




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR COOPER

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HOUSING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms BUSH** (Cooper—ALP) (4.43 pm): I rise in support of the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill, which delivers on the Palaszczuk government's commitment to renting reform for Queenslanders. As others have said, this is about balancing the rights and interests of both landlords and tenants. I believe that the bill achieves that. It is important to remember that this bill is located within a much broader 10-year Queensland Housing Strategy which will modernise Queensland's housing legislation with a strong focus on preventing homelessness. As the minister stated at the outset of the debate, the action plan is also backed by our historic \$2.9 billion investment. It is the largest concentrated investment in social housing in Queensland's history.

I think it is important to remember that this bill is not the panacea to fix all of the housing issues that have been outlined here today. There is a lot of responsibility that sits at a federal level and at a local level—across every domain. It is not simply a housing response that is required. It is certainly not this bill that will achieve all of that, but it will make some significant modifications to the existing housing and rental framework.

The decisions that we make here as a government in this chamber are critical. Everyone is moving to Queensland—and who can blame them. This growth does create pressure on the housing market. Every one of us in all of our electorates would be feeling that. I am sure we are all meeting with people who are experiencing different pressures around housing. My electorate of Cooper is probably not dissimilar to other inner-city electorates.

At one end of the electorate in The Gap most people own their homes. They have been around for a long time. They have often grown up in The Gap and they probably want to die in The Gap, which is fantastic. It is a beautiful place to be born and grow up and end your life. People in The Gap have an interest in this bill because many of them are landlords—mum-and-dad investors—who commonly bought a home early in their lives. Their career has progressed. They have met someone, fallen in love, had children and they have been able to buy their second home and consequently enter the market as owners of an investment property.

These mum-and-dad investors take pride in their properties. They are responsive to reasonable requests by tenants. Mostly they have positive relationships with those renting their homes. These are not rental moguls. Nationwide 71 per cent of investors own just one property, 90 per cent of investors own one or two properties. The majority of people only have one or two properties. I include myself in that. When I was 30 I purchased my first home on my own as a single woman.

Ms Pugh: Hear, hear!

Ms BUSH: It was a huge achievement. At the time I was working about four jobs to do that. I set my sight on home ownership because I knew that, particularly as a woman, it was a pathway to financial freedom. It was an aspiration for me to work towards and to achieve. I then met my partner and we have been able to buy our home. I have been a landlord ever since—for almost the past 10 years. I have a fantastic relationship with those who rent my home.

I was just reflecting earlier to the member for Stafford that I do not think I have actually increased the rent once in 10 years. They are an elderly couple. They are very undemanding and because of that I go over and above to check in on them and what their needs are. When COVID struck I was the first one to ring and ask if they needed assistance. I actually think that is not uncommon. As I move around the electorate I think the majority of us who have rented, who have moved through that market and who have then owned a home, appreciate what it is like to be a renter.

As we move closer to the city in our electorate we see the number of renters increase. In fact, Milton, as at the last published census data, has over 61 per cent of residents who are renting. That is a really high proportion of renters in the inner city. These renters should expect a standard of housing that affords them not just safety but dignity and that they can live in their home as a home and not just someone's asset. I think that sentiment is broadly felt in the majority of people who I speak with. Striking the balance between these interests is the key to legislative reform that is workable, achievable and sustainable.

The key changes to rental laws proposed in the bill include ending without-grounds evictions and introducing an expanded suite of approved reasons for renters and property owners to end a tenancy, including on expiry of a fixed-term agreement. This will provide both lessors and tenants with greater certainty over the circumstances in which their lease will end.

The bill establishes a set of prescribed minimum standards to ensure all Queensland rental properties meet the minimum safety, security and functionality standards. Property condition was highly mentioned in the consultation for *Open doors to renting reform*. Many renters noted the lack of attention or responsiveness to repair and maintenance requests. We have to remember that those are people's homes. They should not need to repeatedly request that necessary work be carried out.

Importantly, there will be stronger protections for people experiencing domestic and family violence and today we have heard from a lot of other members about that. People will be able to end their interest in a residential lease quickly and with limited liability for end-of-lease costs. We know that rental commitments are one of the many barriers to leaving a violent relationship. Currently, if people experiencing domestic violence do leave a rental suddenly, they can run the risk of being blacklisted for future properties. The fear of homelessness should never be a reason to remain in a violent relationship. These reforms will allow renters with evidence that they are experiencing domestic and family violence to exit a tenancy with seven days notice. The renters can leave immediately after providing the notice and their liability for end-of-tenancy costs will be capped to the seven-day notice period. Renters experiencing domestic and family violence can also access their portion of the rental bond funds held for tenancies through the RTA. As we have spoken about, they can also make some immediate upgrades, such as changing locks, before gaining the owner's consent. This is about putting safety at the forefront for people experiencing violence. It is about what they need to feel safe.

The bill makes it easier to keep a pet. Pets are an important part of many of our lives and they give us so much joy, but pet ownership comes with great responsibility. There is a responsibility to care for pets appropriately, including by providing them with safe homes. What I really like about this bill is that it emphasises a framework for parties to negotiate and to come to arrangements that are mutually agreeable. I know that that is something that responsible pet owners will be willing and able to do.

I have to comment here, and I will not unpack it too much, about some of the comments made by the member for South Brisbane. I find the amendments and the general comments that have been put forward by the member quite concerning as they seek to develop an acrimonious relationship between tenants and landlords. That is the last thing we want to be doing. We want people to go into consultation, but we also want there to be a level playing field. This bill achieves that balance.

Under the proposed reforms, renters can request permission to have a pet and if the property owner does not respond within 14 days the renter is deemed to have permission. The property owner can only refuse pets for prescribed reasons and their approval can be subject to reasonable conditions other than additional bond or increased rent. A blanket 'no pets' is not a reasonable condition.

Consultation surrounding the bill has been extensive with community members, tenants, lessors and the sector to make sure that issues are understood and that the government response balances the rights and needs of renters and lessors, that it is proportionate and that it provides certainty and stability in the rental market, which is important. I commend the minister for her work on this bill. I commend the work of the committee. I commend the bill to the House.