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The Secretary
Legal and Social Issues Committee
Parliament House, Spring St,
East Melbourne, VIC, 3002

Inquiry into the Retirement Housing Sector

My name is Theodorus De Wit and I am writing to you about my experience having lived in a Not-For-Profit (NFP) retirement village.

In 2012 me and my wife were living in a two bedroom public housing unit owned by the Office of Housing, Department of Human Services. We had been there for approximately 9 years but unfortunately the area became very hard to live in due to crime and drugs.

We knew someone who lived in a village providing affordable rental units for people over the age of 55 and they were happy and felt secure there. Due to our advancing years we decided to apply to live in St Laurence Park retirement village in Lara.

Upon speaking with the village we were under the impression and were assured that the rental would be comparable to public housing so we decided to sign a rental contract.

After a period of about three months we were informed that we had to pay water and sewerage charges, as well as land rates. I informed management we would not be paying as we did not own the property but were merely tenants. Their reply was that we had signed a retirement village rental contract and therefore we had to pay those rates. We felt as though we had been deceived!

We received a breach of duty notice followed by a notice to vacate for failing to pay our rates. During this time I was seeking advice from Housing for the Aged Action group (HAAG), who in turn sought some legal advice, about whether the village was truly allowed to charge us these extra costs.

The advice we received was that a certain clause in our contract allowed the village to charge us any extra costs that were separately metered against our property and therefore we had no choice but to pay these extra costs. What was most upsetting was that there was no clear disclosure provided to us about the nature of the village. If we had known it was a retirement village we may never had chosen to move in.

Most of the residents living at St Laurence Park retirement village on 'rental contracts' rely on their pension as their main source of income. The added costs put pensioners under financial strain.

We have since, with the help of HAAG through their Home at Last service, left the retirement village and obtained once again a two bedroom public housing unit but our

experience highlights how confusing the retirement village sector can be especially without clear disclosure and transparent management practices.

It is high time something was done about the shemozzle that the Retirement Villages Act represents!

Remaining Yours Truly,

Barney T de wit

