

Community Support and Services Committee

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 30 June 2021 9:30 PM
To: Buderim Electorate Office
Cc: Community Support and Services Committee; Minister for Communities and Housing
Subject: To Community Support and Services Committee (CC my local MP): Submission on the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 and the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation (Tenants' Rights) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021

Dear Brent Mickelberg MP,

Dear the Community Support and Services Committee, cc my local MP -

I'd like to comment on both the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 and the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation (Tenants' Rights) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to share something with you: a snapshot of what it's like to rent in Queensland.

And I would also like to request that my name and personally identifying information be kept confidential.

I'm a 36 year old mother of two children aged 15 and 10.

I'm writing to you to highlight the impacts of the tragic rental crisis in Queensland at present. I want you to read my words, and I mean REALLY read my words, let them sink in, let them make you feel what we feel and, hold on to them for a while after you finish reading them. Because these thoughts and feelings are tormenting us 24/7 right now, and we don't see any light at the end of this dark tunnel we are being forced into.

I moved out of home when I was 16 years old and have been renting ever since in both QLD, and NSW. Never once, in that 20 years have I been evicted from a rental property, nor did I ever skip a rent payment. I have never caused damage to a property, and always been refunded my bond. During that time, I have paid approximately \$400K into the pockets of property investors. At no point did my level income ever affect my ability to rent a home in the affordable parts of Australia that I've lived in over the years.

I have been renting here on the Sunshine Coast since 2008, and after quite an unstable start to their life, my children finally now have strong foundations here including their schools, soccer club, Muay Thai gym, social circles and familiar places and memories.

I currently rent a 4 bedroom home in [REDACTED] for \$520 per week through an agency just outside of town. My 2 children and I share our home with my older brother who pays one quarter of the rent (\$130 per week,) which makes my share of the rent \$390 per week, which I have been diligently paying since well before I had my additional employment income.

We have been renting this property for 10 months, and our lease is due to expire in June this year.

About 8 weeks ago, we were advised that the landlord will be moving in to the property, therefore we will not be able to renew our lease in June as we had intended. Common story for most renters at the moment. Am I right? I've heard stories of landlords using this excuse as a means to get the tenants out 'without grounds,' only afterwards the evicted tenants see the home listed at a much higher price! I can only hope that my landlord has a heart and is an honest human being, and if not, I'd rather not know about it.

Since receiving this news, I've been keeping my ears to the ground and my eyes peeled for anything and everything containing the word 'rental', and what I have found instead of a cosy home like I usually do, is disturbing to say the very least. In addition to a market flooded with overpriced short term rentals, I find a long, long list of sad stories told by vulnerable people being forced into circumstances that only make them more vulnerable.

The saddest stories are of people with chronic health issues and or from low income households being forced out of their homes into a desolate rental market.

There are also stories from THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE, STABLE LONG TERM TENANTS, claiming that they have just received increases of almost 50%!!!!!!???

One lady has a son receiving brain surgery, and he will be recovering in a tent during the first month of Winter, as she cannot find a rental due to owning an 8 year old dog, even though her past references are in favour of her pet, and there is no evidence to suggest that her dog has or will be problematic in any way.

Another family comprising of a single mum and her children, are living in a tent that is not weather proof. They are frightened and alone. Unacceptable.

I'm sure you've heard about all of the tent cities where working, voting, taxpaying residents are living in their cars, campers, cabins, tents, so that they can stay local and still fulfil their schooling and employment commitments. Unacceptable.

Why can we see homes advertised online, for almost up to \$200 per week higher than the previous rental price?

Why are we allowing people to BID on rental properties rather than regulate a fair playing field where listing price is final price for all? Why are prospective tenants allowed the advantage of offering A YEARS RENT IN ADVANCE rather than the typical legislated 2 weeks?

With eviction hanging over us, I have begun applying for homes close to work and school only to be consistently rejected due to the 30% rule. The rule that specifies an application cannot be approved if the rent is greater than 30% of the applicant's income according to local real estate agencies.

Rental prices have increased, but pay rates have not. 5 years ago, 30% of our income got us a suitable home for the size of our family in an affordable suburb outside the major cities.

Today, for 30% of my income, in this area I would be lucky to score a single room in a share house with a bunch of strangers and be forced to bunk up with my teenage son, my pre teen daughter - sadly our beloved family pets would be so far out of the picture it's devastating.

So, I'd like to know this...

What gives property managers the power, the right, to STRIP us of OUR RIGHTS, as ADULTS, to CHOOSE where WE spend OUR INCOMES? Why do they have the power, to decide for us, whether we eat a more affordable diet, purchase clothes from an op-shop, ride our bikes instead of purchase fuel and pay car related costs, or whatever avenues we wish to take in order to save OUR money, so that we can spend whatever freaking percentage we choose to on our rent to live in a place where we are established and connected?

I was told by [REDACTED] from [REDACTED], that I need to just relocate. I need to just pack up our lives, and relocate. I no longer have the right to live here in the town that I call home, because people who HAVE NEVER CALLED IT HOME are being accommodated before me. He also announced his obviously scripted spiel, in 2 separate conversations this month, about how he knows of a couple who both have full time employment in Caloundra, they couldn't afford to BUY in Caloundra, so instead "were forced to" buy a home in Caboolture and commute to Caloundra for work each day. He told me that across the board, "people are in the SAME BOAT"! What kind of insensitive person, speaking on behalf of SOCIAL HOUSING mind you, and communicating with the most vulnerable people within our community, tells a renter living from paycheck to paycheck, a single parent, a person with no capacity to borrow, stripped of their rights to make their own choices, that a dual income couple who are financially well enough to PURCHASE a home, are in the SAME BOAT? That couple never had to consider the reality of being homeless and alone in a tent at night. Or the reality of getting kids ready for school from a car. Or booking an old caravan in a notoriously dangerous caravan park. Or surrendering their beloved family pets. IF THEY COULD NOT BUY A HOME, THEY WOULD BE THE VERY PEOPLE OFFERING COPIOUS RENT IN ADVANCE AND MORE THAN ADVERTISED RENT AND BEING APPROVED BEFORE ANY OF US Dear [REDACTED] renting is not a choice for most of us. Renting is the inferior option of the two housing choices. Buying a property is not unfortunate, it is a luxury and a privilege. We are not all privileged. We are desperate and facing being WITHOUT A HOME, hence the purpose of the entire existence of your service!!! Sincerely, long-term renters everywhere.

How is it that one realtor can specify that the rent cannot be more than 30% of a tenant's income, and another allow up to 40%? Not much of a 'rule' it would seem, but a means to discriminate against people on low to moderate incomes and drive property values higher by locking poorer people out of certain areas, which leaves vulnerable people displaced, and ultimately creates a huge socio economic divide in this 'lucky' country. Lucky for some.

I am now forced to rent a home in a town I've never even been to, one that has an excessively high crime rate and unemployment rate, just so that I can stay under the 30% threshold that SOMEONE ELSE uses to control MY MONEY.

Moving to a home in a suburb further away from work and school etc. actually means my expenses are going to be HIGHER than if property managers were to let me simply rent in my home town. It will cost an additional \$150-200 per week on fuel to get to and from the Sunshine Coast for work, to take my kids to school and their other extra curricular commitments in order to provide at least an inkling of stability in their already upside down lives. This completely contradicts the 30% rule. Which clearly isn't a rule because... Living in a town where I don't know anyone, have NO family or social support, don't feel remotely SAFE, won't be getting any sleep for all of the above reasons, and have to drive 3 - 4 hours each day costing an additional \$150-200 p/w that (I'm fully prepared to spend on rent rather than travel)... costs more financially, regardless of the cost to the mental health and safety of me and my children but hey, it beats homelessness and living in tent city. Or does it?

This is OUTRAGEOUS!

What a major MAJOR disappointment.

Let's now talk about mental health, THIS IS GOING TO KILL PEOPLE. THIS IS GOING TO BREAK PEOPLE, IN FACT IT ALREADY HAS. THIS IS GOING TO FORCE PEOPLE INTO SUBSTANCE ABUSE! Which is only going to cost taxpayers more money in mental health and welfare programs. When real estates will only rent to dual income families, we have families who have to rely on child care facilities to raise their children, so that both parents can work. Unfortunately, good morals and values aren't a main focus in these facilities as much as they would be instilled by loving, nurturing parents, and additionally these kids, when they reach school age, are then left unsupervised after school for a few hours free to run amok without guidance or consequence. The Sunshine Coast is quite literally breeding future delinquents, the polar opposite to what the region is aiming for via the ride discrimination and exclusion of single parents, stay at home parents, and low to middle income earners.

The government needs to take IMMEDIATE urgent action to minimise the impact of housing affordability on citizens:

- Limit rental increases, INCLUDING BETWEEN TENANTS to protect tenants from being kicked out and homeless, just so greed can prevail.
- Ban rent bidding. Listing price is the FINAL PRICE.
- Ban realtors and landlords from accepting MORE THAN 2 WEEKS ADVANCE RENT.
- MANDATE changes to the 30% rule in line with REAL LIFE incomes and rental prices.
- INCREASE RENT ASSISTANCE in line with current rental increases to prevent those on lower income from being displaced and socially isolated.

It's not that hard is it? But you know what is?? FACING HOMELESSNESS AND SEVERE FINANCIAL HARDSHIP BECAUSE YOU ALL JUST SIT ON YOUR HANDS AND REFUSE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THIS CRISIS AND TAKE ACTION AGAINST THIS DISCRIMINATION OF LOW TO MODERATE INCOME EARNERS AND SINGLE INCOME FAMILIES!!!

It's been devastating for us. We have gone from being an active, outdoors, sociable family, to being complete hermits because we don't know anyone nor do we feel safe in our new region.

There have been multiple shootings and armed robberies since moving in only weeks ago, and the Crimestoppers info is larger than the 'Welcome to the Moreton Bay Region' text on the town welcoming sign. My kids have had to stop Muay Thai, and my daughter can't attend soccer training as I can only afford to travel up to the Sunshine Coast once a week now. I've had to quit my job, as I couldn't afford to drive there every day, and my son is now at home with me tutoring him during school hours each day. We've been threatened with police prosecution by [REDACTED] since my son can no longer attend, and I'm too afraid to send him to the high school here as he's always been a target for bullies with his behavioural and academic challenges, so I'm tutoring him at home. And his mates from the sunny coast aren't allowed to visit us, because the area has such a bad reputation.

I feel like our whole life is just in limbo. I cry every night, wishing I had the power to give my kids their happy, safe, lives back. But, like the majority of renters now, I'm completely powerless.

In its current form, the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 will do little to improve my situation as one of the 1.8 million renters in Queensland. While this bill may be palatable to the real estate lobby, it completely disregards my experience as a renter.

While I'm pleased that the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill includes positive provisions for renters experiencing domestic and family violence, it contains little other reforms of substance for renters.

I urge the Queensland Government to take this opportunity to amend this bill and to implement real rental reforms that will make renting in Queensland affordable, secure and fair.

It's crucial that rental reforms in Queensland include:

- A genuine end to 'no grounds' evictions – providing tenants with long-term security in their homes without the risk of an unfair eviction at the end of their lease
- Allowing tenants to make minor modifications, like hanging picture frames or installing furniture safety anchors
- A real ban on rent bidding – banning agents and property owners from accepting amount above the advertised rent for a property
- Expanding minimum standards to include ventilation, cleanliness and insulation
- Stopping unreasonable rent increases by tying rent increases to general inflation (CPI)
- Ensuring prospective tenants have fair and honest information about the property
- Banning inappropriate or discriminatory questions by lessors
- Make it easier for tenants to have pets – by flipping the onus on property owners/agents to demonstrate why it's unreasonable for a tenant to have pet

These provisions are included in the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation (Tenants' Rights) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. I urge the government to either support the Tenants' Rights Bill, or amend its own bill to provide real protections for renters.

Yours sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.