

As a Social Worker who has worked the Penrith and Blue Mountains LGAs for almost 30 years I have seen firsthand the anxiety and uncertainty that unfair rental laws have on vulnerable families in particular on women and children escaping domestic violence.

All renters need and deserve homes that are affordable, secure, safe, and feel like home. NSW renting laws should be reformed in order to make renting fair for the 1 in 3 people in NSW who rent our homes.

Ending unfair evictions

Renters need homes that are stable and secure. Renters deserve to live without fear of unfair 'no grounds' evictions from our homes.

All renters should be provided with a valid reason for ending a tenancy. Landlords should be required to provide a reason to end a rolling (periodic) lease, and a fixed term lease after the end date.

'The property will soon be sold' should not be added as a ground for eviction.

Fear of retaliatory evictions for making requests for repairs and maintenance means that renters often put up with substandard housing. I remember working with a teenaged couple with a newborn baby. I visited their one-bedroom apartment and discovered it was covered with mold, the windows were stuck shut and a number of other repairs were needed. The couple were fearful that if they asked for repairs to be made that they would be evicted and with no rental history they would be unlikely to find new accommodation. Facing homelessness put them at very real risk of having their child removed.

Keeping pets in rental homes

Renters need homes that feel like home. Renters should be allowed to make simple choices to make the houses we live in homes, including whether to keep pets.

Landlords should only be able to refuse a pet by obtaining a Tribunal order allowing them to do so. This is a model similar to those that apply in Victoria, the ACT and the NT.

Women planning to leave violent partners often worry about not being able to take their pets with them to a new rental. For children who have lived in a violent home the thought of leaving a beloved pet with a violent perpetrator is unbearable. Pets are family members and form an important part of the healing process for children.

Sadly we know that men who use violence often harm pets in order to control and intimidate their victims.

Rental affordability

Renters need homes that are affordable. Renters need to be able to afford to pay our rent without worrying that it will mean we go without other life essentials.

There should be fair limits on rent increases in NSW tenancy law.

Housing is an essential service. Having a secure, safe, affordable home is vital to ensure a decent life. There are other essential services – energy, health, education and more – where cost is regulated to ensure the service is accessible for everyone. Fair limits on rent increases and rent setting should apply in rental housing too.

I want to emphasize the importance of stable affordable housing for the healthy development of children and young people. Living with the constant fear of eviction and homelessness has a damaging effect on the mental health of parents, it diverts their focus from creating strong attachments with their children and it can disrupt a child's education when they have to repeatedly move schools.

Ensuring that the rental laws are fair for renters will significantly improve the safety and wellbeing of our most vulnerable citizens and reduce the burden on our child protection system.

