
From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 13 July 2021 4:16 PM
To: Glass House 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 Andrew Powell 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 some of my thoughts and experiences.

Firstly, huge appreciation to all who are working towards solutions, with compassion and care for all who are under huge stress and especially those who are disadvantaged and have been displaced.

I've been a homeowner, an investment property owner, a landlord and a tenant (both via agents and directly with landlords) so I have the perspective of all sides. I've lived in cities, country towns, villages and rural areas in different states (and overseas) so my perspective is broad.

I have for many years been a tenant (with an exemplary track record). I feel very relieved and blessed to currently have a good landlord and low rent, however, I've been advised the rent will be going up as a result of market forces, I don't have a lease and living here is not a long-term prospect. I fall into the category of a recognised high risk group for homelessness. I would love to have a dog, but I have felt almost forced to avoid it so it does not put me at a disadvantage as a tenant.

I have contributed to this discussion as I do not wish to be caught up in the problem, I wish to be part of the solution!

In this current national housing crisis, the displacement of people and the far-too-common (and unfortunately increasing) horror stories of renting (of which I have had my fair share) are the outcome of profit over people, inequitable power/control and failed government policy/stimulus strategies.

The problems, challenges and fall-out of housing for profit vs. housing being a basic human right cannot be overstated, and the impact will be far-reaching in multitudinous ways - already being demonstrated but it will get a great deal worse. The opportunistic behaviour of those putting their profit over people's wellbeing should be illegal. (The insane prices just because they can, like \$500 for a room in a share house and \$450 for a small, one-bedroom granny flat for example; plus booting people out so they can legally increase the rent.) In many instances it could technically be classified as abuse.

The broader impact for individuals at a personal level (life disruption, mental health, financial stress, community disruption, health impacts, homelessness, forced relocation, etc. etc.) has a knock-on effect for society and the economy. (Add to that, commercial rent situations and the drama playing out there.)

It's challenging when the termites are so bad that when you touch the paint on an (internal) wall, it pokes a hole and the termites gather around it and look out at you. When the wall is between your side of the duplex-converted Queenslander and your neighbour, that's an added complexity. (Strategies included putting a large bookcase against the wall to ensure the wall was avoided. The real estate agent chased the owner for weeks and weeks, who had no interest in responding (we concluded that he was just running the place down and milking it dry before rebuilding or selling. He was similarly inaccessible for almost everything).

It's challenging when you rent a home with a pool, and you're advised you have to maintain it in between the monthly professional checks, but nobody tells you how to do it, or leaves any instructions. (And if something goes wrong, you will be held responsible for it.) The pool water turned green, and the water level got too low where the pump was sucking air. Stressful learning curve.

I know someone who rented a place that is solar powered with grid power being secondary back up. The solar/battery room has no instructions, and nobody has shown him how to manage/maintain/check it. He couldn't find anything online, and requests to the real estate agent yielded no result. It was in the lease that he was responsible for it. Since then, the whole system failed. An emergency stop gap measure was taken by an electrician to connect to the mains power. Weeks have passed and nobody's been out to assess it, fix it or more permanently connect to the mains.

Back to my rentals ...

It's challenging when you rent directly from a landlord who, no matter that you have asked several times, fails to notify you of changes happening to the exterior. For example, one random day as you are working from home, a guy climbs a tree about 2 metres from your upstairs living room window with a chainsaw and starts cutting it down, chunk by chunk. Very loud, very fumigating as well as that he can see in your window. That and two other trees, taking hours. I was stuck at my computer with a deadline, and it was a desktop so I couldn't just take my laptop elsewhere. Distressing and affronting.

Same rental property, receiving a phone call from a guy at 8pm one night, saying he would be arriving at 7am the following morning to replace the front and back stairs. You say the timing is really bad as you need the stairs quite a bit that day (for a time-sensitive thing) and would it be possible to change it? "No, I've already loaded up the trailer for the job, so I have to come in the morning." (Involved several hours where I could not use the stairs because they were either not there, or newly oiled and needed to dry.)

Same rental property, the kitchen tap had come loose and was flopping over, and every time you tried to use it was a process. It took weeks for the landlord to come and sort it - and even then it was only because you got creative in ramping up the pressure.

Same rental property, one morning around 8am the power went out. A few minutes later the landlord rang and said they had mixed up which day it would be, which is why they hadn't given advance notice that Energex was doing maintenance for several hours. Then they asked you if you wouldn't mind going around to the other units (they owned the whole complex) and let all the others know.

When you gave notice, these landlords came to inspect the property 'to see what improvements were needed'. After you point out the issues, they quite openly (and insensitively) share with you how they are going to sort all those issues out, plus new paint and new carpets and an air conditioner in the living room and bedroom. Would have been nice to have been able to benefit from some of those improvements. In other words, pick your brains to determine how to upgrade the rental to lease it out for higher rent.

And as is the case for just about everybody, no, you can't push for your rights to be respected, as the fall out is not worth it. The landlord is in the position of power. I was not on a lease and could be asked to leave with two weeks notice.

There's a single parent with a disability I've known for many years who has had to move home six times in six years (juggling two children - one with a disability - and two dogs). One move was due to unsuitability (noisy, not safe plus the rent being increased) and FOUR times were because the property was being sold. Yes, FOUR. (The sixth one is the current one.)

Consider:

- the substantial financial loss due to the cost of moving six times (including a fair distance away from their preferred location due to housing affordability) and the flow on impact on their limited finances in their day-to-day living
- Having to borrow money (informally) to avoid homelessness and be able to afford to move and then having to pay off the debt
- the major disruption and stress, especially given they are already at a disadvantage
- the challenge and pressure of finding a suitable and affordable place to live, especially with pet restrictions, rising rents and decreasing availability

- finding homes that are less than optimal, but preferring anything over homelessness (adapting to the shortcomings as best they can)
- the impact on stability, health, mental health and wellbeing - not feeling safe, secure, supported or autonomous
- learning new places, finding new doctors, etc. (and various other services and conveniences) • connection to services (including delays with connection of internet)
- being further away from their established community connections and support network
- always feeling not quite like it's home
- being at the mercy of market forces and other people's choices

If they could stay renting with secure long-term tenure with a decent agent/landlord, they would be content with long-term renting, however, anyone could appreciate their desire to feel secure and settled.

An excellent tenant with flawless rental history and references, they have for decades been paying sufficient rent to have been able to manage home loan repayments. They would love to buy their own home, however, would not be eligible for a loan. Catch-22. If they'd been able to get a loan 20 years ago they would now be secure in their own home (much more affordable back then) and would have either paid it off or have the majority paid off. Instead, they remain lifelong vulnerable to all the aforementioned challenges and more. (Not to mention the impact on the wider society and economy.)

Beyond all these obvious and all-too-common problems, I see possibilities to ease the situation:

- Visiting my elderly relatives in England years ago, I was very surprised to discover they had a 20-year lease for their rental. (In hindsight, I assume it was social housing, and I've since researched to discover that there are many countries with excellent long-term rental options). The arrangement allows for them to, for the most part, treat the place as if it was their own. They can change the colour of the walls, re-fit the kitchen, hang pictures and so on, and they are responsible for standard maintenance and repairs. (I assume the rent is set accordingly). It was a lovely townhouse in a lovely complex, and their long-term security of tenure clearly gave them peace of mind. This is a crucial middle-ground option that just isn't available in Australia. Here, for a majority, it's either rental Russian Roulette or a mortgage-encumbered treadmill. This serious lack of choice is perplexing, and frankly, outrageous. Australia's approach needs a radical overhaul. Long-term

leases need to be introduced in Australia! And it goes without saying that social housing URGENTLY requires a MASSIVE boost. The benefits, the flow-on effects, the boost to the economy ... it's seriously a no brainer

- I had a bit of a sense of that with a three-year lease and an option to renew for a further three years when I leased a 60-acre property in NSW for a live-in, lifestyle business venture. Not only was I able to feel settled and secure, but I could also make improvements, knowing I would get return on my investment (while also improving the property I might add.) This needs to be considered for home rentals.

If only ...

- Councils could relax their rules to allow second kitchens in appropriate/suitable dwellings and to allow secondary dwelling/granny flats to be built with larger square meterage.
- Councils could reduce or waive some of their prohibitive (in some cases rorting) fees and various other slow-mo frustrations/obstructions/impediments for new builds of primary and secondary dwellings.
- there was any possibility councils could sub-contract/outsourcing to consultants to help them clear the large backlog of inspections/approvals (?)
- owners of semi-rural and rural properties (of suitable size) could be allowed to rent land to (an appropriate number of) those with caravans and tiny homes (even if just for a year with a review at the end, rather than a permanent change, if it helps facilitate councils making more speedy, crisis-based decisions).
- other council areas could emulate Byron Bay council in offering land on a dis-used railway line for the establishment of a tiny home community for homeless people. (What other government land is sitting there, unused, that could be temporarily or permanently repurposed?)
- showgrounds could allow campers to stay longer (they are currently forced by rules to move people on)
- architects, building designers and new homebuilders could be educated/encouraged to consider more co-housing designs (much more flexible and suitable for extended families and house share residents).
- authorities and the public could be re-framed/re-educated on the subject of community living. (Many assume it's all flower power and mung beans!) Any time I talk about community living, I tell people it's a well-established, mainstream thing - pointing out that retirement communities are basically intentional communities. If developments similar to retirement communities were created for all ages, there would be more possibilities for village-style community/social cohesion, support networks, pooling/sharing facilities/resources and various other benefits. I lived in a (respectable, non-fringe, validated by the mainstream) community of 20 people for two years and it was incredibly rewarding, socially cohesive and supportive and it saved me a lot of money
- appropriate authorities or industries could consider a campaign to encourage owners of McMansions to retrofit into dual key or duplexes (subject to preliminary assessment/approval). I can supply a document I've been creating fully outlining this idea (incorporates feedback from local councillors and an affordable housing organisation). It needs more perspectives from 'can-do' experts in different areas. Would love to pass it on somewhere or get more input, in the hope that it has something to contribute, even if only to catalyse other ideas...

Another aspect to that: Would it be worth exploring the possibility of more widely accelerating the concept underlying Ian Ugarte's 'Small is the New Big' (converting large dwellings into micro apartments under the legal structure of boarding houses), which deals with the reality that profit reigns while also creating more housing/more affordable housing? Maybe satisfying both profit and need is an effective middle ground option whilst still keeping our eye on the prize of alternative models becoming more mainstream?

That's just a few of my thoughts, many more stories could be told!

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, and that of many people I know. It is also highly distressing and unsettling to hear of the many unfolding crises happening to so many.

While this bill may be palatable to the real estate lobby, it completely disregards my experience as a renter, and that of so many others - we are not a sub-species! We are human beings!

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]

*(PLEASE NOTE: I do not give permission for my name or address to be shared in any way, anywhere publicly.)