

have continued vigilance around addressing those matters. If there are new issues that have come to light, they need to be raised immediately and responsibly.

Housing affordability—Rent Relief Fund

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Attorney-General. The government's Rent Relief Fund provides emergency assistance for renters and low-income earners who are experiencing financial hardship to catch up on rent arrears, relieve some pressure and prevent eviction. It is administered by Care ACT, who were recently informed that the program's funding would be discontinued in the upcoming budget. They were told the decision had already been made and not to bother including the Rent Relief Fund in their budget submission. Was any modelling undertaken to determine the impacts of this decision on our already unacceptably long social housing waitlists, and, if so, could you please explain to renters under financial pressure how that modelling justifies this decision during a cost-of-living crisis?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Emerson for the question. I think most people in this place understand that the Rent Relief Fund was established in April 2023 as a short-term program to address cost-of-living pressures that had arisen during and after the COVID-19 lockdown periods. The ACT government then extended funding twice, with a total allocation of more than \$3 million provided towards grants and \$640,000 towards Care's administration costs. Care has done an absolutely fantastic job and, in respect of that, I indicated to them that the program was unlikely to continue past its current end date, noting that this was subject to budget processes, of course, and again stressing that this was a short-term program.

We know that, thanks to several progressive, compounding and effective legislative reforms to rent in the ACT, we are now one of the most, if not the most, affordable jurisdictions. Equally, a large number of programs remain available for support and through which renters can seek assistance. In particular, I reference the Tenancy Assistance Program that is run out of Woden Community Service. It provides tailored wraparound support that stabilises tenancies and mortgages and focuses on early intervention and prevention.

MR EMERSON: Will the government reconsider its decision to scrap the Rent Relief Fund, given the potentially disastrous impact on some members of our community who most need our support and on our social housing waitlists?

MS CHEYNE: As I have said, there are already a considerable number of programs available. The Rent Relief Fund was considered to be an extraordinary, short-term, discrete and time limited program at the time, but there are other programs and supports available and clear on the ACT government's cost-of-living assistance page. I refer anyone who believes that they are under financial stress or in any sort of housing instability to, before it escalates, approach the Tenancy Assistance Program to get wraparound support and intervention.

MR RATTENBURY: Is the decision to scrap the Rent Relief Fund a sign of things to come for vulnerable Canberrans in the upcoming budget?

MS CHEYNE: No.