

Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods **Scary Legislation**

In the spring of 2007, the provincial government passed a bill we find very troubling. Despite community opposition, government approved the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods (SCAN) act. This legislation authorizes the courts to throw people out of their homes, even women and children who have not broken any laws.

Government officials advertise this legislation as an alternative way to deal with “unsafe activities” in our neighbourhoods. They say shutting residences down will be more effective than going after individuals. But we’re not convinced.

So far, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador cannot point to evidence showing this approach works. A handful of other jurisdictions have adopted this legislation but none have produced any stats on declining crime rates. No one knows whether the people evicted give up the problematic activities or simply move to a new neighbourhood and continue with business as usual.

Despite its unproven effectiveness, this legislation will come at great cost to some of our citizens. What is disturbing about SCAN legislation is that it by-passes the criminal justice system and over-rides the Residential Tenancies Act. It also by-passes their safeguards, which were put in place to make sure everyone gets a fair shake. Under SCAN, people can be evicted, even if they have not done anything illegal.

When a residence is shut down, everyone living there will have to go. That includes innocent by-standers, many of whom will be women and children living in poverty. The government says it will find alternative housing before evicting them, but as community advocates have tried to point out, there is no emergency housing available. Our shelters are full.

In other regions, SCAN legislation has no known effect on crime rates. Yet we do know it violates people’s civil rights. People who have the least resources to fight back will be the ones affected by this legislation. It is women and children living near or below the poverty line who suffer most if their building is targeted.

To date, this bill has not come into effect. Though it passed in the House of Assembly, it has not become official law. We're hoping our government will follow the Northwest Territories' lead and decide not to adopt this legislation. In the meantime, the Advisory Council will continue to voice its opposition.

This link will take you to the NL legislation:

www.hoa.gov.nl.ca/hoa/sr/