

Phyll Williams (Ms)



The Secretary  
 Legal and Social Issues Committee  
 Parliament of Victoria

RE: INQUIRY INTO THE RETIREMENT HOUSING SECTOR

I am a retired female in my 70s. For the last 7 years I have been a resident at [REDACTED], which is a complex of 40 one bedroom Independent Living Units (ILUs). When I moved here this complex was owned and operated by Catholic Homes for the Elderly Inc but during the past year has been amalgated with Villa Maria and is now known as Villa Maria Catholic Homes (VMCH). VMCH is focused on nursing home care for elderly residents - a focus so far unnecessary for the residents of this complex currently. My understanding is that this complex was built in the late 1960s to provide housing for low income citizens at that time.

My life is Compromise. I believe that if realistically I don't accept that Compromise is a daily actuality then I may feel overwhelmed often. Instead I choose to accept the inadequacies and keep very busy as a volunteer always. For example in my previous life I was so much a painter and a gardener but now the absence of space available to plant and/or paint in a one bedroom unit certainly precludes such activities. Hardly a loss some might think except now, every day, I miss it. Cramped conditions can be smothering or may enable imaginative use of space - after discarding so many long loved items, large and small, including most of the usual kitchen implements. OP shops have been most appreciative. We may choose to crumple or compromise.

Some older citizens have suffered major emotional and financial distress from their experiences in retirement dwellings and consequent dispute resolutions; that hasn't happened to me. Without assets and/or savings I entered this dwelling as a rental tenant, which isn't always bad. For example my hot water unit cracked up last Easter week and after a phone call to the Maintenance people at VMCH it was replaced immediately at no cost to me. What is NOT good about being in this so-called Not For Profit (NFP) complex as a rental tenant is the frequent lack of attention to the '...focus on dignity, respect, appropriate care and quality of life for retirees' as mentioned in your Terms of Reference 1(c). This shows so often in activities that happen here without any consultation from the owners to we, the residents. For example, this is our home and if someone at VMCH decides a fortnight ago to engage a man with a chain saw to cut down all the flowering plus the fruit trees in the courtyard it is not fair, and we, as residents, had no prior notification nor real freedom to express alternative ideas or options. My

complaint was met with a patronising 'don't you worry about that' type of reply stating there'll now be better blooming next year (no, there wont be) while I'm sure the real reason is to eliminate more outdoor maintenance costs. This is the latest example of owner actions, which only cause distressing feelings and opinions that older citizens are unimportant and even incapable of decision making at all. Continual examples abound to show management training connected with any interaction with elderly citizens needs upgraded and specific management training.

This complex is not as old as some so is receiving less attention to upgrading and modification requirement, again based on economical reasoning rather than need. Facilities such as communal laundries, maintenance of specific units' bathrooms, kitchens and rooves, the dangerously aged cement paths in and around the complex are all in much need of review and attention. The ageing of the Victoria's population is matched by the ageing and often dangerously neglected NFP housing complexes of which this is one. My rent is higher than for most residents here, but maintenance fees are still paid by all residents monthly to attend to repairs - seldom noted as happening - though the rent still increases annually.

In conclusion, housing is a right not a privilege is something often said and never more important than for those in their latter years. It is not fair that we seniors need to continually fight for the right to safe, affordable, accessible, and well-maintained accommodation wherein to live with security of tenure, to name but one of the pressing considerations necessary. It is most appreciated to see the Legislative Council looking into the Retirement Housing Sector and we look forward to the results.

I forward my choice of recommendations: 1) that more public housing be built as quickly as possible in Victoria and - definitely - 2) the engagement of a permanent position of Retirement Housing Ombudsman as soon as possible.

Thank you.