

[Ms LOVELL \(Northern Victoria\)](#) -- The matter I wish to raise is for the attention of the Minister for Housing and regards the issue of illegal [rooming](#) houses. The action I seek is for the minister to conduct a thorough investigation of rogue operators, including a campaign to ensure that all [rooming](#) houses are registered and operating within the law.

Over the past two years or more the minister has been well aware of rogue operators in the [rooming](#) house sector taking advantage of vulnerable families who are unable to maintain rental in the private sector and who continue to languish on the public housing waiting list, which has reached a five-year high of 37 860 families.

In the Premier's annual statement of government intentions in February 2008 this issue was flagged as one which the government sought to address. Unfortunately it took the minister until December -- a full 10 months -- to take any action on the issue, and the action he eventually put in place is just not working. The action the minister took was to align the number of

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residents in [rooming](#) houses under the Residential Tenancies Act with the number of residents in prescribed accommodation under the health regulations. In effect this means that a place that has one or more rooms for rent that may be occupied by four or more residents should be registered with the local council under the health regulations prescribed accommodation provisions and is then subject to inspection.

However, this relies on the operator registering the [rooming](#) house before a local council becomes responsible for inspections; although there is a penalty of \$5600 for not registering, it raises the same concerns we have expressed over unregistered brothels, where there is no clarity about who is actually responsible for identifying illegal premises. It is also another form of cost shifting to local councils whose resources are already stretched.

When the changes were introduced, the Tenants Union of Victoria believed there were about 800 [rooming](#) houses operating in Victoria, with less than half being registered. It is believed that hundreds of [rooming](#) house operators continue to thumb their noses at the new laws by failing to register themselves with local councils. Unfortunately these vulnerable tenants, who are being forced to pay exorbitant rent in the territory of \$300 a week for a single bedroom, are reluctant to report the operators for fear that if the [rooming](#) house were to be closed down, they would have nowhere to live. The problem is especially bad in suburbs where the private rental vacancy rate has plummeted to virtually zero. In the Monash-Oakleigh region there are almost 20 residencies that are believed to be operating as illegal [rooming](#) houses.

As the housing crisis in this state continues to escalate, this issue has now reached a point where more and more Victorians are finding themselves at the mercy of these rogue operators.

The Brumby government must act immediately to put a stop to rogue [rooming](#) house operators who are causing further hardship to some of Victoria's most needy and vulnerable families. The action I seek from the minister is for the minister to conduct a thorough investigation of rogue operators, including a campaign to ensure that all [rooming](#) houses are registered and operating within the law.