




Speech By  
**Peter Russo**

**MEMBER FOR TOOHEY**

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Record of Proceedings, 13 October 2021

### **HOUSING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (4.27 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. The objectives of the bill are to amend the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008, the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation (COVID-19 Emergency Response) Regulation 2020, the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Regulation 2009 and the Retirement Villages Act 1999 for particular purposes. I do not intend to speak to each of the pieces of legislation but will pick out a few of the more important ones.

The Palaszczuk government is delivering on its commitment to the people of Queensland by putting in place rental reforms. The 10-year Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027 is the framework for key reforms and targeted investment across the housing sector. We want to ensure Queenslanders have access to safe, secure and affordable housing. In Queensland in 2017-18, around 63 per cent of households owned their own home, with or without a mortgage, with 36 per cent renting. Most renters rent via a private landlord. This is in line with national household ownership rates, which are down from 70 per cent in 1997-98. The long-held Australian dream of home ownership appears to be waning, although perhaps not by choice.

This bill is the result of an extensive consultation with Queenslanders in 2018 and 2019. We want to help tenants to plan for their future housing needs by improving protections for tenants while safeguarding a lessor's interests and improving housing stability in the rental market. The consultations highlighted that many vulnerable renters are reluctant to enforce their tenancy rights because they fear their rent will increase, or they will be asked to leave, or they will not be offered a renewal when their current lease ends. This fear of retaliation towards tenants was common and an indicator that the current laws were not operating as intended.

The security of having a home enables people to achieve positive life outcomes such as good health, quality education and secure employment. With more Queenslanders renting, and renting for longer, it is important that our rental laws support individuals and families. This bill will achieve these objectives by ending tenancies fairly. Lessors will be prevented from terminating a tenancy without-grounds and will need to rely on an expanded suite of specific stated grounds to end a tenancy. Tenants will continue to be able to end a tenancy without-grounds, as long as the required notice is provided. Tenants will also have access to a wider range of specific grounds to end a tenancy, including grounds such as the rental property does not comply with minimum housing standards; the lessor has not complied with a QCAT repair order within the specified time; or the death of a co-tenant.

Minimum housing standards will be prescribed by amending the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Regulation 2009. The requirements will ensure a property is weatherproof and structurally sound; have fixtures and fittings that are safe and work and are in good repair and do not present a health hazard with normal use; be free from vermin, damp and mould; have adequate plumbing and drainage and be connected to a supply of hot and cold water for drinking; and ensure the toilet is connected to a sewer, septic or other waste disposal system. These are not unreasonable requirements. These minimum housing standards will provide safe and secure homes for tenants. No

tenant should have to live in a property that does not meet the minimum housing standards. Similar grounds to end a tenancy will apply to moveable dwelling agreements and rooming accommodation agreements.

We know that people are often at their most vulnerable when they attempt to leave a domestic violence situation. Existing tenancy protections do not support people in these situations to leave quickly or to a safer environment. The bill's amendments will streamline the process for tenants experiencing domestic violence. Lessors, too, will be protected from inappropriate use of this provision by the requirement for supporting evidence to be made available at the time of ending the agreement.

The bill provides for rental law reforms that encourage more pet-friendly rental properties in Queensland by introducing a framework to support renters who want to keep their pet. We know that pets are an important part of life for many Queenslanders and are often viewed as part of the family. They provide a range of benefits that became very evident during COVID-19. People relied on their pets for companionship and safety. Having a pet provided physical and mental health benefits as well. These reforms will allow tenants, subject to reasonable conditions and with the lessor's written consent, to keep a pet.

I was pleased to see that there is strong community support for these protections. The Palaszczuk government has taken the time to ensure that these reforms met the needs and expectations of the community. These reforms find the balance between the rights and needs of renters and lessors, as well as providing certainty and stability in the rental market. I commend this bill to the House.