BILL C-400

Talking Points

Suggested responses to concerns that may arise in discussions with MPs

1. "The Government is already doing a lot. We have made significant investments in housing programs and we have bilateral agreements with provinces"

This may be true, and yet we still have approximately 300,000 – 400,000 people moving in and out of homelessness in Canada and 1.5 million households who lack secure housing. We need a long-term, coherent framework to get the full benefit of government programs.

2. "I don't think this Bill has any chance of passing"

There is no reason this bill should not be supported by Parliament. MPs from every party unanimously voted in favour of Motion M-331 on May 9 2012, where they confirmed that the federal government "should **(a)** keep with Canada's obligation to respect, protect and fulfill the right to adequate housing as guaranteed under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; **(b)** support efforts by Canadian municipalities to combat homelessness; and **(c)** adopt measures to expand the stock of affordable rental housing, with a view to providing economic benefits to local housing construction businesses."

Bill C-400 represents the next step. It's about implementing this commitment by engaging with different levels of government and stakeholders to figure this out. Bill C-400 provides a human rights framework: it brings together multi-stakeholders; it focuses on those who are most vulnerable to homelessness; it includes measurable goals and timelines to end homelessness; it ensures built-in monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

3. "We have lots of housing programs why do we need Bill C-400?"

Bill C-400 is not a housing program. It is the first step in implementing an affordable strategy to implement the right to adequate housing. It ensures a coordinated and coherent response to the housing and homelessness crisis that engages a range of programs and involves all levels of government.

4. "We can't afford this – it will cost billions"

Bill C-400 is not a "money bill". As a private member's bill it cannot allocate federal funds without Government approval. The cost of the housing strategy would depend on how the strategy is designed in collaboration with other governments and stakeholders. We know, however, that addressing homelessness and inadequate housing in Canada would save governments significant amounts of money.

Acting on homelessness is not just morally responsible, it's fiscally responsible:

- By the federal government's own estimates, every $1 invested in housing reaps a net benefit of $1.40 to the Canadian economy (spurs growth, jobs, increases productivity, etc)[1].
- Homelessness alone costs the Canadian economy $4.5 billion each year (cost of emergency shelters, hospital visits, policing, lost productivity, etc.)
- Estimated annual costs (per person, per year) for:

  - Institutional responses (prison, hospitals, etc): $66,000 - $120,000
  - Emergency shelters: $13,000 - $42,000
  - Supportive and transitional housing: $13,000 - $18,000
  - Affordable housing (without supports): $5,000 - $8,000[2]

5. "Isn't housing a provincial responsibility?"

Bill C-400 does not suggest that the federal government is solely responsible for housing programs. It simply acknowledges that we need everyone at the table (including municipal, provincial, Aboriginal, non-profit and private housing providers, and other stakeholders) working in a coordinated way, and that the federal government alone has the ability to pull all of these groups together.

The federal government has recently passed other legislation that demonstrates it has a role to play on critical national issues. Why would housing be any different?

a. National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking (Bill C-310) – April 2012
b. Federal Framework for Suicide Prevention (Bill C-300) – December 2012

1. Canada's Economic Action Plan: a 6th report to Canadians, September 2010, p. 42 (http://www.fin.gc.ca/pub/report-rapport/2010-09-27/pdf/ceap-paec-2010-09-eng.pdf)
2. Homeless Hub http://www.homelesshub.ca/ResourceFiles/costofhomelessness_paper21092012.pdf

6. "We don't need another meeting on housing. We need action on the ground"

Bill C-400 is not just about holding a meeting. It is action oriented; it's about the federal government rightly assuming its leadership role and it's about implementation. Homelessness is a blight on the reputation of a wealthy, stable nation like Canada. Bill C-400 provides a plan of action to return Canada to its status as one of the best places in the world to live – for rich and poor alike.

7. "Why would we want to support an NDP housing bill?"

Bill C-400 is non-partisan. It benefited from input and amendments from all parties at the Committee stage when it was debated in the previous parliament.

Bill C-400 doesn't pre-suppose a particular sort of housing strategy. By providing the lead, the federal government would have the opportunity to shape the outcomes. Existing programs that have proven effective could become part of the strategy.

Supporting Bill C-400 now allows it to go to Committee where it can benefit from further input from all parties. At Committee there will be an opportunity to make constructive amendments that are consistent with the purpose of Bill C-400 to respect, protect, and fulfill the right to adequate housing as affirmed by all Parliamentarians in their vote in May on Motion M-331. The sponsor of the bill, MP Morin, has indicated she is willing to work with all parties to bring a bill to third reading that all parliamentarians support.