

## MEDIA RELEASE

"This Bill is shameful" – Children's Commissioner

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Children's Commissioner Dr Russell Wills has described a bill originally intended to improve the poor quality of rental housing as "shameful".

The Residential Tenancies Amendment Bill includes proposals to make smoke detectors mandatory and sets two different standards for insulation. The Social Services Select Committee is currently hearing submissions on this bill.

"It is intolerable that we have 42,000 admissions and 15 deaths a year for children with conditions associated with poor housing and poverty. This Bill will do little to change this.

"When the 2013 Budget came out suggesting trial of a WoF for private and state housing, Government made a promise to New Zealand children: We will make your house healthy.

"Three years on from that Budget promise, this Bill will do little for children living in cold, damp, mouldy housing. It is a wasted opportunity and a broken promise to our children.

"Tenants still have to complain if they believe the house is not up to standard. All our experience shows that they don't and won't complain because they're too scared they'll lose their house or be unable to rent anywhere else".

There is also no heating or ventilation standard in the Bill.

"Without heating or enforcement these changes will have little impact for children. An insulated but unheated house is still a cold house. Tenants don't and won't complain. Children will therefore continue to live in cold, damp, mouldy, private rental houses. They will continue to be admitted to hospital with the same conditions and some will die. This is shameful.

"Legislation sends a message; in this case, to our children. The message is: you are not important enough for us to set a standard for heating for your house and to check to make sure your house is healthy.

"And so I'm asking that Government re-think why this Bill was originally introduced – to prevent children getting sick and dying because of where they live."

The Commissioner is asking the Government to amend the Bill to include three elements that would improve help ensure houses are warm and dry:

1. Require all houses to meet the current insulation standard
2. Apply a heating and ventilation standard
3. Introduce monitoring or enforcement by local government, with inspections – rather than requiring tenants to complain.

"I am asking the Committee to send this Bill back to the House with these amendments. Surely our children deserve more than this."

Ends.

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