

HNZ bribe claim not first – tenant advocate

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Allegations that a Housing New Zealand (HNZ) staff member has been taking bribes is not the first claim of its kind, says a tenant advocate.

Piripi Gray said he welcomed the investigation and had previously heard of other allegations of bribery at HNZ.

He said tenants were vulnerable and felt intimidated by HNZ staff.

"But if they come forward then people can really see what is happening inside Housing New Zealand," Mr Gray said.

He said tenants had complained to him in the past that application forms were not being processed and that HNZ staff were asking for goods such as stereos.

HNZ chief executive Lesley McTurk said an Auckland staff member had been accused of offering preferential treatment in return for money.

Dr McTurk said the agency was investigating the claims and any findings would be forwarded to police.

She said she was "appalled" by the allegations. "I won't tolerate staff dishonesty or the exploitation of customers. Getting to the bottom of this allegation is a priority.

"I am making this public because Housing New Zealand is committed to providing a fair and level playing field for people applying for state houses. That means acting when we think there may have been abuse of our processes, and doing so transparently," Dr McTurk said.

She said the allegation of bribery was an "isolated incident".

"However, to provide additional reassurance to our customers and stakeholders, I have commissioned KPMG to conduct an independent review of Housing New Zealand's home allocation processes to identify what, if any, improvements might be made." Dr McTurk said.

New Zealand Federation of Family Budgeting Services secretary Raewyn Fox said many of her clients were also clients of Housing New Zealand but she had never heard of bribery.

"I have heard mumbles about the waiting lists though," Ms Fox said. "Even the suggestion that something like this has happened will damage their confidence," she said.

Housing Minister Phil Heatley praised HNZ for its "swift action".

"Prospective Housing New Zealand tenants and the wider public must have confidence in the probity of the state house system. I'm confident all necessary steps are being taken to ensure that is the case," Mr Heatley said.

Mr Heatley said anyone with complaints about HNZ could call the authority's complaints line in "absolute confidence" on 0800 801 601.

– NZPA and NZHERALD STAFF



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