

Tuesday, 6 July 2021

Committee Secretary
Community Support and Services Committee
Parliament House
George St
Brisbane Q 4000
CSSC@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 (Qld)

Firstly, we wish to commend the Queensland State Government on the *Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 (Qld)*, and we welcome the opportunity to provide feedback to the Community Support and Services Committee.

We would like to submit several comments specifically responding to:

- Modernisation – a commitment to reviewing and modernising rental laws to better protect tenants and lessors and improve housing stability in the rental market
- Connections – ensuring that vulnerable community members are supported to sustain tenancies in appropriate and secure housing that facilitates social, economic and cultural participation

from the *Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 (Qld)*.

Our submission begins with an overview of inCommunity Inc. and seeks to outline the role that the Tenancy Skills Institute can have in remediation processes as well as tenancy sustainment. Where appropriate we have outlined potential options for reform. We hope that you find our recommendations useful for your consideration.

1. About inCommunity Inc.

inCommunity Inc. (herein referred to as inCommunity) was established in 1982 and provides a range of programs and services from crisis support and short-term accommodation for homeless youth, adults and family; a Women's Club providing a safe place for women in need; mobile housing support; transitional housing; bail support and the Local Level Alliance delivered in partnership with other community organisations as well as the Tenancy Skills Institute.

We have been servicing the Ipswich and surrounding communities since 1982, and more recently across the State through the Tenancy Skills Institute.

We are passionate about our Why and Just Cause which remains unique:

Our Why is: To inspire people so that they believe that they can . . .

Our Just Cause: We imagine a world where all people have the opportunity and inspiration to reach their potential and live a life that they are truly proud of.

2. Key Issues Identified

Renting is an important housing option for the increasing number of Queenslanders who rely on the private rental market for safe, secure and affordable housing.

The rental law reforms provided in the Bill aim to adjust and create new rights, protections and responsibilities for all parties to residential leases in Queensland, and seek to establish minimum housing standards for rental accommodation. The changes implemented through the proposed Bill strike an appropriate balance between lessor and tenants' rights and provide a strong framework for parties to negotiate and manage mutually beneficial tenancy relationships.

According to the Hon. L M Enoch's speech on the Bill to parliament on 18 June 2021, around one third of Queensland households rent in the private market, with many Queenslanders investing in rental properties not necessarily big corporations. With more Queenslanders renting, and renting for longer, rental law reform is needed to keep up with the changing needs of tenants, lessors and real estate businesses.

With funding from the Queensland Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy, the Tenancy Skills Institute delivers the Skillsets for Successful Tenancies – Dollars and Sense Program. This Program has been designed to build the capacity of people to rent successfully in the private market through the delivery of Australia's first competency-based tenancy skills training course that is supported by the Real Estate Industry. Graduates of the course are supported to source and sustain private rental tenancies through partnerships developed with the real estate sector, community organisations and the Department.

The Program however, is not just about addressing the challenges faced by many tenants. Notably, the Program recognises how important it is to protect the investments of the many property owners who contribute much needed supply to the housing market, by creating tenants of choice.

Tenancy Skills Institute has progressively implemented the Skillsets for Successful Tenancies – Dollars and Sense Program across Queensland with the course available in all Housing Service Centres since 2020.

Students of the course are people trying to enter the rental market for the first time or currently renting. Some students may want to be more competitive in the rental market. Other students may experience difficulty sourcing or sustaining a private rental tenancy, or experience difficulty sustaining a social housing tenancy. Students may therefore include:

- People in the private rental market
- People in social housing
- People who experiences difficulty accessing or sustaining a tenancy in the private rental market
- Social housing tenant transitioning out of a social housing tenancy into the private rental market
- Young people
- Women escaping domestic and family violence

- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- People exiting correctional facilities
- People exiting state care facilities
- People experiencing marital or family breakdown
- Public housing tenants having difficulty sustaining their public housing tenancy.

Objectives of the program are to:

- Improve the capacity of students to source and sustain a private market tenancy
- Reduce the likelihood of students requiring ongoing support related to maintaining a tenancy
- Foster positive relationships between community organisations and the real estate industry
- Raise the profile of the program, and develop, build and sustain partnerships with the real estate sector to improve participant pathways into the private rental market.

The course is competency-based training focused on the following four key areas:

- Effective communication skills
- Tenant's rights and responsibilities
- Financial literacy and budgeting
- Cleaning and maintaining a rental property.

Training is delivered directly by Tenancy Skills Institute trainers or through accredited community partners.

Each participant is assessed for competency against the learning outcomes. The course is recommended by the Real Estate Industry of Queensland (REIQ) and supported by over 165 real estate agencies across the State.

3. Recommendations

We seek to recommend that the Tenancy Skills Institute, through its Skillsets for Successful Tenancies - Dollars and Sense Program, be made available as a remediation option for lessors. Where there are concerns raised by the property agent/manager and/or owner as to the tenancy relationship, the course or specific modules of the course, be made available as an option for tenants to undertake prior to formal enforcement actions being undertaken/issued. For example, it could be utilised as a process for a notice to remedy prior to a notice to leave being formally issued.

Through completion of the course, tenants will learn the expected standards to successfully maintain and sustain their tenancy in the private rental market, or in a social housing tenancy. Completion of the course shows their commitment to improve their capacity, skills and knowledge, fulfil their responsibilities as tenants and successfully manage a tenancy.

The lessor, for example, under the new provisions will be prevented from terminating a tenancy without grounds and is required to rely on an expanded suite of specific stated grounds in the legislation to end a tenancy. By requesting that the tenant complete the course:

- not only places greater accountability on the tenant but also supports the tenant in increasing their capacity to maintain and sustain their tenancy moving forward
- provides a true remedy for a breach enabling the property agent/manager to identify specific issues related to the tenancy and bring an action that best supports the tenant to be educated in a particular area/s and motivate the tenant to improve their capacity so as to successfully manage their tenancy.

Where the tenant might fail to enrol and/or successfully complete the course, the lessor would then have grounds to commence termination processes. Requests for completion of the course must be sufficiently proportionate and relevant to the risks or concerns raised by the lessor.

inCommunity respectfully asks that you take these comments and recommendations into account when preparing the Report and prior to finalising the *Housing Amendment Bill* prior to assent before parliament. We would welcome the opportunity to expand further on the matters raised in this submission. If we can assist the Committee in any way or provide additional information please contact Jodie Mullen (Senior Manager, Corporate Services and Governance) on [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Tommasini', written over a faint, light-colored signature line.

Paul Tommasini
Chief Executive Officer