

OPINION

Opinion: Tenancy laws bring long-overdue protection

With housing affordability showing no sign of easing, a generation of Queenslanders will grow up in rented homes. But, while landlords have been used to calling the shots, new laws mean the balance of power has shifted. Penny Carr explains how.

Penny Carr, The Courier-Mail

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SHARON* and her three children have lived in rented homes since her divorce. She's now over 55 and expects she'll be renting for life.

She's far from alone. The proportion of Queensland households living in rented homes is at 36 per cent and rising. Of those, more than 40 per cent, like Sharon, have dependent children.

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[Rental vulnerability on the rise](#)

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Almost half of people who rent their homes have moved three or more times in the past five years.

Sharon has moved five times in five years, not by choice.

She's constantly been forced to cajole and calm cantankerous landlords and real estate agents for fear of getting a bad reference.

She was forced out of a three-month lease early after being pressured by her landlords who'd promised a long-term tenancy, but then said they wanted their own Christmas in the property.

Neighbours later told her this was usual practice for the owners to have the place vacated for holidays. The stress caused her to lose her job.

When an agent or landlord wants to impose their will – lawfully or not – Sharon has no protection. The hopeless imbalance of power between renters and owners/managers of rental properties keeps her constantly on edge and on the move.



Help is at hand for a generation of Queensland trapped in a rental cycle.

With housing affordability showing no sign of easing, a generation of Queenslanders will grow up in rented homes.

Moving constantly has a huge financial and emotional cost. It dislocates kids from their schools and wrenches older people from their neighbourhood support systems. With more than a third of households having rented continuously for 10 years or more, it's time our laws were updated.

The Queensland Government's package of improvements to tenancy laws has two core strengths.

Firstly, it requires a reason in law before ending a tenancy. The list of grounds to end tenancies has been expanded, but renters cannot be thrown out for no reason.

It means unscrupulous landlords or agents will no longer be able to use the threat of a no-grounds eviction to intimidate renters, who, for example, ask for basic repairs or resist unreasonable or unlawful requests.

Secondly, the proposed improvements make it easier to address substandard and unsafe homes. If an order for repairs is obtained, it will apply to a property rather than a tenancy and prevent the repeated renting out of unsafe or unliveable premises.

Moreover, renters will retain their current legal responsibilities to pay rent, to keep the place clean and return the property in the same condition. The current array of protections for landlords remain if they don't.

These new laws will bring us into line with many comparable OECD countries. The changes will mean people who rent their homes will have more safety and stability – peace of mind for families bringing up kids, or older people on their own.

Most landlords want to do the right thing and keep their properties safe and in good repair. They know that safe, healthy and happy renters mean successful long-term tenancies and steady income. These improvements are aimed to stop cowboys who want to exploit renters by refusing to maintain basic minimum standards or use “no reason” evictions to get them to comply with their will despite the law.

Most of us have rented a home at some point. We all know of stories such as Sharon's.

We all have family or friends who have been forced to move out early, or to fix things themselves just to keep their homes safe.

At this time of year, there are renters trying to celebrate Christmas and New Year in substandard homes or dealing with the extra stress of a groundless eviction notice.

These proposed improvements to our laws give hope to renting families such as Sharon's. It's time for a fairer relationship between renting households, landlords and the real estate industry.

With better legal protections, renters will finally be able to put down roots in their communities, make plans, and live in a safe home with their kids. Because a rented home should be just that – a home.

Penny Carr is the chief executive of Tenants Queensland

* Name changed for privacy