

MACH

Submission to the Senate Committee Inquiry into the Disability Discrimination
Amendment Bill 2003 (Cth), 9 February 2004

Dear Committee

As a community worker with twenty years experience in the social housing sector I wish to comment on the detrimental impact the proposed amendments would have on low income earners and homeless people.

The amendments are counteractive to building a stronger, safer community and will weaken the ability of individuals and families affected by drugs to function as equal members of our society.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) and the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Vic) provide effective and adequate legislative provisions to address circumstances where an individual's drug affected behaviour impacts on their ability to meet their social and contractual responsibilities. If an employee is unable to adequately perform their job tasks because they are substance affected the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) provides redress for the employer to discriminate on the basis of the behaviour.

Similarly the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Vic) Division 5 section 59 prohibits tenants from using rented premises for illegal purposes. Use of premises for illegal purposes eg. drug dealing, can result in a landlord giving a tenant a notice to vacate the premises.

People seeking access to social housing (public and community housing) have limited resources; financial, social and educational. They generally are experiencing multiple and complex issues and disadvantages such as unemployment, mental health issues, social isolation, family breakdown, substance abuse, chronic ill health and poverty. Social housing is often referred to as "housing of last resort". The proposed amendments would allow social landlords to deny service to applicants they perceive of as drug addicts and to evict tenants, not for breaches of tenancy legislation, but for drug addiction.

If we take away the fragile social safety net of social housing from individuals and their families affected by drug use we will create a large group of homeless people with no hope of accessing housing. We will create a more unequal society, a society where crime and homelessness are rampant, making life more unsafe for everyone.

Signed

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