




Speech By  
**Stephen Bennett**

**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

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Record of Proceedings, 28 March 2023

### **HOUSING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (12.22 pm): This bill proposes to amend the Housing Act 2003 and the Housing Regulation 2015 and to establish a charitable donation deed model in Queensland. The bill also proposes to amend the Retirement Villages Act 1999 and implement certain reforms relating to standardised requirements for retirement village financial reporting, statements and budgets. The stated purpose of the bill is to increase transparency, accountability and consistency of financial reporting in Queensland retirement villages.

The Australian Institute of Quantity Surveyors stated in their submission to the committee that they are aware of the lack of transparency and accountability through complaints they have received about retirement villages—the ones they represent and have been to—particularly those aspects impacting retirement village residents. This is common in virtually all jurisdictions across Australia and it is essential that both retirement village operators and their residents are aware of how the capital replacement fund and the annual maintenance reserve fund are developed and what those funds can and cannot be used for.

There is also a need to provide in plain English the difference between capital items and maintenance. The Australian Institute of Quantity Surveyors proposes to work with the department of communities and housing to establish a guide for those quantity surveyors that will be freely available to retirement village operators and retirement village residents explaining the quantity surveyor's role and providing transparency about how capital replacement funds are developed, what the funds can be used for and the difference between capital items and assets to which maintenance funding should be applied.

The committee heard about some concerns that the effect of the bill will be greater compliance obligations on operators of retirement villages, the cost of which will be borne by residents. These greater obligations take the form of numerous information requirements within the bill which are duplicative and unnecessarily burdensome to operators. This will have a particularly significant effect on smaller operators, who will need to engage external accounting services in order to meet these requirements. Adding more red tape simply transfers more costs in return for more bureaucracy to older Queenslanders—in fact mostly pensioners. Further, it adds another layer of cost to the perfect storm smashing struggling pensioners.

We heard from submissions about the 15 per cent wage increase out of the Fair Work Commission's aged-care industry decision; massive increases in the cost of electricity, gas and fuel; big cost increases in building products and maintenance; record inflation; and devastating cost-of-living increases for basic food, care and transport.

I am concerned about the extra costs being forced upon residents as a result of this bill. To now understand that the minister has not acknowledged the issue and the committee recommendations in full is disappointing. The Retirement Villages Act is in a complete mess, to be fair. It is dysfunctional and not meeting the expectations of residents. I understand the frustration when we hear that the solution is to just trust the department—the same department that has presided over decades of dysfunction. What could go wrong?

The Homes for Homes model is simple. It raises funds from voluntary tax-deductible donations as part of an existing property transaction process that leverages both money raised and existing capacity in the community to increase the supply of social and affordable housing, benefiting those vulnerable Queenslanders desperate for housing solutions. For me, it was interesting to learn that those people standing on street corners handing out those newspapers are part of Homes for Homes. I will certainly be looking at them in a different light and maybe supporting their need to communicate with the community. It is something that I did not realise. I commend them on the work they are doing.

The Homes for Homes submission stated that conservative economic modelling shows that just three per cent of residential properties registered with Homes for Homes by 2050 could realise over \$200 million in donations from Queenslanders. Homes for Homes grants these funds to community housing providers through an open tender process to create new social and affordable housing for the most vulnerable in our community. It is encouraging to see the use of community housing providers being expanded and, finally, the acknowledgement that the private sector has a role to play. I commend the committee's report to anyone with an interest in the issues raised, particularly those nine recommendations referencing stakeholder, community and committee feedback.

While the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill provides an opportunity for not-for-profits to be part of the solution, we need to do so much more in addressing the housing crisis some eight years in the making. As we have been saying for the past eight years, we need to be bold. We need to be innovative in delivering housing solutions and not afraid to work with the private sector utilising the huge state controlled land bank. We need to stop the spin and the denials. The government has a real problem in identifying the problem of its own making.

This bill is not a silver bullet for the housing crisis. We need to do a lot more, as has been talked about. As we know, a lot of effort in this parliament has been directed at housing issues. While this bill goes some way to providing new community housing provider funding, it is time we really unleashed the potential of Queensland's building sector, including both the private sector and the government sector. More importantly, it is about all of us pulling together to make sure this housing crisis is something we can get rid of. It is a monkey on our back. Queenslanders deserve so much more.