

Ms Nicole D'Rozario  
Coroner's Registrar  
Coroners Court of Victoria  
65 Kavanagh Street  
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006

By email: [cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au](mailto:cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au)

Dear Ms D'Rozario

### **Investigation into the death of DVR (reference: COR 2020 004470)**

Thank you for your letter dated 6 December 2022, enclosing His Honour Coroner McGregor's findings into the death of DVR and recommendations made to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH).

His Honour Coroner McGregor made three recommendations which were nominated as requiring a direct response from DFFH. The following information is provided in response to His Honour Coroner McGregor's recommendations and supplements our preliminary response dated 18 January 2023.

In our preliminary response, we noted that recommendations two and three may also require input from other parties, being the Department of Education (DET) and the Victorian Building Authority (VBA). Since then, we have consulted DET and included a summary of their response below.

#### **Recommendation One**

**I recommend that the Department of Families, Fairness, and Housing (DFFH) consult with relevant organisations and conduct a feasibility study into whether fire sprinkler systems could be installed in all current (and future) public housing premises.**

DFFH supports the recommendation and agrees to work closely with relevant organisations including, but not limited to, Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV), Country Fire Authority (CFA), Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition Australia and the VBA to investigate whether it is feasible to install fire sprinklers in all current and future public housing properties.

With respect to current public housing properties, Homes Victoria (formerly Director of Housing) owns approximately 72,000 properties, of which approximately 64,000 are

managed by Homes Victoria and used as “public housing”. Whilst this number includes units in high and medium rise buildings that are sprinkler protected, a significant number of Homes Victoria’s properties are single dwellings or low-rise units that are not sprinkler protected. The cost to retrofit a fire sprinkler system throughout the existing public housing portfolio would require a significant investment from the State, not only for the initial capital works but also the ongoing maintenance of the installed fire systems.

The most cost-effective method to install fire sprinklers is to include it in the construction of new public housing properties. In 2022, Homes Victoria chaired a meeting with representatives from FRV, CFA, VBA, and the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition Australia to discuss this issue. The outcome of the meeting was that all agreed that installation of fire sprinklers to new buildings was a worthwhile consideration, but that high capital costs resulting from restrictive licensing requirements for installers and maintenance contactors made installations excessively expensive and disproportionately so in rural and regional areas (where there were very few licensed installers or maintenance contractors). FRV agreed to formally contact the VBA, the former Department of Environment, Land, Water, Planning (DELWP) and the Minister for Planning to consider changes to the licensing and maintenance requirements for the installation of domestic fire sprinklers in new buildings. Homes Victoria agreed to continue to review and monitor this issue as part of its Capital Development Fire Risk Management Guidelines.<sup>1</sup>

We have commenced initial planning works for a feasibility study into whether fire sprinklers could be installed within current and future properties and estimate that an initial feasibility report will be completed in six months.

Homes Victoria chairs the Public Housing Fire Safety and Arson Committee quarterly meeting, which is attended by representatives from Homes Victoria, FRV, CFA, Victoria Police, Institute of Engineers Australia, and Victorian Public Tenants Association. The feasibility study will be included as an ongoing agenda item until the study is completed.

## **Recommendation Two**

**I recommend that the DFFH ensure that all technicians who perform inspections and testing of fire systems, and any other essential safety measures work, be required to hold appropriate licences so that servicing is performed to the requisite standard.**

DFFH has no further information to provide in relation to this recommendation additional to our preliminary response which is included below.

*"We understand that this recommendation refers specifically to technicians engaged to inspect and service fire systems in accommodation provided under the DFFH portfolio. Homes Victoria supports the recommendation and is committed to ensuring that maintenance of fire systems and any other essential safety measures work is aligned to relevant regulations. Homes Victoria ensures that its maintenance contracts stipulate that the contractor must comply with all applicable regulatory requirements, including the use of qualified and registered fire services contractors.*

---

<sup>1</sup> A copy of the Department’s Capital Development Fire Risk Management Guidelines was attached to the Statement of James McNally dated 5 September 2022.

*We note that the VBA regulates Victoria's building and plumbing industries and has oversight of the licensing of practitioners who are responsible for the routine servicing of fire protection equipment, including fire hose reels. Homes Victoria adheres to regulatory requirements and works with industry bodies to ensure its portfolio of social housing and other accommodation meets relevant safety standards. A copy of the VBA Fire Protection Equipment fact sheet is attached which includes details on the VBA registration requirements for persons who conduct routine servicing of fire protection equipment.*

*To the extent that this recommendation may relate to a requirement more broadly that all technicians who perform maintenance to essential safety measures should be required to hold appropriate licenses, His Honour may wish to consider directing this issue to the VBA."*

### **Recommendation Three**

**I recommend that the DFFH considers the potential role of MCHN services or other services in identifying and improving the fire safety practices of parents of young children, particularly those facing social and financial disadvantage.**

In our preliminary response, we noted that the Maternal Child Health Services (MCHN) service is managed by the MCHN and Parenting Unit which falls under the responsibility of the Department of Health (DOH). We also noted that the Department of Education (DET) through its Early Years Learning and Development programs has a role in educating children and their parents on a range of matters including child safety. Additionally, we sought guidance from the Coroners Court on which other services may be particularly relevant in identifying and improving the fire safety practices of parents of young children, particularly those facing social and financial disadvantage.

DFFH consulted DET to enquire what if any of its programs include early childhood curriculum, resources, programs, or support services that relate to improving the fire safety practices of parents of young children, particularly those facing social and financial disadvantage. DET responded that whilst it has a role in educating children and their parents through its early years learning and development programs, the advice it provides to parents through these programs relates to children's learning and development. It does not have a role in providing advice to families about safe parenting practices, which it says is the role of parenting services for which DFFH is responsible and DOH which is responsible for Maternal Child Health Services.

DFFH notes that although its parenting services programs include safe parenting practices, this is limited to families with which DFFH's child protection and family violence services are engaged. DVR was not the subject of an active intervention with child protection services at the time of the fire incident and there was no indication that DVR was at risk of harm or any concerns regarding his mother's parenting.

Although DVR and his mother were living in public housing at the time, there were no signs of fire safety risks such as hoarding, substance abuse or fire related behaviours or activity.

DFFH also consulted DOH to enquire about the scope of the services and programs that it provides through the Maternal Child Health Services however at the time of writing, we have not received a response.

The DFFH's Family services provide early intervention support to vulnerable children, young people, and families. Family service providers are required under the Strategic Framework for Family Services (2007) to undertake a comprehensive assessment of a child or young person's risks, needs and strengths in the context of their family situation, individuality, developmental stage, social circumstances, and cultural identity. This includes a focus on personal safety of a child or young person.

In response to recommendation three, the DFFH will release communications to family service providers emphasising this requirement and will supply providers with relevant fire safety practice material to support families.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact Sue Chadwick, Director Facilities Management Unit at [susan.chadwick@homes.vic.gov.au](mailto:susan.chadwick@homes.vic.gov.au).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ben Rimmer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Ben Rimmer**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Homes Victoria

03/03/2023