



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMY AND GENDER AND ECONOMIC EQUALITY
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Submission Cover sheet

Inquiry into Housing and Rental
Affordability

Submission number: 004

Date authorised for publication: 28 July 2022




Submission to the Inquiry into Housing and Rental Affordability

Terms of Reference:

- a) causes of vacancies in residential and commercial properties;
- b) current economic and regulatory settings for addressing residential and non-residential property vacancy in the ACT;
- c) whether these settings may contribute to the number of vacant properties in the ACT, specifically,
 - an evaluation of settings contributing to vacancies in residential, high density and suburban properties
 - an evaluation of settings contributing to vacancies in commercial and industrial properties.
- d) how reducing residential property vacancy could support housing and rental availability and affordability in the ACT;
- e) how reducing non-residential property vacancy could support improved economic outcomes in the ACT;
- f) whether additional economic and regulatory settings such as a vacancy tax should be considered and;
- g) any other related matters.

Thank you for your attention to my submission to the above-named inquiry. I address parts (a), (d), (f) and (g) in this submission.

(a) causes of vacancies in residential and commercial properties;

My primary understanding of the cause of vacancies in the ACT draws from my experience as a residential tenant and a young professional who relocated to Canberra after securing an offer of employment.

Although anecdotal, I have heard multiple times – in person, via online communication forums [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] that vacancies occur across the ACT due to housing affordability issues. Canberra continues to be the [most expensive city to rent](#) in. I attribute the causes of vacancies to be – in layman’s terms – residents “tapping out” of the Canberra housing market, and by extension, tapping out of Canberra. Share house groups regularly advertise room vacancies as housemates relocate out of the city, seeking opportunities elsewhere. The difficulty of being a renter here is definitely a factor in individual’s decisions to remain, no matter “how good Public Servants salaries” are – I can attest to this from my own social circle. Canberra will struggle to retain motivated and engaged talent if the city continues on its pressured trajectory, restricting the ability of residents to secure affordable and adequate housing.

(d) how reducing residential property vacancy could support housing and rental availability and affordability in the ACT;

Canberra is in desperate need of affordable housing. Public housing, for vulnerable people – those fleeing domestic violence, people who suffer from substance abuse issues, young people who are homeless, to name a few – is utterly lacking in this city.

Economics 101: increase supply, decrease demand. Reducing residential property vacancy would enable a greater supply of housing for tenants (and those fortunate enough to purchase) in the ACT. It is unacceptable that a home-owner/investor can purchase a property and simply just leave it – vacant – when there are people screaming and crying in the streets (literally and figuratively) for a safe place to live.

(f) whether additional economic and regulatory settings such as a vacancy tax should be considered and;

I am in large support of a vacancy tax, particularly for investors. I am also support of a rental cap, not merely indexed to the CPI but a cap on rent full stop. And as a sidenote, investors should not be allowed to purchase ex-government housing.

These residences should be reserved for first home buyers or leased out as public housing.

I also wish to express my support for legislation that stipulates that a landlords in Canberra cannot own more than 1 (one) investment property (and this is my being incredibly generous) in order to free up property in this city for people who want to buy homes (despite the [depressing statistics on home ownership prospects](#) for young people).

(g) any other related matters.

I consider myself on the lucky side of the Canberra housing affordability crisis. I have managed to secure a year-long lease, in a property that is free from pests, mold, allows in natural light, and is reasonably well-insulated from the cold. You might think these as basic rights afforded to tenants, but as a prospective tenant the housing market here is so grim I had to drastically lower my expectations when aiming to secure adequate shelter, something I'd like to consider a human right rather than a privilege.

Yet, despite how lucky and privileged I consider myself, I have made certain sacrifices to remain "competitive" in the Canberra housing market. I would love to own a pet to keep me company, but despite the changes in legislation, having a pet still makes it that little bit more difficult to secure a rental. So I go without. I tout myself as [REDACTED] [REDACTED] which is utterly demoralising to think that my entire worth as a person deserving of shelter comes down to.

I sacrifice more than half my salary in rent each week, a choice that I feel I was forced into – after being evicted on the whim of my previous landlord who wanted to raise the rent [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] which I signed onto in order to remain sane (the constant anxiety, resulting in lack of sleep about being potentially *homeless* and living out of my car after receiving my notice of eviction caused me to underperform at work and deteriorated both my physical and mental health significantly) despite the outrageous jump in my cost of living.

I love Canberra. I love my job, I love my colleagues, I love the city which has so much to offer. But. There are days where I reconsider my future here, given how appalling the housing market has been, and how awful my experiences as a renter have been. I hate how I'm scraping by on my fairly decent salary just because of the amount I have to pay in rent. I hate how I was forced into this arrangement because a greedy landlord decided that they wanted more money, and I was powerless to fight the eviction. I hate how I am treated by real estate agents at each inspection, I hate that I have to take time off work to attend them and feel like I'm working 2 full time jobs applying for rentals after work. As a tenant, I hate the fear that comes with each inspection, where I will be judged by how I live, where I choose to display plants or photos *in a place that I pay to live in*, I hate the fear of contacting real estate agents to fix issues, either due to their non-response or for the fear that my tenancy won't be renewed. Sure, this is a universal experience of all renters, but I daresay it is felt particularly acutely in Canberra where the vacancy rates are so low and it feels next to impossible to secure something actually liveable.

Tenants are at the mercy of landlords, and by extension, largely incompetent and quite frankly, unprofessional real estate agents.