

Floor 3
27 Queen Anne's Gate
Westminster, London
SW1H 9BU

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Secretary
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Secretary of State,

We write to you as a group of organisations that support those struggling with debt.

We warmly welcome the Renters (Reform) Bill's headline promise of delivering greater security for private tenants by abolishing Section 21 'no fault' evictions. But delivering security for tenants also means supporting those who experience financial difficulty.

We therefore strongly believe that the Renters (Reform) Bill should go further to protect financially vulnerable private sector tenants. The growth of private renting means that many of the private rented sector (PRS) tenants we see have the financial profile of social tenants, but without the access to socially rented homes. They are often financially vulnerable or affected by additional vulnerabilities such as disability or ill health.

When facing the threat of mandatory eviction for low level rent arrears, over a third of private renters have turned to credit to pay for their rent.¹ At any one time, over one million private renters are struggling with problem debt.²

Yet rather than supporting private tenants experiencing short-term financial shocks and one-off life events, the new Ground 8A of the Renters (Reform) Bill would increase the threat of debt-related eviction.

¹ StepChange Debt Charity, [More than 1 in 3 private renters using credit to pay for rent \(press release\)](#), 20 September 2023

² StepChange Debt Charity, [Private renters twice as likely to be in problem debt as general population \(press release\)](#), 23 May 2023

We urge you to make Ground 8A discretionary and introduce a new Tenancy Support Programme. This should consist of a series of reasonable steps by landlords to support tenants in arrears to sustain tenancies wherever possible. This would also help landlords by averting costly periods in which properties are unoccupied.

The introduction of Ground 8A as a mandatory ground threatens to further choke off affordable repayment pathways for tenants in arrears. It would deny tenants precisely the support they need, at the time they need it, to help clear their debts and stay in their homes.

Instead, we propose implementing a Tenancy Support Programme to deliver a more balanced set of protections. Like the steps set out in the Pre-Action Protocol that exists for council and housing association tenants, it would enshrine the idea that landlords should offer tenants an affordable plan to clear their arrears wherever possible before cases can be heard through the courts.

The steps a Tenancy Support Programme for the private sector would require include signposting to money and debt advice, providing time to apply for benefits, including discretionary housing payments, and seeking to agree an affordable repayment plan.

And like the Mortgage Charter, which the Treasury agreed with banks and building societies, and which is underpinned by FCA rules, it would aim to ensure that evictions on the grounds of arrears only ever happen as a last resort.

We strongly believe that equivalent measures – making rent arrears a discretionary ground for eviction, within the framework of a Tenancy Support Programme – should be introduced in the private rented sector.

There is strong public support for this approach: 72% of people agree that landlords should be required to offer tenants an affordable repayment plan before being allowed to pursue eviction.³ This support extends across party lines.

The Renters (Reform Bill) is a vital opportunity to introduce balanced protections for all tenants, including those under pressure from financial shocks. We urge you

³ Figures from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,986 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 1st - 3rd September 2023. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

to remove Ground 8A from the Bill and to introduce a Tenancy Support Programme to help financially vulnerable tenants stay in their homes.

Kind regards,



Vikki Brownridge, Chief Executive StepChange Debt Charity
David Cheadle, Acting Chief Executive, Money Advice Trust – the charity that runs National Debtline
Gareth McNab, Director of External Affairs, Christians Against Poverty
Julie Bishop, Director, Law Centres Network
Dame Clare Moriarty, Chief Executive, Citizens Advice

