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FIRST ANNUAL REPORT DETAILS GOVERNMENT NEGLECT, RENTER WINS AMID COVID-19 LOCKDOWNS

The first annual report from the Renters and Housing Union shows how one of Australia's newest unions helped claw back more than \$126,000 for renters in 84 cases amid Victoria's devastating lockdowns.

The 12 month report *Roofs For Ransom* also exposes failures by the Victorian Government in ensuring safe and secure housing amid the pandemic, with 91% of more than 130 survey respondents reporting rental stress throughout the crisis.

RAHU Secretary Eirene Tsolidis Noyce has launched *Roofs For Ransom* one year after the member-run union of renters and people in precarious housing emerged from a rent strike formed in response to Victoria's COVID-19 crisis.

"RAHU is proud to have returned more than \$126,000 for Victorian renters amid multiple lockdowns," Noyce said. "Our members exemplify the community's ability to stand up for ourselves and demonstrate what we can achieve in union."

"Our annual report also shows that renters remain under an incredible amount of stress and that the Victorian government has not done enough to support them throughout the pandemic. We continue to call on the government to reinstate an eviction moratorium and other housing protections amid our seventh lockdown."

An analysis of 84 extended cases involving 146 individual claims shows how RAHU's Renters Rights Support team resolved \$126,775.20 in accrued debt, out of a total of \$139,947.16, in favour of our members. The process involved negotiating rent reductions, debt waivers, preventing rental increases, or claiming bonds, and some cases are still pending resolution.

30% of these cases analysed also involved termination proceedings, a shocking 84% of which were initiated before the eviction moratorium was due to expire on March 29 2021.

Equally, *Roofs For Ransom* demonstrates a continuing need for renters to collectively organise post-COVID-19. The RAHU rental survey, conducted between January and March of 2021, found an average of 67% of respondents' income was spent on rent.

Roofs For Ransom includes specific recommendations for legislative change based on these findings, including restrictions and changes to the operation of VCAT; amendments to the *Residential Tenancies Act*; and a return of the eviction moratorium amid the current public



health crisis. Long-term recommendations also address housing insecurity and call to strengthen the public and community housing system.

Several RAHU members have spoken in *Roofs For Ransom* how RAHU was able to assist them personally in navigating rental challenges in lockdown.

Members Martina and Eros were refused a rent reduction and were pressured into agreeing to a deferral, after both of them had lost their entire incomes during lockdown. RAHU assisted Martina and Eros in defending \$8,000 of rental debt, and continues to support them in pursuing a compensation claim at VCAT.

You can download the full report at <https://rahu.org.au/roofs-for-ransom-12-month-report/>.

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