



Michael Berkman MP
For Maiwar ▲

26 March 2020

The Hon Anastacia Palaszczuk
Premier of Queensland

Via email: thepremier@premiers.qld.gov.au

CC: The Hon Yvette D'Ath, Leader of the House: attorney@ministerial.qld.gov.au and The Hon Mick De Brenni, Minister for Housing and Public Works hpwdts@ministerial.qld.gov.au

Parliament must sit to protect renters and homeowners

Dear Premier

I am writing to urge you to make sure Parliament sits next week as currently scheduled so that we can protect our whole community and in particular Queensland renters and homeowners facing extreme housing insecurity.

The last fortnight has felt like a year, and governments around the country have been scrambling to keep up with the unfolding health and economic crisis. Queensland's front line health staff are doing a heroic job responding to the pandemic, and everyday Queenslanders are coming to terms with unprecedented restrictions on daily life.

I strongly believe that Parliament must sit as planned next week rather than setting the precedent that it will be suspended over the next six months. High on the agenda should be passing a comprehensive set of protections for renters and homeowners including:

- A moratorium on evictions during the current crisis, at a minimum for six months,
- A rental holiday for those affected by the crisis, including those who have lost their jobs,
- A repayment holiday and protection from foreclosure for homeowners and landlords who cannot pay their mortgage,
- A guarantee that every one of the 20,000 Queenslanders who are homeless will be given a home, on top of the measures announced yesterday by Minister De Brenni.

Some of these measures such as support for mortgage-holders may rely on Federal government support, but the Queensland government should go as far and as fast as possible to make sure everyone has a home during this crisis.

Even before the pandemic, more than 10% of Queensland households were in rental or mortgage stress, and household debt had reached record levels. In July 2019 there were 39,513 Queenslanders on the social housing waiting list. With tens of thousands now unemployed, Queensland could be facing a truly staggering housing crisis as renters and homeowners face eviction or foreclosure.

Contact Us

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I note some media reports today that the National Cabinet last night agreed in principle on some measures to protect renters from eviction during the crisis, to be implemented by State and Territory governments. I understand further details may be announced tomorrow, although the finalisation of this plan has now been delayed by nearly a week.

Given those developments at a national level, it is even more crucial that the Queensland Parliament sit next week as planned, and that we act swiftly to support renters and homeowners.

Democracy is an essential service, and especially so during such an unprecedented crisis. The new physical distancing arrangements trialled last week show that it is possible for MPs to continue our vital role in scrutinising and debating the government's response to this unfolding crisis.

I also wish to acknowledge your announcement this morning in relation to student free days at Queensland schools, and in particular for the arrangements you have flagged to make sure the children of essential service workers can still attend.

Please do not hesitate to contact my office on (07) 3737 4100 or maiwar@parliament.qld.gov.au if I can assist.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Berkman', with a stylized, cursive script.

Michael Berkman MP