

Submission on Fairer Safer Housing.

Comments from the perspective of public housing tenants.

There is a problem regarding the definitions used in the document, which states that 'social housing collectively refers to public housing and community housing.'

This definition means that 'social housing' is an umbrella term which applies to both community and public housing. To call both community and public housing 'social housing' is a confusing and obfuscating misuse of language since they are two very different housing models.

Social housing is also used as a synonym for community housing as distinct from public housing. The definitions keep shifting making meaningful and sensible debate difficult.

Some of the differences between public and community housing.

Public housing is government owned and managed housing and provides **security of tenure** and **rebated flexible rents** which are all too often missing in community housing. Public housing does not require tenants to apply for Commonwealth Rent Assistance in order for the rents to be affordable, unlike in community housing. Public tenants are protected from unfair 'no cause' eviction notices. This is not the case for community housing tenants and those in the private rental market. Unlike the situation with public housing many community housing tenants are on fixed term contracts. The criteria for entry into community housing is often much broader than that for public housing because community housing caters for people on low to **moderate incomes**. The report shows that the demographics of public and community housing are different which makes the logic of considering them as a bloc and conflating them for statistical purposes difficult to see.

Public tenants do not refer to themselves as 'social housing' tenants.

To force a change of name on us indicates a complete lack of **cultural sensitivity** to the identity and voices of public tenants and our public housing communities.

Worse it can be seen as a deliberate attempt to disempower public tenants- to deny us the necessary information in order for us to get involved and have our say regarding major paradigm shifts in housing policy. Accurate information is needed so that genuine consultation with public tenants can take place, and public tenants can fully partake in public life, as is our collective human right.

We reject the notion that public tenants - and for that matter community housing tenants - need additional laws and threats such as a Three Strikes Eviction policy over and above the Residential Tenancy Act, which is already weighted on the side of the

landlords' interests against the tenants. **Why should people on low incomes be denied the same housing security enjoyed by other members of society?**

Human Rights

Public tenants have the protection of the Human Rights Charter.

The peak body for Community Housing Organisations -CHFV- is at present disputing the applicability of the Human Rights Charter -HRC- in a submission towards a review of the Charter.

CHFV states that it was not the original intention of the HRC that it applied to Community Housing Organisations and goes on to argue that its terms –ie being a public authority – does not apply to them.

This means that it is the intended outcome of CHFV that their tenants have **less protection and rights than public tenants.**

As your report states, both public and community housing tenants are amongst the 'most vulnerable and disadvantaged' members of our society. **It is essential that they have the full protection of the Human Rights Charter.**

This should be made clear to all public tenants and prospective tenants of community housing, especially in light of proposed transfers of stock, management and tenancies. Public tenants have a right to be fully informed.

To our knowledge there is no fact-sheet available delineating the differences between public and community housing from the tenants' point of view. Again - calling both community and public housing 'social housing' is unhelpful and misleading since it implies that they are the same thing and there is no information easily available to inform tenants otherwise.

If your department is serious about establishing a fairer safer housing system for **all Victorians**, then it needs to acknowledge and rectify its serious ongoing disregard for the rights of public tenants by addressing these issues.

Finally the notion that the market can satisfy all housing needs is an ideological one and unsupported by evidence. The government should accept and embrace the fact that public housing is a necessary and permanent part of housing policy. Rather than divest itself of this asset via stock transfers, the government should keep public housing in public hands and invest in more public housing to meet the growing demand.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our views.

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