



John Hargreaves MLA

MINISTER FOR TERRITORY AND MUNICIPAL SERVICES

MINISTER FOR HOUSING

MINISTER FOR MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

Member for Brindabella

A MORE RESPONSIVE PUBLIC HOUSING SYSTEM

Dear

You will be aware that I recently announced changes to the way public housing is to be managed in the ACT. I am writing to personally explain these changes and how they may affect some tenants. In doing so, I want to assure you that the changes will be implemented carefully and sensitively and they will not be immediate.

Until recently, it was much easier to get on the public housing waiting list in Canberra than in other cities. When Canberra was growing rapidly and when more housing was available, most applicants could be housed within a reasonable time.

In recent years people have not been housed quickly and in some cases not at all.

We have re-shaped the public housing system to ensure that people with urgent and priority needs are housed sooner and this is already delivering results. At the same time, public housing applicants with less urgent needs are also being housed more quickly.

Whilst the ACT continues to invest in new public housing – over \$14 million in 2007 - 08 alone – we also have to explore sensible ways to house as many people in need as possible within our available resources.

One way we can do this is to encourage tenants who are on higher incomes to think about buying their home. This would then allow us to acquire new properties of a size and type that suit the needs of new and existing tenants. The ACT Treasury has calculated \$80,000 as a level of income at which many people will be able to afford to purchase a home without entering housing stress. We believe there could be between 300 and 500 tenants with incomes of \$80,000 or more who may be in a position to consider home ownership over the next three years.

We want to talk with these tenants about their individual circumstances and their aspirations. We need to know whether a move to home ownership would be fair and reasonable. We also have to be sure that their incomes can be maintained. We will also be explaining our new “shared equity” initiative — to be introduced next year — that will take some financial pressure off tenants by allowing them to buy a share in their property in partnership with Housing ACT.

However, we know that for some tenants home ownership at this time may not be a sensible or realistic option, irrespective of their income.

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Another group of tenants we would like to talk with are those who are living in houses with two or more bedrooms more than they require. People may find themselves in this situation when their children grow up and leave home, or following relationship changes.

We estimate that there are some 1200 public housing tenants who have two or more bedrooms that are not occupied.

At the same time we have some 600 tenants who are living in houses that are too small for their requirements and many families are on the waiting list for four or five bedroom accommodation.

Again, we would like to talk to tenants who have two or more spare bedrooms, to discuss their situation and establish whether a property-swap is an option they would consider if attractive alternative properties were available that met their circumstances and expectations.

The changes I have outlined will be phased in over a number of years and will not be implemented in any way that is unjust or unreasonable. We are very sensitive to the fact that a tenant may have lived in their home for many years. For these people especially, buying their home or moving residences would be a major life event.

Comprehensive guidelines will be developed over coming months to ensure that the individual needs of tenants are fully considered. As a tenant you are invited to attend one or more of the forums that will be held to develop these guidelines. Details of these forums are outlined in the flyer that accompanies this letter.

I thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you have any general questions related to the changes I have discussed, please call Canberra Connect on 133 427. If you would like to discuss your personal situation, I urge you to contact the Housing Tenant Information Officer on 6205 2463.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Hargreaves', written in a cursive style.

John Hargreaves MLA
Minister for Housing
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