

British Columbia

New legislation to allow B.C. tenants to terminate leases in case of 'household violence'



Tenants can end their fixed-term lease if staying in the unit threatens safety or security

CBC News · Posted: May 30, 2019 11:29 PM PT | Last Updated: 9 hours ago



Tenants in B.C. can end their fixed-term lease if staying in their suite is a threat to their safety or security. (David Zalubowski/Associated Press)

A law change that would help renters at risk from domestic and intimate violence passed third reading at the B.C. legislature Thursday.

The amendments to the Residential Tenancy Act, introduced by Green Party MLA Andrew Weaver, would allow tenants to end a fixed-term lease if staying in their suite poses a threat to

their safety or security.

The changes build on the existing provisions in the act originally introduced to help victims of family violence. The changes include new language — "household violence" — which covers physical, sexual, emotional or psychological abuse by anyone that occupies a rental unit against another person.

"It expands on the [existing] provisions ... and gives, for example, someone who is sexually assaulted by their roommate or neighbour the right to break their lease so that they can move to a safer home," said Weaver at the introduction of the bill.

The amendments also broaden who can verify whether a tenant is being victimized. In addition to the police, those who can vouch for a tenant include medical practitioners, counsellors, First Nations support workers and victims support workers.

According to the non-profit organization Ending Violence Association of British Columbia, there are approximately 60,000 incidents of sexual and domestic violence in B.C. every year.

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