

T R A N S C R I P T

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Redevelopment of Melbourne's Public Housing Towers

Flemington – Tuesday 24 June 2025

MEMBERS

Joe McCracken – Chair

Michael Galea – Deputy Chair

Ryan Batchelor

Anasina Gray-Barberio

Renee Heath

Ann-Marie Hermans

Rachel Payne

Lee Tarlamis

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Melina Bath

John Berger

Georgie Crozier

Jacinta Ermacora

David Ettershank

Sarah Mansfield

Tom McIntosh

Aiv Puglielli

Sonja Terpstra

Richard Welch

WITNESSES

Witness 1; and

Witness 2.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I declare open the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into the Redevelopment of Melbourne's Public Housing Towers. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

To begin with, I will introduce myself. My name is Michael Galea. I am the Deputy Chair of the committee and a Member for South-East Metro.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: I am Ann-Marie Hermans, Member for the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Hearing suspended.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: We are now resuming the hearing, and we were partway through member introductions.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Ryan Batchelor, Member for the Southern Metropolitan Region. Welcome, and thank you very much for coming today.

Lee TARLAMIS: Lee Tarlamis, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Good afternoon. Anasina Gray-Barberio, Northern Metro.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Good afternoon. Aiv Puglielli, North- Eastern Metropolitan.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: All evidence taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information that you provide today during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by privilege. Any deliberately false or misleading information to the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

For the benefit of Hansard, could you both please state your full names.

Witness 1: My name is Witness 1.

Witness 2: Witness 2.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you both. I would now like to invite you to make a brief statement of no more than 5 minutes in whichever order you like. Who would like to go first?

Witness 1: I just came here because of my complaint I had. I used to be in Holland Court in the walk-up before, and then I moved to Deer Park. The house they moved me into really was not enough for me with my kids, and the house was too old. I had been there for five years, and then they granted me two in Victoria Street, a four-bedroom and two-bedroom apartment, and now I am struggling to pay both because sometimes my kids, they do not go to school, they do not go to work, they are still schooling – I have to pay for those both. I do not know if that one is right for a big family to have, like separating their own kids in two different apartments.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you. Are there any other comments you would like to make? No? Thank you. Witness 2.

Witness 2: I just came to understand. I do not understand what is happening or why we have been pushed. There was not enough time for us to tell us what is happening. We are just confused still. We do not know what is going on and what they are going to do for us. We are still waiting, yes.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you. Thank you very much. Mrs Hermans.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Thank you both for coming in. We have heard a lot about the confusion and the lack of communication between the government and the people, but I am interested, Witness 1, in your situation. I do not fully understand how in government housing your family has been separated and you are paying for two apartments. Were you originally all located in one place?

Witness 1: Yes.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: And the government then separated your family – is that what happened?

Witness 1: Yes.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: And do you have children living in one house and you are in another?

Witness 1: Yes.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Are the children grown-up children or young children at school?

Witness 1: The time I moved in that apartment, my first one was turning 18 and my second one was 17 in that time, but we were still separated until now. And the thief walked into my house – nothing; the community housing said they would just leave me in the block. So I do not know what is going to happen, because now I am struggling with my kids, and I have a medical child and I have another one now, and they are separated with me in the other apartment while I am with the youngest one. So it is making me go crazy.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: I can fully understand that, and I hear the desperation in your voice. Is that a breakdown between you and the government, do you think, that has happened? How does that happen in social housing? Are there other families that this has happened to?

Witness 1: I do not know.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Okay. Thank you. No further questions.

Witness 2: This happened to me, actually. When they were renovating our building, they really wanted to move us, because we were the last people, so they offered me the same thing for my girls – ‘We can give you a two-bedroom and a three-bedroom next to each other.’ By the time they were offering it to me it was late, so I ended up having a three-bedroom only.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: So you have been separated from your children and your family has been split?

Witness 2: Yes. That happened to me.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: In the relocation?

Witness 2: Yes. They were renewing the building. They had to move me from the 11th floor to the eighth floor, so I was eligible for a four-bedroom that time, but they promised me they are going to give me a two-bedroom and a three-bedroom because they could not find a four-bedroom. By the time – the other one was not finished – they said, ‘Okay. We’re going to give you – just move for us for now, because you are the last person.’ After I moved they did not give me anything, and my girls were already over age, so that happened is what I am saying.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: So once they turned 18 it was like, ‘Well, bad luck – you can’t live with your parents now. You have to go.’

Witness 2: They told me 21 and 18. Yes. So they say no.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: They have been forced out of the home.

Witness 2: Yes.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Gray-Barberio.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you, Deputy Chair. I will start with you, Witness 1. When you relocated and you had to obviously go through the relocation agreement, were you shown the entire contract page by page so that you understood what you were signing up for?

Witness 1: The first agreement I did with them, it was like the idea was to open up two apartments, but I did not begin with two apartments. I thought maybe they were going to do what they told me. After we had already signed it and we had moved in already I was like, 'Hmm. They didn't open anything.' So my kids were on the other side.

I am a single mother with eight kids, and I was determined to keep my kids together. They are helping me that much, because if I want to work, I want to go somewhere or do something, they are there for me. Like at the moment now they are starting having that freedom, because no-one is going to tell them 'Don't do this' and 'Don't do this one'. It is like they are teaching our kids to be independent by force.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you, Witness 1. When you signed that relocation contract or agreement, that was between you and Homes Victoria?

Witness 1: Yes.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: And now the agreement that you have now is with you and community housing?

Witness 1: Yes.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Just for the clarity of the committee, nowhere in your new agreement does it say that the two apartments will eventually be merged into one?

Witness 1: Yes.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: And what kind of impact is this having on you and your children and your family?

Witness 1: A lot. I am feeling crazy. At the moment I am feeling this is the thing I did not bargain for my family – to have my kids in the other apartment. Sometimes I do not even sleep. I do not know what the government is doing for us.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Speaking of the government, what is your message to the government given your situation – or Homes Victoria – Witness 1?

Witness 1: The government has to see that families have big families. It is supposed to do something for them, not to squeeze them and lie to them and separate them from their own families.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: I am sorry this is making you upset. I do apologise. Thank you, Witness 1.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Mr Batchelor.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thank you, Deputy Chair. Witness 2, you mentioned you had to move within a building for a renovation.

Witness 2: Yes.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Just for clarity, which of the buildings – what was the number?

Witness 2: I live in 120 Racecourse Road. This happened eight years ago when they were renovating the whole building.

Ryan BATCHELOR: So when they were renovating 120, you had to move from –

Witness 2: Yes. I used to live in a two-bedroom, and I was eligible for a four-bedroom. They could not offer that to me. They said, ‘We can’t find a four-bedroom.’

Ryan BATCHELOR: When they were renovating the building, just so I am clear, you had to move from one floor to another floor?

Witness 2: I was supposed to move from the 11th floor –

Ryan BATCHELOR: Eleventh floor, yes.

Witness 2: because they are renewing everything. They could not find a four-bedroom for us.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Right.

Witness 2: But they said to me, ‘We have a three-bedroom. You can move to the three-bedroom, and then we will give it to you.’ Two of my girls, they are older. They promised that.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Yes.

Witness 2: But they were just rushing me because it was not ready, the flat.

Ryan BATCHELOR: It was not ready to go back, or to the new one?

Witness 2: To the new one.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Okay.

Witness 2: I said, ‘Okay, I’ll just trust them.’ The problem was that I did not ask them for anything written or any evidence. I remember her name exactly – she was [REDACTED] She promised me she is going to give the two girls two bedrooms just next to me, plus three.

Ryan BATCHELOR: When did this renovation take place?

Witness 2: It was eight years ago. I do not even know what the point was to renovate that when they planned to demolish everything.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Yes, but this was an internal renovation of the building, and you were moved around as part of that. Did you have a choice as to when you moved because of the renovation?

Witness 2: You do not have any choice.

Ryan BATCHELOR: The renovation did not give you any choice.

Witness 2: No choice.

Ryan BATCHELOR: You were told what you had to do.

Witness 2: They betrayed me, even that time.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Even for the renovations, you have had to –

Witness 2: Even for the renovations. They said, ‘We are going to make it nicer.’ But in the meantime, they said, ‘Okay, no four-bedroom.’

Ryan BATCHELOR: When they were moving you out for renovation, they did not have what you needed to go to accommodate your family?

Witness 2: Yes. They said the two-bedroom. My girl graduated by then, and they changed their minds. She said to me they have to do an application again. But then they started working and then they rejected them. They said, ‘Oh, they are working now. We can’t.’ It was not –

Ryan BATCHELOR: This experience you had with moving around because of the renovation – were other families affected in a similar way?

Witness 2: Sorry, can you say that again?

Ryan BATCHELOR: Your experience that you had during the renovation, having to move – did other families have the same?

Witness 2: Probably, yes. Probably some, yes.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Okay. Thank you very much.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you. That brings this session to a close. I would like to thank both of you for coming in today and sharing your experiences with the committee.

Committee adjourned.