

## **DRAFT SECOND READING SPEECH**

**HON. JACQUIE PETRUSMA MP**

### ***Homes Amendment Bill 2016***

*\*check Hansard for delivery\**

Madam Speaker

The *Homes Amendment Bill 2016* is an important piece of legislation. It amends the *Homes Act 1935* and the *Residential Tenancy Act 1997* to modernise how housing assistance and homelessness services are provided by the Director of Housing.

The Bill provides the legal framework that recognises the ways in which the Director of Housing works in collaboration with the community and private housing sectors to help vulnerable Tasmanians.

The *Homes Act* of 1935 was written at a time when many of the services we now expect from government did not exist. The original legislation is constrained to a very narrow application of housing assistance that is primarily concerned with helping people to own their own home. For example, back then, the Director of Housing did not have a role in providing homelessness support.

Nowadays the Director does so much more, including

- private rental assistance
- tenancy support
- crisis accommodation
- long term supported housing, and
- home ownership assistance.

Other examples that demonstrate the contemporary ways that the Director of Housing has provided housing assistance include Nation Building Economic Stimulus Package, the National Rental Affordability Scheme, Better Housing Futures, Housing Connect, Home Share, Streets Ahead, Supported Accommodation Facilities and crisis shelters.

The Act therefore needs to recognise the contemporary functions of the Director of Housing and the various ways that housing assistance is now delivered.

Housing Connect is Tasmania's one-stop-shop for housing assistance. It is an example of the ways that Government now works to deliver the range of housing options and support services to those who need it.

Vulnerable Tasmanians escaping from family violence, young people at risk of homelessness, older people who cannot afford to age at home, people living with disability or poor physical or mental health, working families who can't afford to purchase their own home – these are some of the people the Director of Housing now has a role in helping to live in safe, secure and affordable homes.

It is time to modernise the Act. We need to make sure it reflects the broadening needs of vulnerable Tasmanians who seek housing assistance and the partnerships between Government, the community and private sectors to deliver more affordable homes and housing support.

Other jurisdictions have, in their own ways, modernised their legislation to reflect who they help and how. Tasmania needs to do the same. We need our Act to reflect our way of business and the principles for housing assistance under national funding arrangements and reform agendas.

Tasmania has been successful by working with the community and private sectors to deliver affordable homes. It has been the only jurisdiction to increase the supply of its social housing portfolio in the last decade because of the transfer and sale of land and grant funding under programs such as the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Package, the National Rental Affordability Scheme and Better Housing Futures.

The Bill before us today will ensure that the purpose of the Act enables Government to continue to build on the success of the last decade by working with the community and private sector to deliver housing assistance for vulnerable people.

The Bill also updates the Act so that it is gender-neutral. Without these amendments, the Act assumes that the Director of Housing is male. Language and terminology, such as 'servants', have likewise been updated. The Act is old and times have changed – for the better. We need our Act to reflect those changes in our society.

The needs of Tasmanians have also changed. The reasons for seeking housing assistance are widening to include young people, families and the working poor, and older people. To respond to this, Government must address long term stability as well as short term need. We need to ensure the availability of housing that is suitable for people living with disability or ageing in place as well as ensure access to services that are the best they can be.

Madam Speaker - preventing housing stress and homelessness, providing early intervention when people experience housing difficulty and responding rapidly and appropriately to people experiencing housing crisis or homelessness is current policy and has been for some time. The Act must enable this.

The Bill therefore updates the *Residential Tenancy Act 1997* to reflect arrangements where housing providers may lease homes from the Director of Housing or private owners then sub-lease to Tasmanians in need with the full protections of the *Residential Tenancy Act*. These are important amendments to modernise legislation to recognise the ways that the Director of Housing works with service providers to help vulnerable Tasmanians.

The Tasmanian Government's Family Violence Rapid Rehousing Initiative was released in 2015 as part of the Government's *Safe Homes, Safe Families: Tasmania's Violence Action Plan 2015 – 2020*.

The Initiative anticipates community housing organisations entering into leases with private owners to create a pool of 50 furnished properties around the State to rapidly rehouse those who have experienced family violence and need safe and secure accommodation.

Vulnerable Tasmanians housed under this initiative will enter into sub-lease arrangements with community housing providers for as long as they are in need. The sub-leases will also enjoy the full protection of the *Residential Tenancy Act 1997* as a result of this Bill.

Late last year the Government released *Tasmania's Affordable Housing Strategy 2015-2025*. The Strategy provides a ten year plan that aims to decrease the proportion of low income Tasmanian households experiencing housing stress and to reduce the proportion of Tasmanians experiencing homelessness.

The program of works for the first four years of the Strategy is set out in an Action Plan to build on the success of recent reforms to the housing and homelessness system and deliver new supply of affordable homes in Tasmania.

The Bill before us enables the Director of Housing to lease, transfer or sell homes and land to housing providers and housing support providers in certain, limited circumstances, for the purpose of providing housing assistance or support services to eligible persons, that is vulnerable people in need.

This is a key change.

As happened under Better Housing Futures, the Bill enables the transfer or sale of land and transfer of dwelling houses to housing providers and housing support providers, as well as the sale of dwelling houses subject to terms and conditions for a period of up to 30 years after the land and/or dwelling houses are transferred or sold.

This is to ensure that land and/or dwelling-houses that are transferred or sold to housing providers or housing support providers continue to be used to benefit eligible people in need of housing assistance.

Critically, the Bill requires the Director of Housing to have the Minister's approval before making these transfers or sales. This will ensure that decisions are made accountably, transparently, and are subject to the proper oversight.

This change will – most importantly – deliver increased housing stock for use by eligible people in need of housing assistance.

The Bill also streamlines provisions for grants and advances issued by the Director of Housing to eligible people and others. The Bill clarifies the Director of Housing's ability to grant money to, or make arrangements with, housing providers and housing support providers in relevant circumstances.

The Bill is necessary for the important reforms I have outlined today, as part of this government's commitment to delivering housing affordability and homelessness support for the people of Tasmania and I commend the Bill to the House.