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Ministers say feds working to stabilize immigration levels amid housing pressures

Nojoud Al Mallees || January 12, 2024

Housing Minister Sean Fraser and Immigration Minister Marc Miller say the federal government is working to stabilize the number of people entering the country every year as housing pressures mount.

The Canadian Press reported Thursday on internal documents from 2022 showing Immigration Department employees warned their deputy minister that a major increase in immigration could affect access to housing and services.

The federal government ultimately decided to increase the number of permanent residents Canada welcomes each year to 500,000 in 2025 – nearly double the amount from 2015.

In a joint statement Friday, the Liberal ministers are defending the decision to boost immigration levels, arguing immigration supported Canada's post-pandemic recovery.

"Had we not increased immigration post-pandemic, the economy would have shrunk. Businesses facing an acute labour shortage would have closed. The social services Canadians needed, including in health care, would be further delayed or even more difficult to access," the statement said.

But Miller and Fraser also say housing pressures have pushed the government to adjust its immigration targets as well as temporary resident admissions.

Miller decided to level out the number of permanent residents coming to Canada at 500,000 for 2026, the same number as 2025.

The Liberal government also made changes to the international student program to address issues around fraud and the cost-of-living challenges.

The Liberal ministers say the federal government is ready to take more action if post-secondary institutions don't ensure international students' housing needs can be met.

"We expect learning institutions to only accept the number of students that they are able to house, or assist in finding off-campus housing. We are prepared to take necessary measures – including significantly limiting visas – to ensure that

designated learning institutions provide adequate and sufficient student supports as part of the academic experience,” the statement said.

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, who has been heavily critical of the Liberals over their housing policies, said Friday that the government should calibrate its immigration policy to match the pace of homebuilding in the country.

“Common sense Conservatives will get back to an approach of immigration that invites a number of people that we can house, employ and care for in our health care system,” Poilievre said. “Obviously, you need to build homes if you’re going to bring in people. And right now, we’re not building enough homes.”