

**SOCIAL HOUSING — HOMELESSNESS**

*Statement*

**HON DR BRAD PETTITT (South Metropolitan)** [8.50 pm]: Tonight I rise to talk about housing and homelessness. I do not want to focus on what we often focus on when we talk about this topic, which is the broader stats that we know, such as around 10 000 people are experiencing homelessness, of whom 2 315 are sleeping rough, according to the last census, or the 44 000 on our social housing waitlist of whom 9 000 are on the priority waitlist. Often we lose, I think, the real meaning of those numbers, but in the last couple of weeks, I have been speaking with a constituent who is one of those people and she asked that I share her story and I am really honoured to get up today and do that. It is the story of Joey King who is a 54-year-old woman who has been homeless since July 2019. She tells me she has spent 186 weeks and counting on the housing waitlist, which is extraordinary.

I think she has asked me to share this story because she is at her wit's end. I know when I first started liaising with her on social media several months ago, she said she did not want to go public; she just wanted to know what I could do to help. She did not want to put her story out there and certainly I did not encourage her to do so, but months and months have gone by and I think she is now really at the point at which she does not know what to do, and she was really keen to share her story and I am certainly happy to do so. When we did the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations inquiry into the funding of homelessness, we knew there was so much there but hearing an individual's story can really bring things back.

Joey's story goes like this. She wrote to me that she will be back in her car as of 12 October. She has been housesitting and doing other things, but within two days she could be back in her car. She wrote that she has been homeless since July 2019. She has been on the housing waitlist since March 2020, for 186 weeks, when the average wait time is 113.5 weeks. She has been on the priority list since April 2022, 75 weeks ago, when the average is 52 weeks. She is priority listed for two-bedroom seniors designated accommodation in the Fremantle zone. The Department of Communities told her it has not allocated housing for the 2022 priority applicants yet, let alone the 2023. She wrote that she could have another 12 to 18 months of moving from house to house, and her car, before the department gets around to looking at applicants for 2023. The department also told her that she is a senior at 54 years old, which she believes discriminates against her, as does being a woman and owning a dog for her mental health. It implied it is taking so long due to the zone she has chosen.

It offered her a bond loan application form without mentioning that she would lose her position on the waitlist if she rented somewhere, which she found out after she tried to raise money through GoFundMe to rent somewhere while she waited. She wrote that when she first became homeless, she paid \$200 per month to store her things. She now pays \$500 per month. Because she does not have a permanent address, she often does not receive mail in a timely manner. She recently lost her licence because of a fine she was unaware of and she cannot afford to get it back. She tries to house-sit so she does not sleep in her car but there is more competition and fewer house-sits available as more people struggling with the housing crisis want to house-sit. Ongoing homelessness is detrimental to her mental health, which continues to deteriorate. She is unable to establish roots within a community and she finds it difficult to work toward the health, employment and relationship goals identified within her National Disability Insurance Scheme plan. She currently receives NDIS funding for these goals, but cannot work toward them while she remains homeless. If she does not use her funding, she will lose it and will not have the funds to accomplish her goals once she is housed. Joey also cannot find an ongoing support worker. Moving around the north and south metropolitan and southwest areas prevents her from forming a relationship with a support worker. This has obvious ramifications for her mental health and puts her at risk of losing her NDIS funding because she is not using it.

That is Joey's story. I want to thank her for sharing it. I have spoken to her several times and she is a very articulate, brave person. I know that the decision to do that was not taken lightly. In the last week or two she was on *The Project* sharing her story. It is certainly worth watching, for those who have not seen it. It puts a face to the housing and homelessness crisis that we face and I hope we can do much more about. I thank my fellow members for listening tonight.