



Archdiocese of Wellington

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Submission of the Ecology Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Archdiocese of Wellington on the submission on the Residential Tenancies (Registration of Boarding House Landlords) Amendment Bill

Introduction

The Wellington Catholic Archdiocese Commission for Ecology, Justice and Peace is established to contribute to and participate in work for justice and peace inspired and informed by Catholic Social Teaching.

The Commission's key responsibilities are:

- Supporting the communities of the Archdiocese and wider community to hear and actively respond to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor;
- Scrutinising all issues and institutions in society and in the Archdiocese in the light of Catholic social teaching

These Catholic social teaching principles are broadly shared by many others, regardless of religious background.

The Ecology Justice and Peace Commission strongly supports the Amendment Bill which addresses an urgent need to identify boarding houses offering rental accommodation most often to vulnerable people to ensure compliance with legal obligations to meet Healthy Homes and Building Standards, and to ensure compliance with fire safety standards.

We ask the Select Committee to recommend that the Bill be enacted with two amendments for the following reasons:

1. The Bill has the potential to increase oversight of an important source of accommodation for vulnerable people to ensure compliance with health and safety requirements by identifying not only the landlord responsible for ensuring that compliance but also the premises involved.
2. The Bill increases the ability of Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) and local councils to audit the accommodation to ensure that it is fit for purpose and to provide information to landlords as to their obligations which must be met under law.
3. The Bill presents an opportunity to address an anomaly in the classification of those living in a boarding house as being of low need or no need of permanent accommodation. Many of those living in boarding houses do so out of necessity rather than choice. They desire to live in social housing which can better address their need for

security of tenure, often to enable them to address complex issues such as addiction and health issues including mental health.

4. The current definition of boarding house tenancy means a residential tenancy in a boarding house that is intended to, or that does in fact, last for 28 days or more, and under which the tenant is granted exclusive rights to occupy particular sleeping quarters in the boarding house, and has the right to the shared use of the facilities of the boarding house. Notwithstanding this definition, we recommend the acceptance of such a residential tenancy should not disqualify the tenant from qualifying for more permanent accommodation depending on the circumstances and the need for more permanent accommodation.

5. We also recommend that the proposed fines be increased in line with other fines faced by boarding house landlords for breaching their obligations under the Residential Tenancies Act 1986. The proposed fines in the Bill are intended to ensure compliance with the registration requirements which are a means to an end which is compliance with health and safety requirements, fire safety requirements and Building Act requirements. A fine of up to \$50,000 for failure to register would emphasise the importance of registration and is recommended.

6. In summary the Ecology Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Archdiocese of Wellington strongly supports the Bill and recommends that it be amended to update the definition of a boarding house tenancy so that it can become a pathway to more permanent social housing and that the deterrent for non-compliance with registration be increased.