
From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 7 July 2021 7:25 AM
To: Maiwar 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 Michael Berkman 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.

Hello

I'd like to begin with my gratitude for the opportunity to be heard by people who have the power to represent myself and others in my position.

I have recently broken my lease due to my landlord and property managers decision (I have no direct contact with my landlord - my property manager is the conduit between us and as such, upholds decisions made by my landlord)

I made the decision to break my lease in response to my landlords refusal to allow my profoundly Deaf son a Hearing Service Animal in our rental property.

This is a decision I could have fought through Anti Discrimination channels, or sought legal advice.

I have decided to leave the property, with preference given to a fresh start, due to the stress this situation has caused me.

As the single mother of a child with a disability, I have found this last year incredibly difficult.

My former rental property (former as of the 9th of July - three days away) has been a financially crippling experience.

My rent is 380.00 per week. This is 790.00 per fortnight, my Carers pension is 1300.00

I pay water costs on top of this, as part of my Annexure agreement.

As my rental property is within an embedded network (for utilities) I could not access the HEAS hardship payment to ease my financial burden when I lost my casual job due to Covid19 last year.

This is because my reticulated gas is sold to me as “ a hot water account “ which is not covered by the HEAS payment (for which I met all other eligibility criteria)

I consulted [REDACTED] to request my bill be itemised into reticulated gas costs and water costs, seperately, for my HEAS submission.

[REDACTED] told me they could not give me this information as my embedded network provider (owned by the Body Corporate) was their client, for privacy reasons.

[REDACTED] bill me on their behalf.

I contacted my Body Corporate to request this information (also to ensure I am not being double billed for water - I pay Utility Water bills quarterly - I am billed for water usage in kilalitres and also for maintenance costs)

I wanted to ensure this as my hot water account is above what I believe it should be.

No clarification or transparency was provided by my Body Corporate - I was told that when they requested access to this information from [REDACTED] replied that they could not share this information for privacy reasons as my account was itemised usage billed to my premises - and I am the account holder.

In response to this I called the QLD water and electricity ombudsman - to which I was told I am not represented, as they do not cover embedded network clients in QLD.

I was told to call EWOK, who advised I call The Department of Fair Trading.

I didn't. I was exhausted.

I set up my outstanding hot water account in a financially crippling repayment scheme, which I have honoured.

Another example of this type of powerlessness and under representation was the Covid19 Household Relief payment which the federal government released in late March, 2020.

This relief payment was not applied to my electricity account (or any tenant or homeowner within our gated community) until late November last year.

I appealed multiple times to both [REDACTED] (our embedded network) and to our Body Corporate to apply this subsidy to my current billing, (which was falling into arrears due to acute financial hardship)

Please note that my rent was always on time - I did not fall behind in rent despite the immunity afforded within a National moratorium.

I regularly accessed charity organisations to make ends meet, with food and fuel vouchers - the main ones relied upon, Communify, in Bardon, had shut down completely and stayed shut, for months.

They directed me to call St Vincent De Paul or The Salvation Army instead.

No other food and resource hubs were open to me - hubs will not service people outside of their postcode catchment area.

St Vincent De Paul responded, as did Nexus Care in Enoggera.

This is how I survived when I lost my job to continue paying my rent.

I did not qualify for any hardship payments as I received a Carers Payment.

I would have moved to the outer suburbs where rent is cheaper - years ago - if not for the fact my Deaf son attends a bilingual Auslan school in Toowong.

We are catchment area exempt, and I receive a transport allowance, but I remain close to his school because his therapies after school are all within our local area.

During the lockdown last year, my little boy required emergency services (whom I called for assistance) multiple times, for extreme tantrums - which I was powerless to diffuse.

Although I have managed to help him learn how to manage his behaviour better with the help of an extensive support team (OT, psychologist, speech therapist inclusive of but not limited to) and, been successful - the stigma attached to us from that era has caused my (live on site) property manager to shadow us with a suffocating level of intrusive surveillance and correspondence, ever since.

It was recommended I serve a breach notice (by the RTA) when I observed him photographing my private veranda at close quarters - regarding curtains I had hung for privacy (my entire veranda wall is made of glass and our living room can be observed through both the glass walls and the glass veranda doors)

I hung curtains on my veranda using a curtain wire wrapped around two opposing support beams - no nails were used. I secured it to the H beam in the ceiling using bulldog clips.

The curtains were bought for this purpose and new. Clean, matching. Tidy. Cut to length, floor to ceiling drop.

I had saved up for these and bought them especially when Spotlight had a sale on.

After I questioned my property managers intention in photographing my veranda, I was asked by him to remove them " as it was against the by laws " to hang curtains.

Please note - this was in response to all the trees which had previously afforded me a small measure of privacy, being cut down.

When I expressed my disbelief and displeasure to my property manager that he had photographed (in) to my home (as the whole veranda is see through - he also photographed over the top of a privacy wall) - he responded by saying the garden alongside is a common area, as is the outside of my home, and he had breached no legislation (the RTA disagreed)

I could give you multiple examples of similar intrusion... but the point I am trying to illustrate is that I believe this type of harassment was retaliatory in nature due to my young sons disruptive episodes during the lockdown.

Essentially ... I have been intimidated and bullied into giving up my lease.

These are the reasons why... at least, how it appears to me.

I requested in writing no inspections were to ever take place within my home without my supervision.

The following inspection notice, I missed, in my emails and was unaware of the date (they give 7 days notice)

Although they live on site, no effort was made to deliver a hard copy to my letter box or to text me, to ascertain whether I received an entry notice.

I previously stated in my email outlining my boundaries of supervised requests when my female property manager (his wife) excessively photographed my entire home, including our possessions (in context of entire rooms)

In our first inspection... my young son had an anxiety attack.

This was in response to me being questioned about a small dent in the wall by the property manager.

I was also accused of " damages to property " which were (inarguably) routine maintenance.

Inclusive of this was a window in my sons room which the plastic lock had fallen off (in my hand while I was closing his window) ... my use was without force, it was just not fit for purpose and needed maintenance.

I was told (in writing) " that I had shut the window too hard " and would be charged for the repairs" (I had submitted a list ready for the inspection)

Other repairs included a loose toilet seat, a small decorative bolt cover which had come loose from the porcelain and a door stop (which was internally threaded) coming loose from a door.

I fought this, and stated that when they sent " their preferred tradesman " I wanted to be home (they would not let me use my own preferred tradesman, a friend who's quote I trusted)

When the tradesman arrived, he was so kind.

He told reviewed the repairs and said they were being unreasonable.

He said he would put in writing that all repairs were routine maintenance, and nothing damaged due to misuse.

I was also told that my property manager was “ disappointed “ with the general standard as things were “ stacked up “ (upon questioning exactly what she meant by this - she responded by saying we had too much stuff for the small unit)

I was also told to wash my carpets.

As they are beige wool, they show up all dirt. They are hard to keep flawless.

I cried reading this.

I had spent a whole day cleaning in preparation - in between completion of a complex NDIS review for my son, medical appointments, therapy, searching for a new job and mothering a little boy with very complex needs.

When the inspection was complete that day ... my son's anxiety escalated into a violent tantrum which resulted in my calling an ambulance for help to regulate him.

He was emergency triaged overnight at the Children's Hospital (at my insistence) as I wanted him screened for seizure activity, due to the severity of his meltdowns - I believed them to be of a medical nature.

My response to this inspection being the catalyst for such anxiety in him ... I put in writing that all future inspections be without my son present.

In response to the invasion of privacy of having our things photographed, and being inaccurately blamed for damage to the property- only ever with me present for the inspection.

I also purchased a carpet cleaner on Gumtree (as I could not afford to pay for the service) which put me into further financial hardship and began regularly washing my carpets.

I fixed the small dent in the wall, and I took almost half our possessions to the Opshop or sold them on Gumtree, to fit the minimalist style (which was clearly an expectation)

Regarding my written request for no unsupervised inspections ...

My wishes were not respected.

I was told, when I objected (I found the entry notice to our second inspection retrospectively - after the walk through had been completed when I was not home) that “ all that is required is seven days notice in writing “

It genuinely appeared to me to be a purposeful and mindful exercise in letting me know how little power and autonomy I have over my own home, my life and my circumstances.

I feel what landlords and property managers fail to understand ... is it might be “ their best egg “ ... but, for us, it's the nest itself.

It might be their investment property... but as tenants - we invest too.

We invest in a lifestyle that affords us privacy, dignity and quiet enjoyment.

We invest in a secure home for our children.

Two thirds of our income, for years at a time.

This is the only thing we really can afford to invest in ... we are forced out of the buyers market by the current property bubble, irreversibly. This has been my adult life.

I have a flawless rental history dating back 25 years. References spanning a decade.

And yet - I have never once felt secure or safe, anywhere.

In one of the most difficult years of my life, 2020, I experienced another level of this.

I was afforded no privacy to manage my situation.

After months of acute stress, and my end of lease looming, I suffered a nervous breakdown.

I placed my small son with our beloved support worker and paid her, for six weeks, to have full time care of him while I recovered.

Part of my reasoning for this decision was that there would be no noise for six weeks, no further escalation of requests to amend, no unannounced knocks on my door, no discussion on the way to my car.

I placed my son outside of our home to further our chances of securing a home for him to come back to.

In this time ... my sons paediatrician wrote a letter of advocacy on our behalf, stressing it was imperative my son not be moved in this time, regarding the end of lease approaching.

I wrote a personal letter to my landlord, inclusive of a list of all the steps I was taking, and professionals I had hired, with both my personal savings and my sons NDIS funding, and outlined my next steps to support my son.

The entire experience was humiliating, dehumanising and reduced me to genuine grovelling.

This attributed to my mental health decline as much as my situation with my little boy.

The lack of security I experienced within our situation brought me to breaking point.

My lease was renewed - but - only on the final day before a decision had to be finalised.

I had waited six weeks to know, by that stage, if we could stay.

In that time - a place which for the description of my home, was advertised online.

Very specific photos (recognisable as the outlook from my veranda) were used in the advertisement.

Two weeks before the decision was made - I asked if we were not going to be allowed to stay - as I needed all the time I could get, to transition my son, if so.

I was told by my property manager (a week elapsed between my email and his response) " that the landlord hasn't made up his mind " ...

I responded " You are advertising our house, [REDACTED] I just want confirmation " ...

To which he responded " it's just stock photos which we use in all rental advertisements" ... (this is absolutely untrue - it is my belief that the lockdown had made the process of re letting too complex)

No other properties were available for rent, at that time, to my knowledge.

Our lease was renewed.

But the retaliatory harassment has been incessant, unrelenting.

I responded by spending as little time at home as I possibly could.

An example of this harassment is when I was away, camping, recently - for three weeks.

Being tired when I got home, I unloaded my ute and placed all my camping gear neatly in the corner of my private car space.

Within 24 hours - I had an email, with a photo attachment of my camping gear and a request to amend (it should rightly be placed in my allotted storage cage)

I responded by email stating I feel this stance is excessive - and with my own photo attachment of a pile of doors, a broken futon and other assorted dangerous heavy discarded junk, that our Body Corporate has not removed for over a year - in the common refuse room.

And a photo of the broken intercom which has had an Out Of Order sign on it for six months (the gates of our " Secure " complex sit open and unfixed for months due to this broken intercom)

Part of this broken gate and/or broken intercom (they seem to take turns ?) problem was two consecutive break ins to the common garage of our community.

I personally had items taken.

Other residents cars were broken into, and, specifically coded gate keys were stolen.

These residents were made to pay the cost of the lost keys, from their vehicles.

Body Corporate had no collective insurance which covered anyone's valuables (despite the ongoing lack of security to our property)

When I asked whether the prefix of " Secure " Gated Community is really accurate (as per rental advertising!) I was told that the " Secure " part means you can lock your unit.

Please note that when the lock fell off my sons window - our property was unsecured for a fortnight - between notice and repair.

An emergency repair by RTA standards - that I was not game to insist upon.

I kept quiet and let them fix it in their own time.

There are so many things within this broken system that allow us to be marginalised and exploited.

Little things that we have normalised... the way my little boy has wanted a dog since he was old enough to say so.

The way he always wanted a blue bedroom... it made me sad when he grew too old to still want that ... and I never found a way to make it happen for him.

Little things, like vegetable gardens I grew in pots after being told I could not make one in a yard.

Artwork which sat cluttered on top of shelves because I am not allowed to hang it from walls.

Sleepovers we don't have because I worry about noise complaints.

Requests to Amend being sent citing my son is not allowed to ride his bike inside the garage - though Body Corporate guidelines state that children may play in any common area so long as they are accompanied by an adult.

All ... suffocating, happiness dimming, small things... that we normalise and adapt to.

All these things paled in comparison to last year, when I placed my little boy outside of our home - in a bid to keep it.

I will never truly put this experience away from myself. Nor will he.

It changed us.

As a single mother with no informal support network and no family close by ... I took the only true avenue open to us.

Paid care. For a prolonged period.

I have never felt so powerless.

We have a housing crisis in this country.

The waiting list for public housing is years long, which is why I never attempted to access it.

Extortionate rental prices - which leave a single parent accessing food from local charity - to be able to afford registration, school camp or utilities bills.

Please give due consideration to this potential reform ... rental circumstances within QLD feels akin putting two thirds of your entire income inside a pillow case, drawing a dollar sign in it, and throwing it off the nearest cliff.

Real people afford landlords the privilege of the available financial resources to pay off their investment property.

Those real people are us.

The ones accessing food boxes and fuel vouchers and grovelling for mercy when our lease ends.

This is written from lived experience.

I appreciate you taking the time to read this.

I appreciate being given the opportunity to give you insight into our experience.

Kind Regards



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,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]