



EDITORIAL

A sensible solution to Ontario's elevator problem: Editorial

By Star Editorial Board

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As many Toronto condo dwellers can attest, our city's transit problems are not limited to the horizontal. "The elevator," as the journalist Nick Paumgarten once wrote in *The New Yorker*, "is to the city what paper is to reading and gunpowder is to war." Yet if the success of a vertical metropolis depends on the proper functioning of its elevators, we may be in trouble.

As our dependence on elevators has increased, the rules around how many a building must have and how often they must be repaired have not kept pace. Across the province, elevators are failing at an alarming rate. Yet the oligopoly of multinational companies that dominates the industry has little competitive or regulatory incentive to move quickly to fix them.

In Toronto, in particular, where the number of elevators has increased by around 10 per cent over the last five years, what goes up does not necessarily come down – and, under the current law, there’s not much residents or property owners can do about it.

That’s the impetus behind a [sensible new private member’s bill](#) from Liberal MPP Han Dong, who represents Toronto’s elevator-rich Trinity-Spadina riding. Tabled last week, the Reliable Elevators Act would require that broken elevators be fixed within a week in long-term care facilities and retirement homes and two weeks in other residences. Contractors who fail to meet those deadlines would be subject to public shaming, or even prosecution.

The act would also mandate that applications for new building permits include an elevator-traffic analysis. This is a common-sense corrective to the obviously deficient current rule: a building of at least seven storeys must have at least one elevator.

Inadequate elevator access is more than an inconvenience. For older residents or people with disabilities, it can be a life-altering accessibility issue or even a health hazard. In 2014, the lone elevator at a long-term care facility in Clarington, Ont., died, leaving 88 residents stuck on the second floor for more than two months.

“To take elevating lightly is to risk dooming a building to dysfunction and its inhabitants to a kind of incremental purgatory.” That’s Paumgarten again, and he’s not being overly dramatic. In Ontario, the government has taken elevating too lightly for too long, at a cost to quality of life, accessibility and health and safety.

At Queen’s Park, the government and both opposition parties have expressed openness to Dong’s proposals. Private member’s bills rarely pass. This one ought to be an exception.