

8 July 2011

Mr Zed Seselja
Leader of the Opposition
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020
Canberra ACT 2061

Dear Zed,

Re: Submission on the Residential Tenancies (Minimum Housing Standards) Act Amendment Bill 2011 (“Fair Go Rentals Bill”)

We are writing in support of the enactment of the Residential Tenancies (Minimum Housing Standards) Act Amendment Bill 2011 (“Fair Go Rentals Bill”).

The Women’s Legal Centre (ACT and Region) Inc, is a Community Legal Centre accredited by the National Association of Community Legal Centres. The Centre has been operating in Canberra since 1996. The main areas in which we provide advice are family law, domestic violence, and employment and discrimination law. Our client group includes disadvantaged women, such as those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disabilities, and women living in poverty.

Many of our clients are living in poor rental properties, some of which do not even meet basic standards. Enacting this bill will improve the standard of living for our clients and for disadvantaged women in the ACT.

Fair Go Rentals Bill

The Fair Go Rentals Bill seeks to set minimum standards for rental properties in the ACT. The legislation will set specific minimum standards for security, energy, and water efficiency and requires the Minister to set a number of standards in relation to other areas, such as ventilation and damp, construction and condition, hot and cold water supply, heating, laundry and cooking facilities, lighting, electrical safety and hard wired smoke alarms. The Bill would also include public housing where the Government is the landlord. The three principal minimum standards in the Bill are:

- Energy efficiency standard – EER 2 by January 2013, and EER 3 by January 2015

- Water efficiency standards can be met by fitting low flow shower heads and taps, and installing a dual flush toilet
- Security standards – the provision of deadlocks on external doors as well as locks on other external openings.

The Bill also outlines a process for tenants to follow if they believe that minimum standards are not being met. Firstly, the tenant may request action by the landlord. Secondly, the tenant may engage the Commissioner for fair trading. In cases where the landlord is unable to meet the minimum standards without unreasonable cost, then they may apply for an exemption which may be granted Minister.

Rental properties in the ACT

Generally, most properties rented out in the ACT are of good quality. However, there are a number of rental properties which do not even meet basic standards of living. In particular, some older houses have poor ventilation, poor security and often do not have heating. These older houses also have poor energy ratings and the people renting them are forced to pay exorbitant running costs.

Unfortunately, such houses are rented by disadvantaged people who are on the lowest incomes. These living conditions may affect their health and well-being, as well as leading to crippling bills and discomfort. By enacting this bill, it will be possible to reduce the ongoing energy consumption of a property and therefore the high costs to tenants. It will also improve general living standards.

The Women's Legal Centre calls on the ACT Government to introduce the Fair Go Rentals Bill to ensure that disadvantaged women in Canberra have access to housing that is safe, secure and affordable to live in.

Yours sincerely,

Carol Benda
Coordinator
Women's Legal Centre (ACT & Region)