

Sponsor: Wellington Shire Council
Refuter: Overnewton Anglican Community College

A Bill for an Act relating to Increased Support for Youth Homelessness.

To be enacted by the YMCA Victoria Youth Parliament;

Increased Support for Youth Homelessness Bill 2021

A Bill for an Act relating to increasing support for Victoria's growing population of young people who are experiencing long or short-term homelessness. Each and every day, both in rural and metropolitan areas, young people are left without sufficient shelter, food and care. Further, they are often left unable to access services, or are uninformed on how to do so.

This Bill was created to relieve the stress and pressure of finding shelter, services, and care for young people, and to raise awareness for the rising rate of youth homelessness. The implementation of this Bill will ensure all of our Victorian youth – not just young people in metropolitan areas – are fully equipped with the necessary support services in order to improve their safety, happiness, and quality of life.

PART I—Preliminary

Clause 1 Purpose

The main purposes of this Act are—

- (a) to increase support for young people experiencing homelessness;
- (b) to expand services in rural and regional areas where support is currently limited;
- (c) to provide schools with the means of educating and supporting their students about youth homelessness.

Clause 2 Commencement

This Bill shall commence upon receiving assent from the Youth Governor of Victoria.

Clause 3 Definitions

In this Bill, we define the following to mean—

- (a) **youth** means a person who is under and including the age of 25 years;
- (b) **homelessness** means the state of having no home;
- (c) **hostile architecture** refers to an urban design strategy that uses elements of the built environment to purposefully guild or restrict movement and behaviour;
- (d) **social workers** means a profession that provides advice, support and resources to individuals and families to help them solve their problems;
- (e) **safety houses** means a house approved by authorities as a place that homeless young people can use as a safe haven;
- (f) **conduct that endangers** means conduct that is wrongful and reckless, and likely to produce death or bodily harm to another person.

Part II—Establishment

Clause 4 Establishment of Homeless Youth Solutions (HYS)

- 4.1 The HYS shall be established and oversee the following—
 - (a) deconstruction of hostile architecture;
 - (b) implementation of support services, such as—
 - (i) mental health services;
 - (ii) food services;
 - (iii) housing services;
 - (c) the creation and management of safety houses;
 - (d) increasing support for youth homelessness in rural areas;
 - (e) incentives for rural and remote communities to participate.
- 4.2 The HYS shall employ—
 - (a) members of the Victorian Police—
 - (i) an officer from each station across Victoria that has over 50 officers stationed shall be required to participate in the HYS;
 - (ii) any station that has less than 5 officers shall be required to team up with the nearest station that also does not have 5 officers;
 - (b) construction and labour workers;
 - (c) social workers from various areas of expertise;
 - (d) counsellors.
- 4.3 The HYS shall be funded by the Department of Health and Human Services.
- 4.4 The HYS shall have various forms of communication outlets to provide information to young people, including—
 - (a) social media;
 - (b) websites;
 - (c) television advertisement;
 - (d) radio advertisement.

Clause 5 Commitment to spaces free of Hostile Architecture (HA)

- 5.1 All current HA shall be removed from all public spaces.
- 5.2 All future construction of HA shall be ceased to prevent re-introduction.
- 5.3 Public spaces shall be made habitable for emergency homeless arrangements.
- 5.4 All HA-related construction as laid out in Clause 5 shall be completed by labour and construction workers employed under the HYS.
- 5.5 Penalties shall apply to Councils which refuse to remove or cease construction of HA.

- 5.6 The HYS shall make modifications to the Urban Design Guidelines (UDG)—
- (a) elements and objectives of the UDG shall not attempt to deter or relocate people experiencing homelessness from public spaces;
 - (b) there shall be a section added to the UDG which describes the harms caused by HA.

Clause 6 Implementation of Support Services for Homeless Youth

- 6.1 The HYS shall partner with Headspace to provide mental health services for homeless youth across Victoria.
- 6.2 The HYS shall implement community food services, including—
- (a) the creation and support of more programs and not-for-profit organisations who provide community food services;
 - (b) the expansion of community food services to regional and remote Victoria.
- 6.3 The HYS shall implement housing services, including—
- (a) the establishment of the Safety House Program outlined in Clause 7;
 - (b) the expansion and partnership of launch housing for regional areas of Victoria.
- 6.4 The HYS shall partner with Frontyard Youth Services to provide services for young people who are at risk of experiencing, or who are experiencing, homelessness in regional areas of Victoria.
- 6.5 The HYS shall provide educational programs so the general public can become acquainted with the services it provides.

Clause 7 Establishment of Safety House Program (SHP)

- 7.1 Safety Houses shall be implemented according to the needs of each LGA across Victoria.
- 7.2 The SHP shall offer refuge to young people in need, in the form of a temporary lodging situation.
- 7.3 The SHP shall be run by volunteers selected by the HYS.
- 7.4 To be eligible to volunteer for the SHP, applicants shall—
- (a) be subject to interviews;
 - (b) be subject to character checks by Victoria Police;
 - (c) possess an up-to-date Police Check;
 - (d) possess an up-to-date Working With Children's Check;
 - (e) be a member of the community as a—
 - (i) local resident;
 - (ii) local business owner.
- 7.5 Services provided by the SHP shall be available to youth experiencing homelessness.

Clause 8 Rural Initiatives

- 8.1 The HYS shall provide a rebate to rural councils to aid in the redevelopment and —
- (a) required infrastructures;
 - (b) support services;
- 8.2 The rebate value shall be determined by discretion of the HYS.
- 8.3 Councils shall be able to claim this rebate once per financial year for a total of six times.
- 8.4 Eligibility shall be determined based on the following—
- (a) Population of the shire.
 - (b) Distance from outskirts of Metropolitan Melbourne or any Victorian city.
 - (i) Those that are 60 – 140 kilometres away shall be considered as Category One;
 - (ii) Those that are 140 – 200 kilometres away shall be considered as Category Two;
 - (iii) Those that are 200 plus kilometres away shall be considered as Category Three.
 - (c) Percentage of population that is affected by youth homelessness and low-income earnings.

Clause 9 Penalties

- 9.1 Those who refuse to remove or cease construction of HA shall be fined 10 penalty units—
- (a) if HA is not removed within 3 months after initial fine, a further 20 penalty units shall be imposed;
 - (b) these penalties shall be incurred every 3 months until it is removed.
- 9.2 Rural shires which misuse their rebate shall be fined 10 penalty units.
- 9.3 Workers and volunteers of the SHP shall be subject to Level 7 penalties if they act in conduct that endangers, or puts at risk the lives of, youth. The fine amount shall be at the discretion of the HYS.