



Housing for the Aged Action Group

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Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) was founded in 1983 as a small grass-roots community group. Today HAAG is the only Australian organisation specialised in the housing needs of older people with a low income.

HAAG is committed to finding long term solutions to the housing crisis facing older Australians. We have partnered with organisations such as the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV), Council on the Ageing (COTA), the University of Queensland Institute for Social Science Research and the University of Adelaide Centre for Housing, Urban and Regional Planning on research and service based projects.

As well as being a community organisation, HAAG runs two state and federally funded services. The Home at Last (HAL) program provides practical support to those seeking an appropriate, affordable home. HAAG also have a Retirement Housing Advice Service (RHAS) to assist financially disadvantaged people in all forms of retirement housing. The programs have housed over 600 older people since 2012 into public and social housing. In addition, the services produce service data which informs our policy work and submissions such as this one.

The overwhelming majority of HAAG clients at exit are public or social housing tenants whose income consists entirely of Centrelink payments. Renters over the age of 55 currently make up more than a quarter of all Victorians living in public and social housing, with older renters the fastest growing group of social housing tenants.¹ Older social and public housing tenants are an obviously vulnerable and disadvantaged group, and the effects of this Bill would be felt especially keenly by those tenants. We are very concerned as to the foreseeable effects of the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Housing Affordability) Bill 2017 for our clients, and for older renters more generally.

In particular, we are concerned that the Bill:

- Does not require a housing provider to notify tenants before seeking deductions under the ARDS;

¹ Consumer Affairs Victoria, *Residential Tenancies Act Review: Laying the Groundwork*, 2015, p. 23.

- Does not require a housing provider to give a tenant an opportunity to pay any debt before applying for deductions under the ARDS;
- Does not provide a remedy or review process for a tenant who is the subject of ARDS deductions for a debt they dispute;
- Does not provide for the Secretary to consider the financial hardship that deductions would cause to a tenant;
- Allows deductions for costs which would not ordinarily expose a tenant to the risk of termination, such as maintenance and utility costs, and so have no relation the apparent aim of the Bill in preventing homelessness;
- Reduces the capacity of older tenants to manage their finances and, in particular, to deal with unexpected and sudden expenses (for example, funeral costs) or irregular but predictable changes in living expenses (for example, the resetting of the PBS threshold) which may impose delays in rent payments that will be remedied in the ordinary course of the tenancy;
- By reducing already limited incomes, may leave older renters without enough money to cover basic living expenses such as food and medicine.

HAAG recommends that the Bill be rejected in its entirety due to its lack of safeguards for vulnerable tenants and its foreseeable and severe negative effects on older renters.

Sincerely,

Fiona York
Housing for the Aged Action Group