

Speech on Healthy Homes to Changing Minds Meeting 1 July 1pm

Hi, my name is Richard Northey. I chair the Auckland Community Housing Trust, which for the last 9 years has provided secure rental housing at 75% of market rents to families with a member living with a mental illness and to others in need. Unfortunately the Labour Government 10 year interest free loan under the Housing Initiatives Fund is due to end for us and a number of other social housing providers and we will be forced to sell 6 of our homes then unless the policy changes. We are not currently eligible for Income Related Rents because we are too small to qualify and a few of our mental health consumers are temporarily earning too much to qualify until they have another acute episode. I also chair the Inner City Social and Community Services Network, the Responses Committee of the Auckland District Council of Social Services and am standing for election to the Waitemata Local Board. Some of my fellow candidates are here too.

I start with the submission I recently made on behalf of ADCOSS on Andrew Little's Healthy Homes Guarantee Bill. This Bill is a good attempt to overcome the fact that too many Aucklanders live in rental accommodation that is damp, cold and unhealthy, too costly and with only short-term tenure, resulting on people developing long term health problems that can blight the rest of their lives.

ADCOSS supported the intent of the Bill, namely to ensure that every residential rental property meets clear minimum standards of heating and insulation so that every home is healthy, warm and dry.

ADCOSS strongly urged that the specific requirements in Clause 6 in the Bill for adequate insulation and heating be extended to cover other requirements with equally important health impacts. We asked that specific further requirements be added namely, methods of heating and of insulation, indoor temperatures, ventilation, draught stopping and drainage. These should include more specific requirements for effective heating (such as by a heat pump) but not by unflued gas heaters because of the dampness they generate. This could be achieved by adding to (i) to read: "(i) methods of heating that must be fixed and effective and specifically exclude unflued gas heaters; and".

Other requirements that we recommended be added to this list of required standards in the Bill are:

"(viii) lighting; and

(ix) lavatories; and

(x) food storage, preparation and cooking; and

(xi) potable water supply; and

- (xii) moisture extraction systems; and
- (xiii) sound-proofing; and
- (xiv) safe access; and
- (xv) safe power outlets and light switches.”

All these requirements should become the major part of the requirements to obtain a Rental Warrant of Fitness to be required for all rental accommodation.

ADCROSS also believed an additional clause should be added to the Bill to oblige MBIE to carry out adequate random auditing to ensure compliance with the Act and regulations.

Although the provisions in this Bill are very valuable, much more extensive reform of tenancy law is required.

Residential tenancy laws and regulations in New Zealand should be modelled on those applying in Germany, which I visited last year, the Netherlands and in most of Europe. The objectives of these laws should include the following major changes.

1. A better balance in the law as it applies to tenants as compared to landlords so that tenants have much more security of tenure;
2. tenants being able to make changes to their residence so that it is genuinely their home and their housing location is indeed their community;
3. strong requirements to ensure all rental accommodation is not only healthy but also safe, secure, accessible and affordable; and
4. there is no longer excessive pressure on people to exceed their realistic financial means in seeking to become home owners. These changes would be to encourage and enable them to instead rent with secure tenure and use their precious financial resources instead on advancing their education, their quality of life and growing their business.

Government, Auckland Council, Community Housing Providers, Developers and Landlords need to adopt policies which should include at least the following provisions.

1. A requirement for a just cause for eviction if a tenant wishes to remain in their rental property. In general tenants also should be able to remain in occupation when a property is sold. As a first step I believe that the provision in the Act for landlords to be able to evict tenants on 42 days notice, ostensibly to house a relative, is unnecessary, unfair, has too often

been inappropriately exploited by landlords; and obliges tenants into sometimes frequent moves, thereby harming the education, health and personal development of children and the ability of adults to retain jobs and community connections. That provision should be repealed.

2. An ability for tenants seeking to rent long term to be able to make reasonable additions and modifications to their property as set out in Shamabeel Eaqub's "Generation Rent".
3. A requirement that, just as a car has to have a Warrant of Fitness, all properties offered for rent must have an approved Housing Warrant of Fitness. This would cover not only heating and insulation but all the proposed additions above to the standards set out in the Bill and also other reasonable requirement for health, safety and quiet enjoyment of their rental accommodation. These should include appropriate and effective lighting, laundry facilities, safety window latches and disability access.
4. Until a Warrant of Fitness becomes compulsory for all properties offered for rent the Accommodation Supplement should only be paid to those landlords all of whose properties have a Warrant of Fitness.
5. The Government should build about 20,000 affordable homes for rent every year, about 10,000 of which should be social housing for Housing New Zealand or Community Housing Providers.
6. The Auckland Council should substantially and continuously increase its pensioner housing units. The Council should build, or enable Government and Community Housing Providers to build, a substantial number of homes for low income families and individuals including on its own land.
7. Council's Unitary Plan should enable more housing choice and encourage a significant proportion of healthy affordable homes to be provided in all suburbs, consistent with protecting heritage and character homes, through more intensification and controls more appropriate for ensuring desirable outcomes.

8. Appropriate measures, including tax changes like a capital gains tax, need to be adopted drastically to reduce the cost of urban land.

9. Tenancy regulations should permit a rent increase no more than annually and consideration given to controlling rent levels where they unjustifiably high and unaffordable for the quality of housing provided.

10. Income related rents should be available to reputable community housing providers providing for special needs, such as those with a mental illness, rather than only for tenants who would qualify for Housing New Zealand accommodation.