

HOUSING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2016

Second Reading

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Castle Hill) (11:12): On behalf of Mr Brad Hazzard: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

It gives me the greatest of pleasure to speak in support of the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. I think the vast majority of people in New South Wales know that our Government is committed to implementing a variety of initiatives which will increase the supply of social and affordable housing in New South Wales and improve supports for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our community. I have often said that a government is judged on the way it cares and supports the weak, the frail, the aged and the most disadvantaged people in the community, and this Government will be judged very fairly in the future when one looks at the work it has done in just a few short years.

We are making some remarkable inroads in social and affordable housing. Under this Government, people who require shelter will receive it. We will implement measures throughout the tenure of this Government that will provide social and affordable housing well into the future. I will not go into what some of those measures will be but this Government is working diligently to provide for all people in the community. It is not just about providing for the more affluent in society or about creating jobs; it is about providing for those who are disadvantaged. That is why I said that I have the greatest of pleasure in speaking in debate on this bill.

Ms Tanya Mihailuk: I thought you were doing policy there for a while.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I acknowledge the rude interjection by the member for Bankstown. I am sure she regrets making that comment. In addition to the Social Housing Management Transfers program, the Government has embarked on a major reform process to significantly improve tenant experience through social housing asset maintenance. A new social housing maintenance contract commenced in April 2016 and has a strong focus on social outcomes, including tenant employment and training. Once again I say with the utmost sincerity that it is not just about providing homes for people or about giving people a handout; this is a genuine attempt by our Government to improve the lives of people and to improve opportunities for the next generation. We know that there are areas of disadvantage in Western Sydney where up to three generations of people have not held employment. We need to break that cycle.

This Government will do all it can not only to provide housing and shelter for those people who cannot afford a home but also to reach out and try to get people into gainful employment and, ultimately, to try to improve the lives of the next generation and the generation after that. By doing that, we will improve society for everybody. In 2015-16, of the order of \$500 million was allocated to maintenance for social housing properties in New South Wales. This increased to around \$517 million in 2016-17 for existing work programs and property upgrades; for example, new kitchens, improving bathrooms, roofing and gutters, hot water systems, carpets and painting—general maintenance that perhaps we in this place take for granted but which, sadly, in the past and during the dark 16 years of Labor rule in this State, was overlooked.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Ms Melinda Pavey): Order! I call the member for Fairfield to order for the first time.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Many of the public housing tenancies fell into disrepair. This Government will not overlook that; we recognise our responsibility, as we do in all areas of service delivery in New South Wales, and we will seek to improve the quality of life of those residents. To improve the efficiency of the maintenance program, new maintenance contractors have recently been employed to deliver maintenance services for social housing dwellings across New South Wales. The new contract

includes regular monitoring of tenant satisfaction via contractor and independent reports, and promotes better quality first-time fixes.

How many times have members of this place, regardless of their political persuasions, been contacted by tenants in public housing who have said that their place of residence has fallen into disrepair, that the roof leaks and that the doors will not lock? It is endless. Every member of Parliament has heard those cries. Once again, this Government recognises its responsibility. We have now reformed the processes so we can have a direct conversation with tenants to ensure that the Government is applying itself diligently to upgrading those residences. Importantly, the contractors are required to train and employ tenants and to engage small and medium enterprises and disability service providers. These are positive measures to help tenants break the cycle of disadvantage.

I state clearly for the record, as the Minister for Finance has previously pointed out, that of course one would choose to build three new dwellings by selling one block. I will be quite candid because there has been a lot of controversy about some public housing tenancies and residences in and around Millers Point and other harbourside residences that are worth an enormous amount of money. The Government has made no secret of the fact that it has on-sold many of those properties and directed that money into building more residential accommodation for disadvantaged people. Telopea, Waterloo and Parramatta are other areas at which the Government has looked.

From a planning perspective the ability to knock down and rebuild is one of the greatest secrets of economic prosperity. Although I recognise and acknowledge the importance of heritage buildings, knocking down and rebuilding old public housing, with all the wonderful urban design that is available today to improve outdoor living areas and provide a mix of both public and private housing, is extremely important. The last thing we want is to create enclaves of disadvantaged people living together. It is important to get the balance right, with both public and private tenants living in refurbished and new apartments. This encourages public tenants to follow the example of private tenants who are driving or catching public transport to work, thereby improving their lifestyle. It can be infectious and may educate people to now believe that this is possible for them. Indeed, it is the aim of the Government to help people gain employment, encouraging generational change, which adds not only to their personal wealth but also to society.

Everybody who is capable of undertaking gainful employment should contribute to society. I have spoken many times about disadvantaged people, particularly people with disabilities. We no longer focus on disabilities; we focus on abilities. Many people with disabilities are able to work actively in and contribute to society. I have worked very closely with organisations such as NOVA, which provides opportunities to young people at Rouse Hill. Each and every parliamentarian could play a role in offering work experience opportunities to those people, helping to give them a leg up on the ladder of life and hoping they will find gainful employment in the future. Across every area of social disadvantage, but in particular in the area of housing, the Government is being diligent. I commend the Minister for playing an active role and for showing heartfelt concern for disadvantaged people.

The new maintenance contracts and social housing maintenance transfer programs enable much greater involvement of non-government departments in managing social housing assets. They also will support social housing tenants in the future, often the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our community who can expect to achieve greater outcomes through the Government's measures. As the bill was introduced in the other place on 12 October 2016 and is in the same form, the second reading speech appears at pages 10 and 11 in the proof *Hansard* of that day. I commend the bill to the House.