

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government
2 Marsham Street
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21 July 2020

Protecting tenants with coronavirus related rent arrears before 23 August

As two charities covering housing and debt, we welcome the government's efforts to protect vulnerable tenants through changes to the Civil Procedure Rules on evictions. These acknowledge the hardship caused by the coronavirus emergency and the need for landlords to consider this when dealing with tenants.

However, with just a few short weeks remaining until the ban on evictions is lifted, we're concerned that steps are not being taken to ensure these changes will have the necessary legal backing to fulfil your department's aim that no-one who has lost income because of coronavirus should be evicted from their home.

StepChange estimate that since lockdown measures were introduced more than 590,000 people have fallen into rent arrears and are facing housing insecurity, over 200,000 in the private rented sector. A further 3.8 million people borrowing to make ends meet, most often using a credit card, an overdraft or high cost credit.

The government was quick to act in support of homeowners, which we welcomed, but renters have not been given the same consideration. Generation Rent found that 58% of renters were afraid of eviction despite the government's ban. This reflects concern about the ability of landlords to evict tenants using powers in the Housing Act 1988 without appreciation for household circumstances. This cannot be right in the context of a global pandemic in which many are facing acute financial hardship.

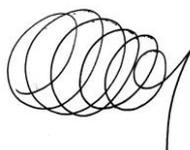
Last week, the government announced that its Breathing Space scheme will go live in May next year. We welcome this recognition that people need time to recover when facing a crisis. The same principle should be applied to renters who have been hardest hit by the coronavirus outbreak. To give them space to recover, plans to end S21 evictions must be accelerated. Alongside this, temporary changes need to be made to Ground 8 to give courts discretion when granting a possession order in cases where arrears have built up because of the pandemic.

The government has acted admirably during the pandemic to protect jobs and livelihoods. It has also proven its ability to act quickly, passing emergency legislation in days. We are living through one of most challenging times in living history, yet for renters, the countdown clock to homelessness and prolonged housing insecurity is ticking. We urge you to act to ensure these protections are in place before 23 August.

Yours sincerely,



Phil Andrew
Chief Executive, StepChange Debt
Charity



Alicia Kennedy
Director, Generation Rent