

# Self-Advocacy: Getting What You Need

## Before You Call - Tips for Getting What You Need

Many of the services or people that may be able to help receive a very large number of calls or complaints each day. It's a good idea to get prepared before you call to increase your chances of getting what you need.

- **Know What You Need:** People need to know how they can help you and what exactly you need. It is best to figure out what kind of help or solution you are seeking before you call. For example, if you are having an issue with mould, what solution are you looking for – to move out? To be financially compensated? To have the issue fixed? To have your Landlord reprimanded? Before you call for help, think about exactly what help you need and write it down.
- **Specific is Terrific:** Before calling for help, gather all the information you may need to provide. This could include your address, your Landlord's name and contact information, any file or application numbers you have, and details about dates and times of issues you are experiencing. The more information you can provide up front, the faster your issue may be resolved.
- **Keep Records:** You may not get your issue resolved on the first try. Having a written record helps you keep track of your efforts and issues you've experienced, and can also help you hold others accountable. It is a good idea to keep either a digital or hand-written record of all incidents or calls, when they happened, and who was involved. Keep this record safe.
- **Don't Give Up:** You are your own best advocate! Follow up if you have left messages that have not been returned or if someone has not done something they said they'd do. It is important to hold public service officials accountable. If an issue is important to you, don't give up.

## Who to Contact

If you have housing issues that your landlord will not address, there are services that may be able to help. The Landlord and Tenant Board has the authority to manage disputes between Tenants and Landlords, but they do not usually act quickly and there are limits on what they can assist with. Some of the services below may be able to get you what you need faster.

- **Bylaw Offices:** Local bylaw offices may be able to assist when your landlord refuses to abide by local bylaws. This could include issues like electrical, plumbing, or building safety; fire safety; yard/snow maintenance; mould or pest issues and more. Bylaw officers can be contacted through your municipal government (see contact info in renter's guide). Note that for serious safety issues, the bylaw office may take steps to remove all occupants from a home.
- **Rental Housing Enforcement Unit (RHEU):** The RHEU is part of the Ministry of Housing (Ontario). If your Landlord has locked you out illegally, or has threatened to lock you out, or has cut off your heat, water, or electricity, you can contact the RHEU for urgent help. You can call them at 1-888-772-9277.

- **Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority (RHRA):** The RHRA is a regulator that ensures the safety and well-being of seniors living in retirement homes. They can respond to complaints from residents or family members who are concerned about resident rights or harm to residents. You can call them at 1-855-275-7472 or visit their website at <https://www.rhra.ca/en/>
- **The District of Muskoka:** If you are facing imminent homelessness, the District of Muskoka has many resources available. Please call the District at 705-645-2100.
- **Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP):** Housing is an issue that is shared across municipal, provincial, and federal governments. The MPP is your representative at the provincial level of government. The MPP's office can help you access provincial services, such as the Landlord and Tenant Board or Ontario Works.

The MPP can also schedule time to hear your concerns about housing or any provincial service. It is very important that our MPPs stay informed about our local housing issues. The current MPP for Parry Sound-Muskoka is Graydon Smith. You can reach his Bracebridge office at 705-645-8538.

- **Member of Parliament (MP):** The MP is your representative at the federal level of government. The MP's office can help you access federal government services, like EI or CPP, and can also hear your concerns about community issues like housing. The current MP for Parry Sound-Muskoka is Scott Aitchison. You can reach his Huntsville office at 705-789-4640.
- **The Police:** Muskoka is served by the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP). If your landlord or another tenant is harassing or threatening you, damaging your property, or causing safety concerns, you can call the police. Please note that police records can be hard to get – if you are calling the police, it is a good idea to keep your own very detailed records (police badge number, incident number, time you called, time of arrival, etc.). In an emergency, dial 9-1-1 for immediate help. For non-emergency situations, call the 24-hour OPP line at 1-888-310-1122
- **Ombudsman of Ontario:** The Ontario Ombudsman is an independent government office that resolves complaints about government and public sector services, including municipal governments and the Landlord and Tenant Board. They are considered the “office of last resort”, or the place you go when no other service has been able or willing to address your concerns. They can take a variety of actions from attempting to resolve the issues between parties, to service referrals, to formal investigations. You can call the Ombudsman's office at 1-800-263-1830.