

# Bill brings fear of more homelessness

BEN LANGFORD

NEW laws making evictions from public housing easier will increase the risk of the most vulnerable becoming homeless, Illawarra housing advocates say.

Legislation before the NSW Parliament would bring in a set of rules designed to more easily secure evictions from public housing to deal with persistent anti-social behaviour, but fears are the bill will scrap safeguards.

Wollongong Homeless Hub manager Julie Mitchell said not all cases of poor behaviour justified eviction but this would be the likely outcome for more people.

"The obvious flow-on effect of a law that facilitates a quick eviction process is more people will become homeless," she said.

"And where are these people supposed to go? They will end up sleeping rough and putting additional pressure on homelessness services who are already at breaking point."

Illawarra & South Coast Tenants Service team leader Warren Wheeler said the bill would remove a fair process for settling tenancy disputes in the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

He said the new powers would mean someone could be evicted on evidence of criminal activity

that had not been properly tested before a court.

"By their very definition, public and social housing tenants are amongst the most vulnerable in our community," he said. "This bill prioritises expediency over basic principles of justice and will undoubtedly result in people being unfairly evicted."

A spokeswoman for Social Housing Minister Brad Hazzard confirmed tenants could be evicted if the tenancy tribunal was shown that they had committed a "serious criminal offence".

"These laws are about protecting the vast majority of social housing tenants who do the right

thing from the small number of people engaging in criminal and anti-social behaviour," she said.

"The proposed One Strike policy for a serious breach of a tenancy agreement means the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal must terminate a tenancy where it is proven, on balance of probabilities, that a tenant has committed a serious criminal offence - serious drug crimes, grievous bodily harm, storing an unlicensed firearm and offences under the 'show cause' provisions of the Bail Act."

She said a "three strikes" policy would enable officials to evict a tenant if they breached a tenancy agreement three times in a year.

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