

TRANSCRIPT

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Inquiry into the retirement housing sector

Melbourne — 26 October 2016

Members

Mr Edward O'Donohue — Chair

Ms Nina Springle — Deputy Chair

Ms Margaret Fitzherbert

Mr Daniel Mulino

Ms Fiona Patten

Mrs Inga Peulich

Mr Adem Somyurek

Ms Jaclyn Symes

Participating Members

Ms Colleen Hartland

Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips

Staff

Acting secretary: Mr Patrick O'Brien

Witness

Ms Helen Vallack.

The CHAIR — Hello, Ms Vallack. Thank you very much for joining us. I will caution you before you start that all evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Thank you for joining us this evening.

Ms VALLACK — Good evening. I am here to tell my story plus support the last two ladies who have told you their stories. I would like to say something to the spokesperson for UnitingCare Harrison. I would like to say his comment about some people are never satisfied when they go to consumer affairs and do not get the outcome they want is not true. I had to take my case to consumer affairs for a conciliation meeting. The conciliation meeting was resolved, we thought, but it only lasted two months. The resolution lasted two months, and Harrison stopped coming to see us where we were working out the finances. The finances had always been a big problem. I was on the committee and felt extremely responsible. The budgets we received were unreadable. At one stage we even paid, a couple of us, an accountant to help us understand it. He could not; he just said, 'It's a load of rubbish'.

At that stage our service fee had gone up from I think it was \$430-something to over \$700 per month — one jump, over \$700. There were a lot of people there on pensions, myself included, and it just was not feasible. I could not stay. The main problem, I found, was the on-site manager, who was manipulative and, as Daisy has said, she made the bullets, the residents fired them, and it was the most unpleasant, toxic situation I have ever been in.

I made the decision, because I was 69 at the time and I decided, 'I am not spending the rest of my life here. I can't, even if I do lose all that money'. So immediately I went home and packed my things. That took me a while. But I could not stay there a minute longer, so I lived in my flat surrounded by packing boxes until I found somewhere to go. I might add I am very happy now.

But I would like to, in closing, support everything those previous ladies have said, and it was worse. I also would like to correct Mr Fee for saying you cannot please some people. In the beginning it did please us. However, the compliance was not adhered to by the other parties. So, happy news, myself, the other two ladies and three others have left — no, two others. Five of us left. There is one lady there who was very supportive of us, and she is still there. But basically, if I had not been a resilient person, I think it would have ruined me — but I am resilient, and I am wiser now.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for telling us your story.

Committee adjourned.