



Speech by

Ms Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Tuesday, 2 December 2008

RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES AND ROOMING ACCOMMODATION BILL

Ms GRACE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (8.08 pm): I rise to support the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Bill 2008. It is aimed at regulating residential tenancy in Queensland. I guess in doing so I am joining a number of members of this House—I am joining the ever-growing conga line—in congratulating the minister, Robert Swarten, for his forward thinking in getting the wheels in motion to actually present this legislation to the House. I congratulate the minister.

I guess I am stating the bleeding obvious in saying that the electorate of Brisbane Central has a very large percentage of its population who are renters and has a very large stock of rental accommodation. Therefore, I definitely wanted to speak during debate on this bill to put my points on the record. This legislation definitely keeps up with a changing world, and there are many changes that are fast coming in what I would describe as an essential service for many people in the community. I fully support—and I thought that the minister showed great foresight—and endorse the review that was conducted by the Residential Tenancies Authority, which included extensive consultation with lessors, agents, tenants, rooming accommodation providers and residents whose views were carefully considered and then incorporated into this bill.

I fully support—I think it is a great idea—getting rid of two unnecessary pieces of legislation separating the regulation of this area and putting it into one bill. It makes it administratively easier to have one reference point which will enable many people to be better informed by being provided with one piece of legislation and one point to go to when they want to know their rights and entitlements.

As I said, my electorate has one of the highest proportions of renters in Australia. In the current environment of low vacancy rates, higher rental costs—they have been going up quite substantially in my area—and a shortage of appropriate stock, it is even more important to ensure that tenants get a fair go, and we are doing it, as other members in this House such as the member for Kallangur have said, in the Labor way. We are doing it in the way that people expect Labor governments to govern and we are doing it in a way that takes a reasonable and balanced approach to ensure neither tenants nor lessors are disadvantaged by what we are proposing in this bill tonight. In these hard times, any rent increase is difficult to absorb, particularly if it occurs often and with little notice. Limiting the frequency of rent increases to no more than once every six months not only reflects current best practice but also enables lessors to reasonably raise the rent on their properties and at the same time limits the frequency of such increases to ensure tenants have time to budget or to find alternative accommodation.

I welcome a number of additional protections contained in this bill. Two months notice for rent increases makes eminent sense in today's environment, as does two months notice for termination of fixed-term tenancies. Previously, as little as two weeks had been given for without-grounds terminations. I believe that was a little unfair in a very tight rental market. Students, both international and domestic, will now receive greater protection in that all of their bond moneys will be paid and lodged with the RTA whether it is on-campus, not-for-profit or off-campus accommodation, and this brings about fairness and brings students into line with other tenants. The significant change to extend coverage beyond traditional residential services to cover all rooming style accommodation, including all government funded or government run services, means that the Queensland government now will conform to the high standards

that it has set for the industry. Equally, it is important that we extend such coverage to employer provided room-only accommodation, and it makes good sense to have the same rules whether a worker is provided with a room only, or a house, or a flat.

I certainly welcome the end of rent bidding, where tenants compete in an auction-style bidding war to secure a roof over their heads. Rental accommodation should be and will be advertised at a fixed price with no rent ranges and no tenders allowed, and the bill provides for this outcome. I welcome the abolition of such a practice.

As with any change, it is important that we ensure there is adequate and meaningful information and education, and I look forward to the work of the RTA in delivering this vital information for all stakeholders. I am sure that it will have the provisions that are contained in this bill on its web site and will be able to advise all stakeholders of their rights. I am positive that the information and material will be up to date and will be quickly able to be accessed by those who require the information.

As I have said before, fairness is a very valuable principle by which we as Labor members in this House live our lives. This bill delivers fairness to both lessors and tenants. Fairness is a Q2 objective that I value most highly—fairness in the workplace, fairness in society, fairness for the vulnerable and fairness for families, young people and the aged. This bill enhances fairness for private rental market stakeholders, and I commend the bill to the House.