To whom it may concern

My name is Irene Doutney, I am a Councillor on City of Sydney Council, have a long history of working with and advocating for public housing tenants and am myself a tenant of public housing in inner Sydney. I am writing to express my concerns about the *Public Housing Tenants Support Bill 2013*. In particular I am concerned about the provisions of the Bill that allow tenants simply judged ‘at risk’ of rent arrears to have parts of their income co-opted as this is unfair, counterproductive and inconsistent with other provisions in the Bill.

Income management for able adults should be an absolute last resort, a sentiment expressed in the fact sheets accompanying the draft Bill. However applying it to someone simply on the basis that they may fall into rent arrears in the future is not consistent with the idea of this being a last resort and is also contrary to the principles of natural justice. It is akin to arresting someone simply because there is a suspicion they may one day commit a robbery and is anathema to the notion that all people in our society are innocent unless they are proven to be guilty. It is also unclear how this process fits with the statement that income management will cease once an individual’s rent arrears has been paid off – how can someone’s arrears be paid off if they have no arrears in the first place?

Automatically deducting a proportion of someone’s income support payments can also create a culture of being ‘under the thumb’ in those who are affected by it, leaving them less in charge of their own affairs and potentially making them dependent on such outside intervention in the future. Many different types of people receive income support payments for a wide range of reasons but for many of these people the ability to manage their own affairs is an important part of their sense of control in their own lives and can assist them to ultimately move off such payments and into employment.

This is particularly the case in relation to people who are long term unemployed or suffering from temporary disabilities. If such people get used to having such basic tasks like paying their rent managed by some external authority it can potentially stifle their ability to take initiative and thus hinder their future employment prospects, setting them up for potential long-term welfare dependency that could otherwise be avoided.

For all the reasons listed above I would ask that the Bill be withdrawn or, failing this, that the provisions for income management of those who are simply judged ‘at risk’ of rent arrears be removed. Should you wish to discuss anything I have said here further feel free to contact me on idoutney@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au or 9265 9812.

Thank you for your time and for considering what I have said.

Regards

Councillor Irene Doutney

City of Sydney Council