

COST-OF-LIVING RELIEF

**814. Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI to the Premier:**

Before I ask my question, on behalf of the member for Swan Hills I acknowledge students here from Malvern Springs Primary School and, on behalf of the member for Scarborough, students from St Mary's Anglican Girls' School.

I refer to the Cook Labor government's ongoing commitment to reduce cost-of-living pressures amid global inflation pressures.

- (1) Can the Premier outline to the house how this government is supporting tenants experiencing rental stress?
- (2) Can the Premier advise the house what further support has been provided to buffer Western Australians from the full brunt of the current global economic conditions?

**Mr R.H. COOK replied:**

- (1)–(2) Madam Speaker, it is good to be back! I thank the member for the question; it is a very important one. When I was elected back in June this year, I said that I would keep the economy strong and I would look after those who were doing it the toughest. Today's announcement goes to the heart of those principles. As we know, the pandemic has reshaped the housing market right across the globe. Our housing market is no different from any other. We have urgently pursued policies to make sure that we can relieve the tightened rental market and that people can get access to the homes that they need. Lack of funding is not the issue. We have invested a record \$2.6 billion into housing and homelessness measures in this term of government alone, including the construction of more than 1 600 social homes, with another 1 000 under construction. We have introduced a range of reforms, including nation-leading planning reforms, 100 per cent stamp duty concessions, a dedicated housing supply unit and a new infrastructure development fund to partner with industry to support major housing projects. The bottleneck faced in WA is not unique to our state—it is faced elsewhere—but what is unique to Western Australia is that because we have kept the economy strong and protected the state finances we can invest to assist those who are doing it the toughest.

Today's announcement is about providing rent relief for those who are in danger of falling into arrears on their rent and in danger of eviction. Alongside the Minister for Housing, John Carey, and the Minister for Commerce, Hon Sue Ellery, I launched the WA rent relief program—a \$24.4 million program that will help financially vulnerable Western Australian tenants remain in their homes. Although it is funded by the government, it is delivered in partnership with great community service organisations such as Vinnies WA and Anglicare WA. We are very proud of the work that they do in the community to help those doing it tough.

Support will be available to tenants experiencing rental stress, rental arrears, severe financial hardship and risk of eviction. The level of support will depend on the tenant's circumstances. For some, for instance, this may involve the payment of arrears—for others support will cover part of their future rent costs of up to three months' rent to the value of \$5 000. The idea is to help those who have had a setback, a financial disruption to their lives, and are in danger of falling behind and therefore becoming homeless. We want to intervene in that process and make sure that they do not get turfed out onto the streets but can maintain their role as great, reliable tenants.

This goes to part of a range of matters we have in place for support to people and tenants across Western Australia, which our community sector organisations do a great job of providing. This comes on top of a range of measures that my government has introduced to make sure that we can assist people with the cost of living, such as the \$400 household electricity credit, \$200 of which was already delivered in July–August, with the next part coming as part of the December billing cycle. In partnership with the Albanese Labor government, we have provided more than \$800 to those doing it the toughest. At the same time, we have capped our public transport fares, saving households thousands of dollars each year, particularly commuters. We have capped regional airfares, locking in affordable air travel for those living in country areas. We have made TAFE free for many courses for over 30 000 Western Australians. We have doubled the KidSport grants to \$300 per child, ensuring parents can keep their kids active in sport. We have boosted the seniors cost-of-living rebate. We have kept fees and charges well below the rate of inflation at around 2.5 per cent.

We can make these measures because we have kept our economy and public finances strong, which means a WA Labor government can stand by those who are doing it the toughest. These are the most prosperous of times for some people, but for many people these are the hardest of times, and we will stand by them. The WA rent relief program is another great example of my government's effort to support those doing it rough.