



Speech by

**Jo-Ann Miller**

**MEMBER FOR BUNDAMBA**

Hansard Tuesday, 10 July 2012

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## MOTION: PUBLIC HOUSING



**Mrs MILLER** (Bundamba—ALP) (5.30 pm): I move—

That this House:

- acknowledges the government's proposed reforms to public housing are creating fear and uncertainty among tenants, particularly elderly residents;
- guarantees that no tenants will be disadvantaged by these reforms;
- commits to engaging with tenants with sensitivity and compassion; and
- guarantees that any tenants required to move from under-occupied dwellings will be offered suitable alternative accommodation in the same community.

This evening I rise to put on the record this parliament's view of disgrace and shame of government members who sit opposite for the upheaval and pain they have caused public housing tenants in this state. In the early days of June 2012 the Minister for Housing and Public Works sent out a letter to all residents living in public housing which can only be described by the three Cs—cruel, callous and cold. It is truly astounding that the minister, who is also a medical doctor and has been a member of parliament for over eight years, could be so out of touch with the Queensland constituency to send out a letter like this, and I table a copy of this letter for the benefit of the House.

*Tabled paper:* Template letter to public housing tenants [495].

This letter sends shivers down my spine and the spines of every resident who has received it. It has been written in a cruel way that makes people fearful that they are going to be kicked out of their homes or forced to pay higher rents or take in people they do not know. That is, until today. What happened miraculously today after I gave notice this morning that I would be moving this motion? The government has suddenly done a backdown. It is now saying that it will not force people to take in other residents. At the moment it is saying that it is not going to have boarding houses or backpackers hostels, but we are yet to believe this. Since the distribution of this letter, electorate offices on this side of the House and I am sure maybe even on the other side have been inundated with emails and faxes, telephone calls from public housing tenants, family members of public housing tenants, community groups involved in public housing, the National Seniors Association and many other stakeholders all expressing their concerns over this public housing upheaval. Many people have cried, even sobbed, at the callous disregard for them as people and as tenants.

Many of the people I have been talking to and meeting with are elderly or suffer from a disability. These people do not deserve this cruel treatment being handed out to them by the worst landlord in this country—'Landlord Minister' Dr Flegg. One public housing resident that the Leader of the Opposition and I recently met with was an elderly lady, Connie Dailey. Connie is 71 years of age and has lived in her public house in Inala for a very long time. The house holds great sentimental value to Connie. Her husband passed away in the house and it is the house that she has raised her family in. It is a house in which they have shared many birthdays, Christmases and many other special occasions. But now, faced with the letter from 'Landlord Minister' Dr Flegg, Connie, like many others, is worried that she will be thrown out of her house, thrown on to the scrap heap. She is also worried that she has value added to her home after

many years and that she may even be forced to another location outside of Inala and might be forced to take strangers in to live with her.

Her story, like many others, is deeply moving. In fact, some would describe it as sad. It just goes to show that the actions of those opposite are creating a sense of uncertainty and of instability in the community which is leading to many residents, mainly the elderly, becoming sick and depressed and anxious. Shame on you, 'Landlord Minister' Dr Flegg! Connie is now standing up alongside her fellow housing tenants and is the principal petitioner of a petition which I am sponsoring which is receiving overwhelming support in the community. I encourage all members with a heart to support the petition and this motion.

This is just another example of how this government is undertaking policy on the run. There was no warning about the upheaval to public housing before the election—surprise, surprise—and now because they have the numbers those opposite think that they have the mandate to turn people's lives upside down and inside out, to ride roughshod over them. I have had the opportunity to meet with a variety of different housing community groups, including the Tenants Union of Queensland, that have all raised valid points about the implementation of this policy. I ask the minister: how is this plan of yours going to work? How will you expect to displace an 80-year-old widow from her house of many decades to another community away from her doctor, her friends, her church and community organisations like the National Seniors Association? Will you expect us to go back to the days where there were boxes and locks over people's phones in the house to ensure that only certain people used them? Who is going to say who pays the electricity and the gas? Who is going to say about the payment being enforced? Will it be the public servants in the housing department? How many of them are going to be left?

Who owns the TV and who can say who watches what and when? Will there be stereo police in the house? Will you expect people to have individual locks on their doors as they have strangers living in their homes? Will there be a roster to use the kitchen and will there be a roster to use the bathroom? Who owns the furniture? Who has the entitlement to say who can sit on the lounge, who can sleep in the bed? Jesus wept! As a single mother of one recently asked me, who was living in a three-bedroom house, will the government force her to take another person in as she does not wish to move as her son is already going to the local school and has established friends and social networks in the community; or will she, 'Landlord Minister' Dr Flegg, have to interview people on the waiting list and take someone in; or, as you say, Minister, 'unless initiated by a specific request from a specific tenant', whatever that means? You knew that was unworkable. You knew your policy was unworkable and that is why you backed down today. You knew it would never work.

**Madam SPEAKER:** Member for Bundamba, I ask you to refer your comments through the chair and cease referring to people by the title of 'you'.

**Mrs MILLER:** Thank you. The minister knew it would never work. We pointed it out and the minister backed down. All of these are valid questions which have arisen in only a few weeks which goes to show that this government has clearly not thought through its plan before embarking on it. But there is more! Not satisfied with creating havoc with tenants, there is more. The minister in the final days of the financial year took the scalpel to the Tenant Participation Program. Yes, the minister killed it off, and I table a copy of the letter in relation to the Tenant Participation Program where he indicates that the Tenant Participation Program will be axed.

*Tabled paper:* Letter, dated 21 June 2012, from Natalie MacDonald, Director-General, Department of Housing and Public Works, to an unidentified person regarding the tenant participation program [496].

The program was established over 20 years ago in 1991 and it is used to provide information and referral centres, counselling services and, most importantly, advocacy services. The axing of this funding could not have come at a worse time for public housing residents in Queensland who are faced with massive upheaval in their lives. How cruel and callous can 'Landlord Minister' Dr Flegg be? The letter unfortunately outlines cuts in the form of cuts to the 2012 garden awards. This may not mean a lot to the toffs on the other side of the House, but let me tell them it means a hell of a lot to people in public housing.

These awards were launched many years ago through the urban renewal program and provided an avenue for tenants to take pride in their residences. Many people grew fruit trees in their backyards to help feed their families. They had vegie patches and best back garden awards et cetera. These awards instilled a sense of pride in people.

I would also like to put on record that we have spent over \$1.5 billion on funding and on over 5,080 new public houses in recent years. Imagine how the public servants who are going to administer this are going to put together the instruction manual. My God, it is just going to be terrible. So this is my prescription to Dr Flegg to assist the tenants: that the minister guarantee that no tenants will be disadvantaged, no repeats; that the minister commit to engaging with tenants with sensitivity and compassion, no repeats; that the minister guarantees that any tenants required to move from underoccupied dwellings will be offered suitable alternative accommodation, no repeats. His prescription for public housing is cruel, callous and cold. His prescription is making people sick with numerous, absolute contraindications.

*(Time expired)*