

May 10, 2024

Kim Langille
Legislative Committees Office
One Government Place, 2nd Floor
1700 Granville Street
via email: kim.langille@novascotia.ca

Dear Ms. Langille:

I am pleased to respond to the question raised at the Public Accounts Committee meeting on Wednesday, April 24, 2024, with respect to Review of Social Support Programs.

My answer to the question is as follows:

Question

Women and children fleeing domestic violence are prioritized on the waitlist. What is the average wait time for this specific demographic?

Response

The Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency (NSPHA) prioritizes access to public housing for individuals and families experiencing family violence, including women and children. In November 2023, in consultation with the Departments of Justice and Community Services, the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women and Halifax Regional Police - Victim Services Unit, we improved the application process to ensure we work more closely with community resources so that victims of family violence are better supported as they wait for NSPHA housing. From November 2023 to March 2024, NSPHA provided housing to 18 households under this priority access stream. The average wait time for these households was 7.3 months. Wait times vary based on the location of applicants and their specific housing needs.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to share more information about the work we are doing to meet the urgent housing needs of Nova Scotians who are victims of family violence.

Sincerely,



Byron Rafuse
Deputy Minister

Received LCO
May 15, 2024

May 15, 2024

MLA Lorelei Nicoll, Chair
Standing Committee on Public Accounts
Legislative Committees Office
1700 Granville Street
One Government Place, 2nd floor
Halifax, NS B3J 1X5

Dear MLA Nicoll:

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on Wednesday, April 24, 2024. My colleagues and I appreciated the opportunity to share information about our programs and the work we are doing to support Nova Scotians.

In follow up to that meeting, I am pleased to share the following information as requested:

1. *Does the department track the average rental costs for income assistance recipients year over year? If you do track, what is the average rental cost for the recipients this year compared to last year? If you don't, how can you ensure recipients can afford to pay their rent?*

The Department of Community Services implemented Standard Household Rate (SHR) in 2020 to make the process simpler for Nova Scotians who need help to meet basic needs. With the introduction of SHR, the Department no longer tracks actual rental expenses in our case management system. SHR is provided to clients based on the accommodation type and family size.

2. *We understand income assistance recipients can also receive support for security deposits when they move into new apartments. Are there limitations to that program?*

Individuals may be eligible to receive supports for security departments if there are health and safety concerns or if a move can be made to more economical accommodations. The Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA) Program Policy (section 8.2.32) states that only one security deposit will be provided equal to the lesser of half the actual rent amount or half the applicable SHR. The Policy does provide for subsequent security deposits on an exception basis for health and safety reasons, however some exceptions may include the additional security deposit being paid on an overpayment basis.

3. *Is there a cap on additional supports for income assistance recipients transitioning from being unhoused to housed?*

When a person is transitioning from unhoused to housed, the ESIA program will move the recipient from SHR-Essentials to SHR Board, Rent/Own, Enhanced (as appropriate). There are provisions in the ESIA Program Policy for moving expenses (section 8.2.22), security deposit (section 8.2.32), and some essential furniture items (8.2.14). Each of these provisions have parameters in terms of what can be supported. For instance, an individual may be eligible for moving expenses up to a maximum of \$200. Sometimes additional support over the prescribed amounts may be approved depending on the individual's circumstance, however they might be approved on an overpayment basis.

Our goal at Community Services is always to help our clients to achieve independence and we will continue our efforts to ensure our clients' success. We are always assessing how we can improve our programs, placing the needs of the clients at the centre of this work. We appreciate the opportunity to share this work with the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cathy Maclsaac". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Cathy Maclsaac
Associate Deputy Minister

cc. Kim Langille, Committee Clerk, Standing Committee on Public Accounts
Suzanne Ley, Executive Director Employment Support and Income Assistance