




Speech By  
**Jennifer Howard**

**MEMBER FOR IPSWICH**

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### **HOUSING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (4.00 pm): I rise today to support the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. I support it because it is another example of the Palaszczuk government delivering on our election commitments. This was an election commitment that we made to provide rental reforms to improve Queenslanders' access to safe, secure and affordable housing. They are part of the 10-year Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027 that commits to modernising our housing legislation. It is also supported by our action plan on housing and homelessness which was introduced in June this year, along with our \$2.9 billion investment to boost housing supply across the state. I am pleased to say that my community of Ipswich is benefiting from this investment.

Having a safe, secure roof over your head is the basic foundation of participating in society. A growing number of Queenslanders are relying on the rental market for housing. They are renting for longer due to being priced out of the housing market. Many people are finding themselves to be lifelong renters and consider their rental properties as long-term homes rather than a short-term stopgap before home ownership.

The demographics of renters are also changing. We are seeing more older people renting, particularly older, single women. Around 39 per cent of private dwellings in Ipswich are rented, which is above the state and national average. It is one of the reasons people in our community were so deeply affected when the former Newman LNP government cruelly cut the funding to our local tenancy advocacy service almost immediately following their election in 2012.

Increasingly, many Ipswich people are telling me that they are finding the local private rental market more unaffordable and difficult to get into, especially low-income earners who have previously found Ipswich to be quite an affordable place to live until recently. Local people feel like they are being squeezed out of the rental market by the large numbers of people moving here from our southern states. On top of this, COVID-19 and the winding down of the federal National Rental Affordability Scheme is putting the squeeze on local renters like never before.

Before the pandemic, Ipswich's rental vacancy rate was 2.9 per cent and now it is just 0.9 per cent. This lack of housing supply is making it harder for vulnerable and low-income tenants to compete in the housing market and negotiate with property owners on equal terms. This bill is a much needed intervention to help level out the playing field. It acknowledges the challenges that tenants face, while recognising the importance of protecting the investments of landlords who supply housing to the private rental market.

This bill comes after extensive consultation with Queenslanders that started in 2018 with our Open Doors to Renting Reform consultation. Around 137,000 Queenslanders responded to this consultation, providing feedback on their experiences of living in, owning or managing a rental property. This was followed up in 2019 by *A better renting future reform roadmap* consultation, which saw over 15,000 responses. This demonstrates that renting is an important issue for many in our community.

The consultation showed that Queenslanders want our rental laws to be modernised and to strike the right balance between tenants' and lessors' rights and responsibilities. It is not surprising that one of the top issues that came out of the consultation was the right for renters to keep pets. We have heard many MPs talk about that in the House because we all know that most people consider pets to be part of the family. They provide companionship, safety, and physical and mental health benefits. It is probably the right time for me to give a shout-out to my own four-legged best friend, Juno.

With increasing numbers of younger people and older retirees renting, many of whom are single, a pet provides company and is proven to have many mental health benefits. However, only an estimated 15 per cent of rental properties are pet friendly in Queensland. That is why I am so pleased to see that this bill will make it easier for renters to keep a pet by requiring that lessors can only refuse pet requests on prescribed reasonable grounds and within required time frames.

Everyone deserves to live in a safe and functional home. Some renters, however, particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable renters, are reluctant to request repairs and maintenance out of fear that their rent will increase or their tenancy will be terminated. No renter should have to fear retaliatory action for simply requesting a repair. Introducing a minimum housing standard for all rental properties is a welcome reform that will ensure all Queensland rental properties meet minimum safety, security and functionality standards.

Another reform we are introducing will end without-grounds evictions and expand the suite of approved reasons for renters and property owners to end a tenancy. Tenants should not fear that their lease could end abruptly at any minute without any given reason. Knowing on what grounds a lessor can end your tenancy right from the start will provide peace of mind for many renters.

I am also very pleased to see this bill put in place protections for people experiencing domestic and family violence. People who need to flee abusive homes need to be able to do so quickly and safely. They do not need the added stress of worrying about how to deal with end-of-lease issues. This bill will allow them to end their lease with seven-days notice, with their liability for end-of-tenancy costs capped to the seven-day notice period.

The reforms in this bill strike a fair and balanced approach to renting in Queensland. Importantly, they are unlikely to have any significant impact on rent supply or affordability. With more and more people renting in Queensland, it is important our laws are modernised to better reflect the state's changing housing needs. I want to thank our housing minister, Leeanne Enoch, for overseeing these important and fair reforms. I commend the bill to the House.