




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

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MOTION: SOCIAL HOUSING

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (5.55 pm): Before I go too far, I want to pick up on the minister's comments that under the previous government housing was a basket case. We had the then shadow Treasurer, Tim Nicholls, talking about the basket case of the economy under the previous government. When he said it was a basket case, we were growing at four per cent. Now we are growing at three per cent. When he said it was a basket case, unemployment was at 5.5 per cent. That is obviously far better than 6.3 per cent under this government! So whenever I hear the term 'basket case' used by those opposite, forgive me if I get a bit concerned that they might be using it out of context.

As the member for Rockhampton has clearly stated, the government have had an axe to grind against public housing tenants in Queensland ever since they came to office. Whether it was sending what many public housing residents thought were threatening letters to them, indicating a raft of changes to their rental conditions, to selling government owned caravan parks, to axing front-line TAAS services, this government has constantly beaten up on Queensland public housing tenants.

Any thought of a fresh approach, a more compassionate approach, to public housing when we got a new minister was quickly dashed. The minister has continued the tried and true LNP approach of treating public housing tenants like second-class citizens. And there is no greater example to prove this than the minister's new temporary absence policy. As other speakers from the opposition have stated, this policy is bordering on an infringement of the right to free movement in our state. You only have to look at the temporary absence application form to see that people have to 'request permission' when a public housing tenant wants to be away from their property 'for any period of time'. How absurd!

Public housing tenants are ordinary Queenslanders who pay their rent on time, who maintain their properties, who take pride in their homes by spending their savings on gardens, water tanks and even solar panels. They are not second-class citizens. When I first heard of this preposterous policy, I had to check that I had not woken up in King's Landing, with Joffrey Baratheon at the helm, and commoners of the land having to request the permission of the Lannisters to leave for a holiday. This is not *Game of Thrones*! Who is advising you, Minister? Is it Lord Varys?

Public housing tenants are not pieces on a chessboard. They are not playthings of the LNP. They are ordinary Queenslanders who deserve respect and do not deserve to be treated the way that they have been by this arrogant government. What would happen if we came into this place and changed the legislation to empower landlords in the private rental market to insert into a tenant's tenancy agreement that they could only go away from their premises, which they legally pay rent for, for a maximum of four weeks in a calendar year and that they had to seek approval by them at every request? There would be outrage right across Queensland and this would not happen. What the government is doing by this policy is in effect creating a two-class rental market, with those who have

to apply to leave their premises and those that are able to come and go as they please without the need to request leave.

The opposition has heard of many disturbing stories across the state, including in my local area, with many public housing tenants who have been saving up for a holiday or a trip to see their relatives for years, but when it comes time for them to go they are being restricted to only four weeks leave. Couple this with the attacks on public housing that have already occurred under this government and the so-called achievement by those opposite that they have reduced the public housing waiting list. In fact, the opposition has heard that there has not been a dramatic increase in placement of people on the public housing waiting list into housing. Indeed, what the government has done is undertaken a massive cleanse of the public housing waiting list, dropping people off the list if they do not contact the department when they write to them asking if they still want to be on the list, or actively discouraging people from applying to go on the public housing waiting list when they visit public housing centres.

What happens if someone does not receive the correspondence? What happens if they have moved or the mail never reaches the person as they are sleeping rough on a friend's or a family member's couch? The person is still in need of housing but will most likely be cut off the list under this government, thus reducing the public housing waiting list on paper but not in reality. Those opposite unfortunately do not understand that public housing tenants are people as well. They are Queenslanders who have families, who pay their taxes and who have a right to travel and see Queensland if they are paying the rent on their properties and not breaking any rules.

The opposition understands that there are some public housing tenants who flout the rules of the system. They may push the boundaries by leaving their properties for extensive periods of time, and they should be dealt with accordingly. However, the LNP's temporary absence policy has not been thought through properly and will affect every single public housing tenant in Queensland as they will need to request permission to leave their properties, even for an overnight stay.

I join my colleagues in condemning the Newman government's actions on public housing tenants and I call on the minister to rescind his temporary absence policy immediately to ensure that public housing tenants are treated with the dignity that they deserve. We should not forget that, of the people who are in public housing in Queensland, a large percentage are people with a disability, seniors or people with mental health concerns. These are people who need our support, housing stability and some flexibility, not the arrogance of this Newman government.