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Ms Pauline Williamson
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Dear Ms Williamson

Thank you for sending me a copy of *A plan towards housing justice for older people in Victoria*, the *haag* Policy Platform for the November election.

As you may know, I have worked with *haag* on a range of matters from the 1990's when I was associated with the Housing Justice Roundtable and also since I have been a Member of the Victorian Parliament.

The policy platform that you have developed and provided is clearly a solid document that presents and argues for secure and optimal housing for all older Victorians, especially those who need additional support owing the difficult circumstances they face. I expect that you have been working with Labor's Housing Shadow Minister, Richard Wynne MP, in the development of your platform and its recommendations.

As you know, Victorian Labor unequivocally supports the right of all Victorians to secure, affordable and appropriate housing as well as access to reliable services. Labor has always advocated for Victoria's most vulnerable citizens.

You will know that Labor recognises that an affordable housing strategy must involve the whole of government so that supply can be expanded and that we did this when we were last in government. Labor is committed to ensuring that local planning schemes promote socially cohesive neighbourhoods through good urban design that incorporates diverse and affordable housing.

By contrast, under the current Coalition Government, Victoria's most vulnerable citizens are at greater risk, especially elderly people and low-income families and you will also know that no new money has been invested in the purchase or construction of new public and social housing since they came to office in 2010. Successive budgets have cut funding to crucial programs that have provided essential support to vulnerable Victorians.

Thank you for writing to me, and congratulations on the Platform. I provide for your information a two page extract from Labor's Platform.

Warm regards

Johan Scheffer MP
Member for Eastern Victoria Region

The Suburbs

Labor is committed to the creation of a Ministry for the Suburbs, and is committed to establishing a dedicated fund to support the infrastructure needs of interface communities.

Labor will:

- Develop and implement a plan for the delivery of key services and infrastructure to Melbourne's suburbs
- Improve the livability of Melbourne's suburbs through support for accessible health services and transport, recreational, educational and employment opportunities

Housing

Labor believes that all Victorians have a right to safe, affordable, and secure housing. Having a home provides the foundation for financial, social and emotional security. A strong and sustainable social housing sector is critical to ensuring that all Victorians can own or rent housing that meets their needs.

Labor will:

- Continue to expand Victoria's social housing assets through the National Affordable Housing Agreement and State initiatives
- Promote and expand not-for-profit, community-based Housing Associations
- Continue the practice of spot buying to ensure the diversity of housing throughout the community
- Review the status of State-owned properties currently managed by Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) with a view to transferring the ownership from Government to AHV
- Investigate alternative housing finance options for social and public housing
- Encourage local government to develop initiatives that facilitate greater private and community investment in affordable housing
- Ensure that social housing is allocated using transparent guidelines based on need
- Ensure that social housing tenants are supported to maintain their tenancy by providing well-located housing close to jobs and services, with appropriate support in place for those with complex needs
- Lobby the Commonwealth to continue to play an active role in housing supply,

- Enhance the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA)
- Assist public and social housing tenants to buy housing through home ownership schemes
- Ensure that Places Victoria and other statutory authorities promote a range of housing choices at suitable sites across the State
- Ensure Victoria's planning system and building regulations encourage the redevelopment of under-utilised urban sites to achieve appropriate urban densities of housing
- Work with the housing industry to stimulate investment in housing developments in regional and rural Victoria
- Ensure Victoria's planning system and building regulations require new construction to incorporate universal design principles that facilitate better access for persons with disability and older persons

Neighborhood Renewal

Labor recognises the enormous progress that has been made in communities that have undertaken Neighbourhood Renewal projects.

Labor will continue with a progressive program of urban renewal to ensure that areas with high concentrations of public housing enjoy increased amenity, access to public open spaces and a mix of housing tenures, density and social mix to better reflect surrounding communities. This will involve direct investment by Government partnering with housing associations and the private sector.

Tenancy and Private Rental

Labor believes the provision of more secure, affordable and appropriate housing in the private rental market is essential.

Labor will:

- Review and strengthen the Residential Tenancy Act and Residential Tenancies Regulations to ensure effective consumer protection and improved housing standards
- Ensure that a review of the Residential Tenancy Act and Residential Tenancies Regulations examines reforms to specifically:
 - Mandate a standard tenure of leases to be offered in the market environment under normal circumstances

- Encourage greater length and security of tenure
- Ensure access to transparent and independent mechanisms for reviewing rental increases
- Strengthen maintenance regimes for rental properties
- Reform minimum standards for rental properties to improve water and energy efficiency standards
- Outlaw the practice of rental bidding or rental auctions
- Work with all levels of Government to encourage greater investment in affordable rental housing, increasing the supply of homes available for private rental across a diverse range of sizes and locations
- Review and strengthen the regulation for tenure in relocatable housing and caravan parks
- Ensure that public housing tenants are not discouraged from social and economic participation by the prospect of immediate rent rises when their income increases

Cost of Utility Bills

Labor understands the vital importance of access to energy to all Victorians and that many Victorians are finding it harder to meet the cost of rising energy bills.

Labor is committed to strategic household energy and energy efficiency responses to help reduce utility bills for families and slash Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions.

Labor will:

- Consider a target, and support programs, for improving the energy efficiency standards of existing homes
- Actively promote information about the energy rating of homes that are sold or leased
- Support programs and incentives to improve the energy efficiency of public and social housing
- Investigate innovative funding models and incentives to assist residential tenants and landlords to improve the energy efficiency of homes and to assist with the installation of solar photovoltaic rooftop systems
- Develop strategies to support families and low incomes households save on their energy bills
- Ensure that existing No Interest Loans Schemes are expanded to cover energy efficiency products with higher upfront costs
- Assess the viability of lifting the minimum energy efficiency standard for new homes and major renovations
- Improve Victoria's proportion of insulated homes, which currently ranks fourth in Australia

Protection for Energy Consumers

Labor recognises that electricity is an essential and increasingly costly service and that governments need to do more to promote effective retail competition.

Labor will implement an Energy Consumers Charter of Rights. This charter will set out the principles for the regulation of the retail electricity sector, including that:

- Electricity contract offers will be clear and simple enough for easy comparison by the average consumer
- Vulnerable consumers will be able to access free, impartial and informed advice about which contract is best for them
- All residential electricity consumers will have the same rights and protections
- Consumers will be protected from high pressure sales tactics
- Disconnection will always be a last resort and every effort should be made to assist, not punish, consumers experiencing hardship

Homelessness

Labor believes that people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness should be supported to achieve sustainable housing and social inclusion.

Labor will:

- Focus on prevention and early intervention to stop people, particularly young people, becoming homeless
- Work with relevant organisations and local Councils to support strategies that break the cycle of homelessness
- Improve and expand the service response to homelessness, with the goal of providing long-term, integrated support to those in need
- Ensure that crisis and transitional housing accommodation is available in locations where it is needed