

Rec 15/6/16

June 8th 2016

Ms Mary Charles

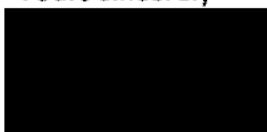


The Secretary
Legal and Social Issues Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Please find attached my submission to the Committee on the Inquiry into the Retirement Housing Sector.

Thanking you for taking the time to consider my Submission and Recommendations.

Yours sincerely



Mary Charles

My name is Mary, I am 74 years old and on December 15th 2016, I moved into my I.L.U. which is in a not for profit retirement village in the metro Melbourne area.

I am retired and living on a limited income. After feeling unsafe in the area I was living in, I was given the opportunity to move to my current home in a safer area.

My rent was due the day I moved in. As I hadn't used direct debit to pay my rent in the past, I checked my bank account only to find out that my rent had not been paid. I rang my housing provider and firstly spoke to someone in the finance department. She told me to speak to the affordable housing coordinator who told me that my direct debit authority had gone to the wrong section and that the next rent deduction would be double.

During the same phone call, I was told by the person in the finance department that my rent would be increased from February 15th 2016 despite the figure written into my contract and on a disclosure statement for rental residents. I told the person that it was illegal to raise the rent so soon and to tell someone their rent was being raised by telephone. The person I was speaking to told me it wasn't her concern and to take it up with the affordable housing coordinator as this was the person who gave the finance department the figures.

Following this conversation, I rang Consumer Affairs and was sent a Residential Complaint Form.

I then re-contacted the affordable housing coordinator again and was told that everyone pays the same for the first month and then the income and asset test is applied and the rent is automatically increased. (The asset and income test was applied to the figures I have to the affordable housing coordinator prior to signing my contract.)

Having got nowhere with my housing provider by telephone, in early February 2016 I wrote a letter addressed to the "General Manager Customer Services" who had signed the disclosure for rental residents. The title was correct according to the website. I have never received a reply to my letter.

(Ironically the person who signed the letter to HAAG was the person I had written to. This did wonders for my self-esteem – the fact that I could be ignored but HAAG wasn't. This person had also written that it was "hoped that this error hadn't caused me any inconvenience", and that the "mistake was within our Business Service team". In the same letter no apology was offered to me.)

Once again I rang Consumer Affairs and I was referred and transferred to HAAG who have had more success with my housing provider.

Prior to being referred to HAAG, I rang my housing provider again hoping to speak to someone in authority. I was offered the affordable housing coordinator, but asked for someone higher. I was put through to an extension and left a voicemail. This call was unanswered.

The experience of having to deal with my housing provider has left me feeling extremely vulnerable, stressed and also that if my complaint was ignored, then I would go away. And that is a feeling no one should have to experience.

All existing legislation contained in the Residential Villages Act 1986 should be amended/updated and most importantly enacted to become relevant in 2016.

Operators and their employees of retirement housing should be made aware of the relevant sections of the Act.

Persons or institutions who operate any type of retirement accommodation (e.g. retirement villages, I.L.U.s and others) should have a contract specific to the accommodation needs of an ingoing resident. A simple contract/lease relating to the type of accommodation would be easier for all concerned.

Improving all aspects and areas of communication is vital. In my case, a lot of stress could have been avoided had my housing provider shown a little empathy toward me and listened to what was a genuine complaint. (An apology written or otherwise would have been appreciated, at least it would have acknowledged I existed and that my housing provider had made a mistake.)

A Retirement Housing Ombudsman should not be necessary but needs to be appointed to ensure that the Residential Villages Act is implemented in a manner equitable to all parties at all times. The Ombudsman would be able to mediate between the parties should that be necessary.

I am willing to appear at the Parliamentary Inquiry.

Mary Charles

