

TRANSCRIPT

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Inquiry into the retirement housing sector

Melbourne — 28 September 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 Joane McKnight.

The CHAIR — For those who are interested in giving a comment from the floor, this is your opportunity to make a statement about this inquiry in 60 seconds. I will just provide a general caution to all those who are going to make a statement that all evidence taken at this hearing 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 you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but any comments made outside the hearing are not afforded such privilege. Today's evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with proof versions of the transcript within the next week and transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website. I invite you to say your name and make your statement in 1 minute.

Ms McKNIGHT — My name is Joane McKnight. I am a committee member with HAAG, but I also live in a caravan park by definition but in a home that could not be relocated without destroying it. In reality and advertising they call it a lifestyle village for the over 55s, owned by a resident in Singapore and managed by only two office staff. Many residents are asked after they have moved in and settled down how they fell for the advertising and they say, 'Cheated'. One of the biggest issues presented by residents relates to management's attitudes and the lack of professionalism in that field.

There are currently no standards for management, and no training is required for people to undertake these leading roles. For this reason residential village operations must be separated from the old caravan park culture. Managers need to be accredited and reaccredited every two to three years. Many residential village operators have an old-fashioned caravan park, almost feudal, approach to park management and liaison with residents. Changes are needed to stop this endemic problem in the sector. Retirees can live a very negatively impacted life, and in some cases damaged by the behaviour of the village owners and managers. We have had single ladies in our villages in tears because of the treatment over the location of a pot plant. That is elder abuse.

In our village we have had a very successful residents group, both social and communication, but during the redevelopment of a community centre we were asked to be involved in the design and selection of furniture. That was fine until we actually challenged the suitability of the design for older people. We were told it was an over 55s village; the fact is that most of us are around about 75. We challenged the height of toilet seats, chairs and table designs, the width of doorways and trip points. At one particular meeting we were told that because we questioned these items we threatened management's safety. From then on we have had no constructive communication with management and an almost unusable community centre.

Last week I was in China and I had the opportunity to visit an over 60s housing area. Granted it was in high-rise apartments, as is their wont, but there were levels of accommodation depending on health issues. The important point to me was management: two skilled managers — one must have a medical background and the other management skills. This was a privately run institution funded by residents, with no Chinese government input.

Management training and standards overlap with the important need for an ombudsman, as how can you resolve disputes when the person causing the problem is the one that you have to complain to? Some will tell you that no-one complains, and I heard that regularly today. But people are scared. They are frightened; they are frightened to comment for fear of retribution and the effects on their tenancy. Creation of new legislation would set appropriate standards for managers for this type of accommodation and release the shackles of the old model.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your statement.

Witness withdrew.