

## POSITION STATEMENT: VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT FAIR RENTAL LAWS

10 October 2017

Melbourne City Mission welcomes the Andrew's Governments proposed changes to Victoria's tenancy laws, and are pleased to have been part of the Make Renting Fair campaign.

"In an over-heated housing market, rental bidding and ad hoc rent increases are rife and there is no real security of tenure. We need to "fix" housing. Part of the fix is to Make Renting Fair," Vicki Sutton, Chief Executive Officer, Melbourne City Mission said.

Melbourne City Mission has advocated for these reforms since 2015, including through four policy submissions which have informed a suite of the reforms now pegged for implementation, including:

- Banning rental bidding
- 'No reason' evictions abolished (i.e. abolition of the 120 day 'no specified reason' notice to vacate)
- Rent increases capped to once per year
- Measures to make it easier for tenants to make minor upgrades and keep pets
- A range of bond reforms including the early release of bonds.

Melbourne City Mission is one of the State's oldest and largest community services organisations, with a diverse service platform that supports marginalised community members to forge a pathway to social and economic participation. Our services span across disability, education & early years and homelessness and justice.

A significant proportion of the 9,500 people accessing Melbourne City Mission services each year rely on income support. Whilst these community members have long faced barriers to home ownership, they have increasingly been locked out of opportunities in the highly competitive private rental market and face extensive waits for public and social housing.

We also know that security of tenure (or rather, lack thereof) is a significant issue for many of our clients in private rental. This lack of security often contributes to ongoing cycles of homelessness for people we support.

While the Victorian Government's rental reforms are an important step, they do not contain measures to maintain or strengthen protections for people at risk of homelessness or escaping family violence.

It is imperative that such measures are put in place. Melbourne City Mission provides a range of supports to women who have left –or are seeking to leave–violent relationships. We observe that some violent partners seek to obstruct housing pathways, not only by perpetrating financial abuse but through actions that seek to portray women as undesirable tenants to landlords/agents.

These actions include trying to have women 'black-listed' on tenancy databases and/or coercing others not to provide positive written references in support of women's applications for private rental housing.

Forty-three (43) per cent of women involved in WIRE's<sup>1</sup> research into family violence and financial abuse said they found it 'extremely difficult' to get their ex-partner to leave the family home. Almost half identified 'having nowhere to go' as an 'extremely important' reason for staying in their abusive relationship and around half (47 per cent) reported that it was 'extremely difficult' or 'difficult' to find somewhere to live when they did leave.

Rent must be made fair for *all* Victorians.

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<sup>1</sup> WIRE, "Relationship Problems and Money: Women talk about financial abuse", 2014