second and third reading.

Mathyssen said she hopes local authorities and Union Gas will act to avoid the loss of gas service to the buildings "just knowing the bill's been tabled and a solution is at hand."

TRUST FUND: Civic and health officials had previously said it's unlikely they would step in to settle

Elieff's account. The tenants had been paying their rent into a trust fund rather than to Elieff and, after court permission, had the fund directed to cover Elieff's overdue water and electricity bills.

In March, tenants paid the London Hydro-Electric Commission \$10,000 of an overdue bill of more than \$18,000.

Since then, however, the residents have decided to stop paying Elieff's accounts and to disband their fund.

Haskell said Union Gas had no claim on the fund, and the money flowing into the trust wasn't enough to cover Elieff's outstanding gas bill anyway.

Besides utility bills, Elieff also owes the city about \$28,000 in unpaid property taxes from 1992 and 1993.