

FIGHTING FOR RENTERS

THE PRIVATE RENTAL MARKET SHOULD DELIVER SAFE, AFFORDABLE HOMES FOR PEOPLE

Housing is a human right. Every Canberan deserves a safe, affordable and comfortable place to live - whether they are a homeowner or a renter.

But right now, more people than ever are struggling to put a roof over their head. Rents are amongst the highest in the country and house prices are out of reach for many Canberrans. For decades, Labor and the Liberals have used tax breaks to rig the housing market in a way that builds wealth rather than providing safe and secure places to live.

The ACT Greens want to reform the system to address the significant power imbalance that exists between landlords and renters and ensure that every Canberran has a safe and affordable place to live.

Canberra needs a private rental market that provides affordable homes for people, gives them security in their housing and protects them if they are unfairly treated. The Government - at all levels - has a responsibility to make that happen.

The ACT Greens have worked hard to improve rights for renters, and the ACT now has the strongest rental rights in Australia. In this term alone we have banned 'no cause' evictions, banned solicited rent bidding and introduced minimum ceiling insulation standards for rental properties.

But more needs to change. The Labor and Liberal parties have blocked our attempts to deliver better protections for renters such as a rent freeze and improved rent caps.

The ACT Greens are committed to ensuring that every Canberran has access to a safe, secure, and affordable home. That's why we have a plan to fix the rental crisis.

THE ACT GREENS WILL:

- ▲ Establish a "Rental Commissioner" to inform and engage the community, and support dispute resolution
- ▲ Establish a portable bond transfer scheme
- ▲ Establish a permanent Rent Relief Fund to assist struggling renters
- ▲ Introduce rental controls including a 2-year rent freeze and fixed rent caps that give tenants certainty, and ban all forms of rent bidding
- ▲ Incentivise accessibility improvements in the private rental market

A RENTAL COMMISSIONER

ENSURING RENTERS CAN ACCESS THEIR RIGHTS

The ACT Greens will establish a Rental Commissioner (or 'rental ombudsman') to ensure rental laws are followed by landlords and real estate agents to deliver real benefits for renters.

Currently renters (and landlords) need to attend the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal to resolve disputes or enforce rights. This is not the most effective way to handle these issues, and it can be a particular barrier for renters, especially as they are generally already at a power and financial disadvantage.

A dedicated Commissioner will provide a timely and targeted service for rental questions and disputes and will be empowered to enforce rental laws and issue fines. The Commissioner will provide a much-needed enforcement function to ensure renters' rights are protected, without relying on renters to pursue matters themselves through a tribunal. The Commissioner will be independent (like the ACT Human Rights Commissioner or Commissioner for Fair Trading) and will be empowered to:

- Develop and provide resources and community outreach for tenants, landlords and other stakeholders.
- Work with ACAT and the Office for Rental Bonds to collect and publish data on tenancies

(including exit surveys at the end of tenancies).

- Engage with ACT Government agencies and organisations working with renters and occupants (e.g. JACS, Housing ACT, legal services, the real estate sector, community housing providers, universities) to further ACT Government understanding and work on ACT and national policy.
- Issue infringement notices for offences under the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* and engage with ACAT where necessary.
- Conduct inspections to ensure rental properties meet the current minimum standards for rental properties in the ACT.

We know that there can be an overlap of issues between renters, strata and body corporate agencies and owners.

Once the Rental Commissioner's office is established, the ACT Greens will work with the Commissioner and stakeholders to expand the office of the Commissioner to cover the *Unit Titles (Management) Act 2011* and related strata and property services (similar to the role of the NSW Strata and Property Services Commissioner).

WHAT'S THE INVESTMENT?

Appointing the Rental Commissioner and getting the supporting team up and running will cost approximately \$5m over four years.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR RENTERS

PORTABLE BOND SCHEME

The cost of moving house is high. Renters are often forced to move for reasons outside their control, and requirements such as rental bonds increase the costs even further.

To assist renters with these costs, the ACT Greens will establish a portable bond (transfer) scheme, as exists in other jurisdictions, so tenants can use their existing bond for the new property rather than having to pay a new bond before they get their current bond back, which can be a difficult expense to meet.

PERMANENT RENT RELIEF FUND

During COVID-19 the ACT Government provided a range of short-term measures to protect renters. This included establishing a Rent Relief Fund to provide financial assistance to households struggling to pay their rent. Beyond COVID, some renters are still at the risk of eviction and vulnerable to homelessness.

The ACT Greens will make the Rent Relief Fund permanent to help renters manage short term financial shocks.

This fund will provide a one-off payment of four weeks rent, up to a maximum of \$2,500 to eligible people, and will be

administered by an independent community organisation (currently [Care](#)).

FREEZE & CAP RENT

PROVIDING SHORT TERM RELIEF AND LONG TERM CHANGE

The rent is too damn high. In March 2023, a report from Anglicare Australia showed that none of the properties listed as available in the ACT were affordable and appropriate for essential workers. We are in a housing crisis.

The ACT Greens will implement a two-year rent freeze and subsequently cap rents at a 2% flat rate.

This will freeze rent increases completely for two years to provide immediate relief from ever increasing and unaffordable rental prices. Following this two-year freeze, rent increases will be capped at a flat 2% rate of existing rent. This 2% rate improves on the existing rent cap of 110% of CPI, which can be hard to understand and calculate, and consequently is not as easily enforced.

SUPPORTING RENTAL REFORM

The rent freeze and rent caps will be supported by complementary measures to:

- ban all 'rent bidding'. To ensure that rental prices cannot be increased by potential tenants bidding higher than the asking price.
- enforce rules on no cause evictions and rent increase limits

- via the Rental Commissioner – to ensure that renters are empowered to enforce their rights in rejecting illegal rent increases.
- remove the option for non-standard clauses around rent increases to be written into rental agreements.

INCENTIVISING ACCESSIBILITY IN THE PRIVATE RENTAL MARKET

People with physical disability renting in the private market can find it difficult to access homes with the modifications they require to live independently. The NDIS can be complex to navigate, and it doesn't cover everyone who needs accessible accommodation.

The ACT Greens will support people with disability in the private market by establishing a grant program for landlords and/or body corporates to incentivise the modification and supply of affordable rental properties for people with disability.

We will also work with a community housing provider to expand rental programs (like Rentwell and HomeGround) to support people with disability to lease accessible properties in the private rental market. These programs encourage landlords to rent at less than market rate, and the expansion we're proposing would also encourage landlords to offer long-term (5-10 years)

lease agreements to provide security of tenure.

WHAT'S THE INVESTMENT?

We will provide \$3 million over four years for these programs.