

Community Support and Services Committee

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, 1 July 2021 9:21 PM
To: South Brisbane 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 Amy MacMahon 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.

Please redact my name from this submission.

In February this year I moved out into a student accommodation house near my campus as a Griffith University student. Due to COVID-19 there was a steep decline in international students in Brisbane so the real estate agent was very excited for me to move in. I was keen too as the property was very close to my campus.

Everything was fine until three weeks into my four month lease I received a call from the real estate agent. I remember the day clearly because it was the day the Brisbane lockdown was announced in March and I was stressed about the impact this would have on my studies. The agent abruptly told me that he would be forced to terminate the lease and I had four weeks to move out. I was shocked. I asked why and he said the owner was experiencing financial difficulties and that he'd managed this sort of situation before and would send through the paperwork shortly.

The abruptness of the call was distressing in itself, but myself and the other housemates did not receive any further information for three days. Left in limbo during a lockdown, we all became extremely anxious at the prospect of having to move in the middle of semester. The point of living in student accommodation was to avoid this very situation as leases run by semesters.

Three days later we received an outdated lease termination form and a vague email that gave us little information other than asking for sympathy towards landlords. At this point I called the RTA for advice and they advised that our leases could not be terminated without a QCAT order unless we wanted to leave. The housemates and I then composed an email conveying our sympathy for any financial struggles the owner was facing, but also passing on the advice from the RTA that we had the right to reside until the end of our leases unless they had a QCAT order.

At this the real estate agent responded with emotional anguish that he would be taking us to court immediately and made several inappropriate comments around us living in the house without power or hot water. The aggressive emails continued so I was forced to call the RTA repeatedly for advice. They encouraged us to respond politely but firmly if we wished to stay and quote the legislation.

This continued for some time, with the agent making aggressive threats. Then one day a few weeks into the turmoil I was sitting on our balcony drinking coffee with a visitor when the agent came into the house. He became confrontational and began yelling that my visitor was trespassing and that he was going to call the police. There are house rules in student accommodation, but having a guest at 10am did not break any of these rules. After this

confrontation I was extremely anxious in the house and couldn't sleep or spend time in the common areas without fearing his arrival.

At this point he also began sending breach notices to myself and another housemate for unpaid rent despite the fact that our rent was both paid on-time and via an online system that his office required us to pay for so that they could track our payments. We called the RTA and they advised that according to the legislation we had paid our rent and the breach notices were null and void. At this point I applied for a formal dispute resolution via the RTA which the agent refused to take part in. He continued to threaten to take us to QCAT until the dispute resolution request, when he suddenly fell silent.

Next week my lease is up and I will be forced to move to a new student accommodation due to a "no grounds" eviction. The whole experience was extremely stressful and now I cannot use this agent as a rental reference as I imagine he has ill feelings towards me despite the fact that I always paid rent early and kept the house very clean.

I wish there was a formal way to make a complaint against real estate agents. He was obviously trying to bully us out of the house before our lease had run out, and I am still not sure why.

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,

