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Rental assistance program a better option

Shooters, Fishers and Farmers MP Rick Mazza says residential fixed term lease agreements have been torn up after the *Residential Tenancies (COVID-19 Response) Bill 2020* passed the Legislative Council last Friday.

The Bill puts a moratorium on evictions, except in special circumstances and provides for tenants to break a lease without penalty.

It also provides for a conciliation process through the Department of Commerce, with the Commissioner for Consumer Protection able to receive applications from tenants and landlords to try to resolve issues.

Mr Mazza said he appreciates the Government is trying to protect tenants from becoming homeless during the pandemic, however the impact on landlords is unacceptable and a rental assistance scheme would have been preferable.

“Landlords are having to bear the financial brunt on tenancies as one small part of the community when it should be a whole of community effort,” Mr Mazza said.

“A preferable option is a rent assistance scheme, if people are struggling to pay rent, they could apply for rent assistance.

“Rent assistance would prevent tenants affected from the COVID-19 crisis from having rent accrue which will become a debt they will have great difficulty paying back. A rent assistance package would also provide landlords with critical income to meet mortgage commitments.

“Victoria is providing an \$80 million rent assistance package that WA should seriously consider as an option.”

Mr Mazza predicted there would be significant long-term consequences resulting from the Bill’s passage, such as a shortage of private rental accommodation and a rent spike because of the supply and demand issue as private investors leave the market.

“The Housing Authority will come under pressure to provide housing to try to make up that shortfall, and that will be a huge cost to the State, far more than providing a rental assistance scheme during the COVID-19 pandemic,” Mr Mazza said.

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