

ECCWA response to the Residential Tenancies Act (1987) Review

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As a significant number of the members of the Ethnic Communities Council of WA (ECCWA) Inc have come from an economically disadvantaged background and at times face race-based discrimination, financial hardship as tenants or potential tenants, therefore, ECCWA welcomes and fully supports the WA government's review of the Residential Tenancies Act (1987).

About the Ethnic Communities Council of WA Inc.

ECCWA is Western Australia's peak Non-profit / non-government community based ethnic umbrella organisation. ECCWA takes an active interest in all aspects of multiculturalism, culturally and linguistically diverse (caLD) affairs and acts on behalf of all ethnic communities in Western Australia (WA). ECCWA has been providing advocacy supports to multicultural communities for 45 years and is a member of the Federations of the Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA).

through the Ethnic Advocacy and Support Team (EAST), ECCWA provides specialised advocacy supports for individuals who are unable to access government funded services. ECCWA's objectives are to:

- Ensure that ECCWA's policy positions contribute to government's policy making;
- Promote and safeguard the interests of CaLD communities in WA;
- Disseminate WA government information to the Ethnic Communities. For more information about ECCWA, please refer to our Website at: www.eccwa.org.au/

Tenancy issues for ECCWA members:

ECCWA members Often report that due to their lack of English language proficiency, having large families, being visibly different due to their race, cultural dressing or religious beliefs, they experience significant disadvantage when looking for a place to rent. They find it difficult to come up with enough money to pay option fee if they have to make more than one application per week. As most of our members are low income earners working for the minimum wage, having 12-month lease agreements and then an option to make another agreement for another 12 months if they agree to the rent increments, put them in financial hardship. As they pay most of their income in rent, they often do not have much else to spend on their daily needs and for their utility bills, most of them rely on charitable organisations.

ECCWA members find it difficult to feel at home in their rental property when there are strict rules about not being able to hang family photos and any other wall hangings as most of them may feel homesick as some or most of their family members may be living overseas; to keep a pet for company and to make small modifications to the dwelling.

People with disability, especially if they are from a culturally and linguistically diverse background on low incomes, often experience discrimination against their disability and race when looking for an accessible house. Department of housing may provide the person a wheelchair accessible dwelling or a place close to the amenities like the doctor's surgery, children's schools, public transport, close to the intersections where there are traffic lights with audible signalling if the person is blind, etc.; they often push tenants out of the Homeswest dwellings when the family's income raises over \$500.00 per week giving no consideration to the person's accessibility needs. As most landlords and the real estate agencies can find other tenants who may not have any accessibility needs, they often refuse to spend their money to make any modifications to meet the tenant's disability access needs. This policy also strongly discourages people from getting a job and working for the fear of losing their accessible house.

ECCWA's Recommendations:

- Abolish the option fee;
- Allow long term like two or three-year lease agreements with no rent increases;
- To make their rental property a home for themselves, the tenants should be allowed to put up wall-hangings and keep pets as long as they can return the dwelling back to the Landlord in its original form at the end of the lease agreement.
- People with disability who have been given an accessible dwelling should not be moved out of the Department of Housing dwellings regardless of their income. They should be able to still continue to live in their dwelling and pay 25% of their income in rent.
- Department of Housing should build / purchase more accessible houses to accommodate people with disability on low incomes.