

A FAILURE TO PROTECT, THE DENIAL OF CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO HOUSING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, A LEGAL LITERATURE REVIEW

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This legal research review used case law databases, legal research journal databases, Google Scholar, the University of Victoria library resources, and governmental legislation. Our thanks to law student Gemma Walsh for this work in 2021, which was also updated to reflect subsequent legislative changes in British Columbia.

Case Law Findings:

The case law denotes various tribunal rulings and decisions regarding the general right to be free of discrimination due to family status (as indicated in British Columbia's Human Rights Code). In the vast majority of cases the plaintiffs were either adult family members or boards and insurance agencies acting on behalf of the adult family members. There was no indication that any cases have been tried that speak directly to the child's right to housing. There are a few possibilities for this outcome. The first being that it would be unusual for a child to be a plaintiff in a case, and therefore the nature of the child's right to housing is not what is directly being addressed. The second is that children's right to housing is not explicitly covered under any legislation. Children seem to be grouped under family (and potentially sex/gender). The Human Rights Code does protect against age discrimination, but as per s.1, age is defined as 19 or older. By this definition, children are not protected from age discrimination with regards to housing.

However, there were tribunal cases from varying jurisdictions across Canada demonstrating that the right to be free from discrimination due to family status is one that is recognized across Canada. At the time of this research there were no cases (with regards to housing and family status) that had been appealed or accelerated to a higher level of court. This may further explain why children's legal right to housing is not explicitly covered in the legislation.

Legal Research Journals Findings

There was a lack of research on the indicated topic. Most articles would discuss why proper housing was important for children, but not what their legal entitlements to housing were. Most of the research was outdated, tangentially related, and often from outside of Canada entirely. The research seemed to be more related to psychological and sociological concepts as opposed to legal concepts.

Legislation Findings

Various forms of legislation seemed to be at odds with one another. Though the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified, these rights don't appear to have been subsumed or explicitly added to any form of legislation. As mentioned above, British Columbia's Human Rights Code does not protect anyone under 19 from age discrimination. Though it does appear to place limits on age restrictions in rental properties, when cross-referenced with the provincial Assessment Act, it appears that most properties fall within the definition of "prescribed forms of residential premises" and therefore age-based discrimination is lawful on these properties.

LEGAL PROVISIONS

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Convention on the Rights of the Child text | UNICEF

- Article 16: 1. No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his
 or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her
 honour and reputation
- Article 16: 2. The child has the right to the protection against such interference or attacks
- Article 27: 1. States Parties recognize the right of every child to a **standard of living** adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development

Human Rights Code, [RSBC 1996] c 210

Human Rights Code (gov.bc.ca)

- fs.10(1) A person must not
 - o (a) deny to a person or class of persons the right to occupy, as a tenant, space that is represented as being available, or
 - (b) discriminate against a person or class of persons regarding a term or condition
 of the tenancy of the space,
 because of the Indigenous identity, race, colour, ancestry, place or origin, religion,
 marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation,
 gender identity or expression, age or lawful source of income of that person or class
 of persons, or of any other person or class of persons
- s.10(2) Subsection (1) does not apply in the following circumstances:
 - o (b) as it relates to family status or age,
 - (i) if the space is a rental unit in residential premises in which every rental unit is reserved for rental to a person who has reached 55 years or older or to 2 or more persons, at least one of whom has reached 55 years of age, or
 - (ii) a rental unit in a prescribed class of residential premises
 (The impact of this clause is rather hidden, requiring finding the related acts Assessment Act & Strata Property Act)

*NOTE: As of s.1 – age means an age of 19+; therefore children are NOT protected by their age and seem to only be protected under family status

Assessment Act, Prescribed Classes of Property Regulation

Last amended October 24, 2022

Prescribed Classes of Property Regulation (gov.bc.ca)

Class 1 — residential

1(1) Class 1 property shall include only (...), but **not including**:

- 1(1)(a)(iii): a strata accommodation property (...)
- 1(1)(a)(iii.1): a strata accommodation property in a strata plan or contiguous strata plans (...)

Strata Property Act, [SCB 1998] c 43

Table of Contents - Strata Property Act (gov.bc.ca)

- 121(1)(c) A bylaw is not enforceable to the extent that it prohibits or restricts the right of an owner of a strata lot to freely sell, lease, mortgage or otherwise dispose of the strata lot or an interest in the strata lot.
- 121(2)(c) (*Previous wording*) Subsection 121(1)(c) **does not** apply to a bylaw restricting the age of persons who may reside in a strata lot.
- 121(2)(c) (November 2022 amendment) Subsection 121(1)(c) does not apply to a bylaw under section 123.1(2) that restricts the age of persons who may reside in a strata lot.
- 123(1.1) (Previous wording) Without limiting a strata corporation's power to pass any other bylaws. A strata corporation may pass a bylaw that restricts the age of persons who may reside in a strata lot.
- 123.1(1) (November 2022 amendment) Except as permitted by subsection (2), a bylaw must not restrict the age of persons who may reside in a strata lot.
- 123.1(2) (November 2022 amendment) The strata corporation may pass a bylaw that requires one or more persons residing in a strata lot to have reached a specified age that is not less than 55 years.
- 123(2) (*Previous wording*) A bylaw that restricts the age of persons who may reside in a strata lot does not apply to a person who resides in a strata lot at the time the bylaw is passed and who continues to reside there after the bylaw is passed.
- 123(2) (November 2022 amendment) A requirement in a bylaw for one or more persons residing in a strata lot to have reached a specified age does not apply to any of the following persons:
 - (a) a person who meets all of the following criteria:
 - (i) immediately before the bylaw was passed,
 - (A) the person resided in the strata lot, and

- (B) by residing in the strata lot, the person was not contravening any bylaw restricting the age of persons who may reside in the strata lot;
- (ii) the person continues to reside in the strata lot after the bylaw is passed;
- (b) a caregiver who resides in the strata lot for the purpose of providing care to another person who
 - (i) resides in the strata lot, and
 - (ii) is dependent on caregivers for continuing assistance or direction because of disability, illness or frailty;
- (c) a person in a prescribed class of persons.

Ontario Human Rights Code

Human Rights Code, R.S.O. 1990, c. H.19 (ontario.ca)

- 10(1) In Part I and II: "age" means an age that is eighteen years or more.
- Part 1, Accommodation, 2(1) Every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to the occupancy of accommodation, without discrimination because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status, disability or the receipt of public assistance. R.S.O. 1990, c. H.19, s. 2 (1); 1999, c. 6, s. 28 (2); 2001, c. 32, s. 27 (1); 2005, c. 5, s. 32 (2); 2012, c. 7, s. 2 (1)."
- 4(1) Every sixteen or seventeen year old person who has withdrawn from parental control has a right to equal treatment with respect to occupancy of and contracting for accommodation without discrimination because the person is less than eighteen years old. R.S.O. 1990, c. H.19, s. 4 (1).

Canadian Human Rights Act

Canadian Human Rights Act (justice.gc.ca)

Prohibited grounds of discrimination

- **3 (1)** For all purposes of this Act, the prohibited grounds of discrimination are race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, disability and conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered.
- Idem
 - **(2)** Where the ground of discrimination is pregnancy or child-birth, the discrimination shall be deemed to be on the ground of sex.

BOARD AND TRIBUNAL DECISIONS – BC CASES

NT by HST v. Daljit Sekhon and others, 2019 CarswellBC 2816, 2019 BCHRT 201 HUMAN RIGHTS TRIBUNAL DISABILITY CASE SUMMARIES AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 2019 | Law, Disability & Social Change (lawdisabilitysocialchange.com)

Facts: HST filed complaint on behalf of his minor son (NT) alleging that their landlords discriminated against him due to his disability (Cerebral Palsy). Frequent rent increases were imposed (33% over 2 years and 4 months), various forms of harassment, and served notice to vacate. Family moved to a nearby home, but rent was an additional \$1000/month. Complaint was filed stating that landlord's behavior was discriminatory contrary to s.10 of the BC *Human Rights Code*.

Analysis: Evidence accepted that NT has disability and he was adversely impacted by the behavior of the respondents. There may be some hardship in accommodating someone's disability, but unless that hardship imposes an undue or unreasonable burden, it yields to the need to accommodate (*VIA Rail* at para 122.). Reasonable accommodation is satisfied where the respondent could not have done anything else reasonable or practical to avoid the negative impact on the individual (*British Columbia (Public Service Employee Relations Commission*) v B.C.G.E.U. at para 38). Evidence shows that there was no accommodation — therefore does not meet threshold of reasonable accommodation. Evidence further demonstrates that harassment led to eventual eviction.

Remedy: Appropriate remedial order is set out in s.37 of the *Code*; an order under s.37(2)(a) is mandatory when the Tribunal finds that a complaint of discrimination is justified. This is not a punishment – it is intended to put NT in the position he would have been had the discrimination not occurred. The tribunal has the discretion to award a complainant an amount to compensate for injury to their dignity, feelings, and self-respect under s.27(2)(d)(iii) of the *Code*. Generally, the nature of the discrimination, the complainant's vulnerability, and the effect on the complainant will be considered.

Access to safe and adequate housing is a core human need – this was recognized in *James obo James v. Silver Campsites and another (No. 3)*, 2012 BCHRT 141.

Considerations were taken regarding NT's age, the nature of his disabilities and his resulting profound vulnerability, the escalating level of discrimination, and the impact of such discrimination. A sum of \$10,000 were awarded as damages.

Valdez v. Bacheli and another, 2020 CarswellBC 401, 2020 BCHRT 41

Facts: Valdez lived with husband and son in a one-bedroom apartment. After giving birth to her second child, the respondent objected to the size of the family in the apartment. The family moved two weeks after the second child was born because of the respondent's persistent harassment and pressure to leave.

Analysis: The burden is on Valdez to prove that the respondents treated her adversely regarding a term or condition of her tenancy, and that the family status was a factor in that adverse treatment. The respondent offered the complainants a one-bedroom (after meeting them when the complainant was 5-months pregnant) because there were no two-bedrooms available.

In the housing context, the protection from discrimination based on family status "exists to protect families, and others who may be screened out of tight housing markets, from being unjustifiably excluded from safe and secure housing (*Abernathy v Stevenson*, 2017). But for the respondent's conduct, the complainants would have stayed in the apartment.

A landlord may justify a maximum occupancy policy, and where they do so, there is no violation of the *Code* (*Abernathy*): to justify such a policy that adversely affects families, the landlord must show that they adopted the policy in good faith, for reasons related to the maintenance and use of the unit. They will have to prove that it was not adopted arbitrarily, and that it is a reasonably necessary restriction that cannot be modified without the landlord incurring undue hardship.

Remedy: The complainants seek compensation for expenses incurred by the discrimination and damages for injury to dignity, feelings and self-respect. A sum of \$9,000 was awarded as compensation for injury to dignity, feelings, and self-respect, and a sum of \$1,923.56 was awarded as compensation for incurred expenses.

BOARD AND TRIBUNAL DECISIONS – OTHER PARTS OF CANADA

Dudnik v York Condominium Corp. No. 216, 1991 CarswellOnt 568

Facts: An "adult-only" condo was found to infringe upon s.2(1), 3 and 8 (family status), and age discrimination under s.9(1)(a) of the *Human Rights Code*.

One appellant (S) was unable to complete a condo sale because she would be moving in with her 13-year old son, which was contrary to the age restriction.

Analysis: The board found that the definition of age in s.9(1) of the *Code* was unconstitutional and not saved by s.1. Therefore, all complainants had been impacted by the discrimination of the condominium.

Remedy: Complainants were only awarded remedies by reasons of their losses arising out of the infringement they suffered under s.2(1) of the *Code*. S and her son were awarded \$1000 and \$500 respectively.

*NOTE: This case was decided in Ontario and it is an older case – I included it because it was referenced in the two cases above and is therefore still good/persuasive law. This case was an appeal from the decision of the Ontario Board of Inquiry – Human Rights.

Ceccanese v. Taylor, 2020 CarswellOnt 17099

Facts: The applicant alleged discrimination with respect to occupancy of accommodation (housing) because of family status and age. The applicant viewed an apartment with her two children, and was told by the respondent that he would not be renting his apartment. She later saw the apartment listed again as "suitable for seniors". He told the applicant that it was too small for three people and a dog.

Analysis: The applicant has the onus of proving that she received such treatment due to her family status and/or age. The applicant is in a parental relationship with her children, therefore the ground of family status is engaged. There appeared to be no issue with renting to the applicant until the respondent learned of her children. The apartment was a 2-bedroom; and therefore the pretext of renting to a single person is illogical.

Remedy: The applicant drove a significant distance to view an apartment in the expectation that she would arrange to rent it. Later stating that it would not be rented to her because of her family status is upsetting and insulting. This would result in a serious affront to one's dignity, feelings, and self-respect. The applicant was awarded \$2,000 for injuries to the dignity, feelings, and self-respect.

*NOTE: This case was decided in Ontario,

Richardson and Galbraith, Re, 2021 CarswellMan 3

Facts: The complainant alleged harassment and was a tenant of the property. She alleges that during the course of her tenancy, Galbraith harassed her on the basis of her age, sex, and pregnancy contrary to s.19 of the *Code*.

The complainant met with Galbraith to view the apartment and told them she had a one-year old daughter and was raising her younger sister. Galbraith claimed that the complainant's children were too loud. The complainant later became pregnant, and Galbraith called her a whore and made racially motivated comments about her unborn children.

In March 2017, Galbraith left a handwritten note on the complainant's door indicating a next day rent increase. The harassment increased, in part due to a friend of the complainant's who lived in the building whose child had recently been placed with the complainant, and Galbraith shoved the complainant. Galbraith left a note on the complainant's door telling her to move out under the pseudonym of "upset tenant".

Analysis: There were at least 14 separate occurrences of a harassing nature, and therefore the tenancy was poisoned. These incidents are contrary to the prohibition against harassment in s.19 of the *Code*. The *Code* provides protection against a poisoned home environment.

Remedy: Because the respondents were in contravention of the *Code*, s. 43(2) affords discretion as to the remedy. The complainant was awarded damages of \$15,000 for injuries to the dignity, feelings, and self-respect. She was also awarded special damages of \$388 – related to losses incurred from moving and storage.

*NOTE: This case was decided in Manitoba

Cunanan v. Boolean Developments Ltd., [2003] O.H.R.T.D. No. 17

Facts: The Commission alleges that Maria Cunanan has been subjected to discrimination in the occupancy of accommodation on the basis of family status and on the basis of her relationship or association with persons identified by the prohibited ground of age, contrary to subsection 2(1) and section 12 of the *Human Rights Code*, R.S.O. 1990, c. H-19, as amended ("*Code*"). As well, the Commission alleges that Ms. Cunanan has been subjected to reprisal, contrary to section 8 of the *Code*.

Ms. Cunanan applied for an apartment and was told she would probably be rejected because she had three teenaged children. Mr. Lee told Ms. Cunanan that her application was lost, she could not fill out another, and to "go get another".

Analysis: At the hearing, it was Mr. Lee's evidence that he makes the decisions regarding prospective tenants and that he has never discriminated against anyone for any reason,

including family status. Although Mr. Lee presented himself as a forthright person, I have trouble accepting the second part of his statement. For example, Mr. Lee admitted in his signed witness statement dated September 25, 2001 (Exhibit 7) that when deciding who is better for a unit, he looks at the number of people who are going to occupy the unit, and would "go by: one bedroom for a couple or single; two bedroom for a couple and one child and three bedroom for a couple with two children": a principle that he considers to be a "Canadian standard". Although he might rent a three-bedroom apartment to a person or couple with three children, he would only do so if the children were "very young", or if "the children are young and the parents are new-comers", although even then the family would "have to move to [a] bigger unit" after a year. The fact that Ms. Cunanan did not have an "ideal family" affected his rental decision because a family containing three teenagers would not be "suitable"; and if both an "ideal" family and a "non-ideal" family were to apply for the same apartment, he "would not bother to consider" the application from the "non-ideal" family.

Remedy: The sum of \$4000 for the loss arising out of the infringement of Ms. Cunanan's rights, and a cease and desist from refusing to rent an apartment to a tenant with teenagers for the reason, or any part thereof, that the tenant has teenaged children.

*NOTE: This case was decided in Ontario.

Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse v. Cloutier [2004] Q.H.R.T. No. 2

Facts: A young pregnant couple was looking for a home to rent. They visited a home and were told they were second on the list. Having never heard back, they assumed the home was rented to the first family. They saw the house was again for rent and called and stated their intention to rent the house. The landlord refused to rent to them without valid reason. He later admitted that he preferred to rent to aged people and was worried about any accidents that might happen to the child on the premises and in the vicinity of the home.

Analysis: The landlord's actions were contrary to the *Code* provision holding that an owner cannot refuse, because of biases or stereotypes, to rent to prospective tenants on the basis of a discriminatory ground. The tribunal concluded that the complainant was denied the opportunity to avail herself of her priority on the list of potential tenants, and that she and her spouse were excluded because of their age and the child they would have had during the rental period.

Remedy: The defendants were ordered to pay \$3000 in moral damages.

*NOTE: This case was decided in Quebec.

ARTICLES AND SECONDARY SOURCES

United Nations Human Rights: Office of the High Commissioner
The Right to Adequate Housing

FS21 rev 1 Housing en.pdf (ohchr.org)

- Homelessness has particular effects on children, compromising their growth, development and security. Homeless children can be vulnerable to a range of emotional problems, including anxiety, sleeplessness, aggression and withdrawal
- Forced evictions tend to affect the entire family but have a particular impact on children. Following forced evictions, family stability is often jeopardized and livelihoods threatened. The impact of forced evictions on children's development is considered to be similar to that of armed conflict.

More Than Wishful Thinking: Recent Developments in Recognizing the "Right to Housing" Under s.7 of the *Charter*

Windsor Review of Legal and Social Issues, Scott McAlpine (2017)

• A Harper government reduction in the health care protection of refugee claimants coming to Canada was found unconstitutional by the Federal Court in that it violated s.12 of the *Charter* subjecting "affected individuals ... to "treatment" as contemplated by s. 12 of the *Charter*, and that this treatment is indeed "cruel and unusual" ... [and] potentially jeopardize[s] the health, and indeed the very lives of these innocent and vulnerable children in a manner that shocks the conscience and outrages our standards of decency."

Carol N. Chodroff "Children's Need for Safe Housing" (2004) 24 Child. Legal Rts. J. 2.

Thesis: The article posits that the need, and the right, of all children to have a safe home triggers an affirmative duty by courts to help secure safe homes for poor children and for court-involved children and youth.

"Safety connotes not merely physical safety, but a state of wholeness, or well-being" – at p. 3

"Children can also find international protection for their right to safe housing. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes and protects children's rights, including the right of every child to 'life, survival and development' and to a standard of living adequate for positive development" – at p. 4

"In Schall v. Martin, the Court authorized preventive detention for juveniles, explaining that 'juveniles, unlike adults, are always in some form of custody.' The theory that juveniles are 'always in some form of custody' might trigger a constitutional obligation to provide protection (in the form of safe housing) to juveniles" – at p. 4

*NOTE: This is an American article

Amy Clair, "Housing: An Under-Explored Influence on Children's Well-Being and Becoming" (2018) 12 Child Ind Res 609.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324383147 Housing an Under-Explored Influence on Children's Well-Being and Becoming

"The established relationship between housing and adult outcomes makes a relationship for child outcomes likely through both direct and indirect pathways." – at 611

"Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach to human development posits that children develop alongside their environments, and emphasizes the significance of children's experiences and perceptions of their environment to their well-being." – at 611

"... the important role of housing in accessing other important public services, such as its gatekeeping role in accessing schools, health care and public transport." – at 611

"The causal pathways for direct influences of housing, such as the impact of poor quality housing on health, are likely to be similar for children and adults. The impact of damp on respiratory conditions, for example, has been found to affect children and adults. Similarly, high housing costs will crowd out spending on other essentials, including food and educational resources, with implications for children as well as adults. Children are aware of and affected by family financial difficulties" – at 611

"A paper found negative impacts of moving, but it may be explained by the stressors that caused the moves rather than the moves themselves." – at 612

"It may be that as children get older and become more aware of their local environment and have established friendship groups, for example, they have more to lose from residential mobility." – at 612-613

"Moves can disrupt the relationship between children and health care." – at 613

"They highlight the importance of treating school moves and residential mobility as different events, and found an increased risk of high school dropout among movers, although proactive changes to schooling early in high school could have protective effects on the risk of drop out." – at 613

"Residential mobility is a clear example of where housing may exacerbate existing disadvantage." – at 614

"Housing insecurity, operationalized as having experienced eviction or homelessness or multiple moves in the past year, is associated with increased risk of child neglect." – at 614

"Tenure is less important than home quality for child outcomes." – at 615

"A homeownership effect on cognitive performance was found for white and Hispanic children but not for black children." – at 616

"Emotional and behavioral problems were more common among doubled up children than housed low-income children, but there was no increased risk of physical health, mental health, cognitive development issues or health care usage." – at 617

"Poor quality housing is often treated as a form of child neglect." – at 617

"Housing quality was the most important of the housing measures considered in terms of impact on child outcomes." – at 617

"Better housing affordability is associated with better health and grade retention for 6 to 11-year olds. For older children, aged 12-17, positive effects were found for health, behavior problems, grade retention, and school engagement, suggesting that housing affordability difficulties have wider ranging impacts on older children." -618

"In the UK there is evidence of the positive effects of housing support more generally." – at 620

"Research has found significant impacts of homelessness on children, including increased risk of chronic health conditions, undernutrition, development delays and problems with cognitive function, as well as reduced likelihood of receiving vaccinations." – at 620

*NOTE: This is an article from the UK/US

Catherine S. Taylor, "Children's Right to an Adequate Standard of Living" (2002) 22:2 Child. Legal Rts. J. 17.

"The U.N. Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) states the right of the child 'to adequate nutrition, housing, recreation and medical services,' again in the context of enabling the child to develop 'physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially.'" – at 18

"The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that there is no fundamental constitutional right to the necessities of life such as food, shelter and education." – at 19

"In this country, the primary responsibility for providing an adequate standard of living for children falls on the parents." – at 19

"Among the nation's children, certain groups are more likely to be poor: young children, minority children, children in single-parent families, children in young families, and children in rural families." – at 20

"In many cases, families will only be able to afford decent housing and adequate food and clothing with an income of twice the poverty line." – at 20

*NOTE: This is an American article

Susana Sanz-Caballero, "Children's rights in a changing climate: a perspective from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child" (2013) 13 Ethics Sci Environ Polit 1. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289552469 Children's rights in a changing climate A perspective from the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child

"As far as the right to housing is concerned, the Human Rights Council has expressed its view that the right to housing is correlated to the right to an adequate standard of living. In the Convention on the Rights of the Child the right to adequate housing is enshrined within the right to an adequate standard of living, together with the right to nutrition and clothing in Article 27." – at 6

"The CESCR has defined the right to housing as the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity. It has also expressed its view that the expression 'adequate housing' is determined partly by social, economic, cultural, climatic, ecological and other factors." – at 6

"Families suffer difficulties in acceding to private housing because of xenophobia, unemployment, uncertainty about their income, or lack of legal documents.

*NOTE: This article is from Spain