

My name is Michelle Tyrrell. I am 43 years of age and I am a secondary teacher. I have been renting since the age of 17 in QLD, NSW and Victoria. I have also rented overseas, living in Ecuador and London 2016 - 2021. I returned to Melbourne in August 2021 with my partner after living in London for over 5 years. Initially we lived in an apartment in the CBD of Melbourne. We moved at the end of 2022 to have more space. We chose Kingsville.

When inspecting the houses in the inner west of Melbourne a common theme emerged. The houses were poor quality, glass louvers, carpets were decrepit, only one heater in one room, blinds were often thin, bent and aluminium, doors did not fit correctly, gaps under doors, lack of insulation, no double glazing, big cracks in paint and visible mould.

The property we applied for and currently live in was viewed for approximately 10 mins. Moving in and being able to turn the lights on and see what it truly looked like was a shock for us both. With the lights on we could see clearly black mould throughout the entire house (bathroom, walls, ceiling, windows), a gaping, rotting hole in the floorboards by the fireplace which was black and wet from all the rain coming down behind and inside a dilapidated fireplace with dead bird remains. The walls were absolutely filthy with a black dust.

We wrote to the real estate agent about these things. We also noticed that during the night the top of the quilts were wet. The real estate agent was not helpful or supportive and we were constantly made to feel like the problems were all in our heads. I took many photos and documented the mould in all the rooms, window frames, and the hole in the floorboards. We ended up calling Tenants Victoria to understand our rights and further steps we would take to address the issue. I applied to VCAT due to the lack of action or repairs from the Real Estate. The real estate was given orders after the hearing to fix the mould and to employ the services of the Mould Doctor and follow any recommendations provided. They cleaned up some of the mould, and put in some new grouting and sealant in the bathroom, trimmed trees and cleaned gutters from the report. I asked for a plumber to inspect the house and report back (part of the report recommendation) but they refused to give me this report. I reopened the case.

Each time I have gone to VCAT the process has been mentally exhausting and at every step I have had to meticulously document the issues, take photos and videos, keep emails, document all evidence and be prepared to fight for myself. The burden of proof is heavily weighted on the tenant.

After the second hearing was set the real estate agent emailed me asking why I was going back to VCAT. I stated very explicitly why I was going back. The next day I got sent the plumbers report and the following day I received a call from the plumber saying he was removing the fireplace. I adjourned the hearing until all the work was completed and then I was able to cancel it.

We have been in the house over winter and we have been able to observe, live and see just how bad things are.

Moisture and humidity levels remain high with us using a 30 litre dehumidifier in the bedroom and study area throughout winter. My partner's salt lamp has been a wet puddle with water on cold days and nights. Mould of all different shades grows over the removed fireplace. In our bedroom our quilts and clothes are still damp to touch. Black mould has grown through the built-in robe for our clothes covering my partner's clothes and a leather hat and over the ceiling of our bedroom many times like a black shadow and we are constantly using either bleach or vinegar to regularly remove. There is mould all over the wall of our bedroom wall that faces south and upon writing this I found it behind our bedroom wall. We have not gone back to VCAT or notified the agent because 1) we won't be believed. 2) They won't fix it up properly and there's nothing really to compel them to do this. Even VCAT lacks bite and there are no real consequences for property agents or owners. 3) Due to such a rental shortage we don't know if we will actually find somewhere and we don't want to be homeless. 4) Looking for a new place and moving takes substantial time and money.

What I would like to see improved. I would like

To see the equivalent to the roadworthy for cars or building inspection for a house when you go to buy a house but for renting. Each time a rental ends and a new lease begins the rental needs to pass a test.

Burden of proof reversed. If I say there's mould through the house it needs to be an easier process rather than me providing all evidence and trying to navigate a complicated, bureaucratic system by calling Tenants Victoria to find out the process and relevant forms to fill out.

The World Health Organisation recommends indoor humidity to be 30% to 50%. I can't find any standard or set code for Victoria or Australia so this needs to be fixed.

I want insulation in walls and ceilings made compulsory. We have global boiling upon us. Australian summers aren't getting cooler and temperatures in houses are unbearable and we are spending too much on electricity and gass trying to cool off in old houses that have poor housing standards.

I want ventilation and real extractor fans for stoves, ovens and in the bathroom that take the fumes and moisture outside, not faux ones that put it up to the top of the ceiling or into the rooftop. The evidence is that gas is toxic. I want proper ventilation.

I also would like Real Estate, Real Estate Agents and owners held to greater accountability. In the process of VCAT they do not seem to be punished (financially, blacklisted or losing their licence). Real estate agents also need compulsory education around the rental laws in each state.

Get rid of negative gearing and tax benefits for investors and the wealthy. The fact that on a federal political level many politicians have multiple investments properties I see as conflict of interest in this enquiry as I don't believe it's in your interest to improve the market when it's a way you make income.

Increased government and social housing provided for the most vulnerable.

Price limits on house rent can be raised. Investment properties shouldn't be viewed as an automatic profit with rent going up as much as they want it to be. If you can limit HECS interest then you can limit rent prices.

Regards

Kind Regards
Michelle Tyrrell