



28<sup>th</sup> March 2025

James Browne TD,  
Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage,  
Leinster House.

## **RE: Measures to address homelessness**

Dear Minister,

With the publication today again of another record figure of 15,378 people accessing emergency accommodation in February including a shocking 4,653 homeless children, an increase of 50 on January, I am writing to ask that you adopt a number of policy measures that will make a significant difference to addressing the homelessness crisis and the thousands of children in emergency accommodation.

The latest figures for February show 2,185 families without a home, of which nearly 60% are single parent families. You will be aware of the homelessness proposals published by the Labour Party in our manifesto which I append here. The Irish Homeless Policy group has also made several proposals. Four key policy measures I am asking you to pursue are to:

1. Pass Labour's Housing Homeless Families Bill 2017.
2. Increase investment in homelessness prevention.
3. Ensure the tenant in situ scheme protects single people at risk of homelessness.
4. Review the allocation criteria for social housing.

Further measures are needed to strengthen the rights of tenants and increase housing supply which is at the heart of the current crisis but I would ask you to consider the following homelessness measures when preparing a replacement for Housing for All.

### **1. Housing Homeless Families Bill 2017**

My colleague Jan O'Sullivan proposed the Housing (Homeless Families) Bill in 2017 and it passed second stage unopposed by the government. There was some consideration that it would be included in the recent Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill in 2024 but this did not happen. It passed [legislative scrutiny](#) in October 2019.

The Bill would ensure local authorities place the best interests of the child at the centre of decision making when supporting homeless families. It built on the work of the Children's Rights referendum and would address the lack of statutory recognition of the needs of a homeless family as a family unit. I intend to restore this Labour Bill to the Order paper, and I would appreciate your support in securing its passage or else folding into any planned government legislation. It would be an opportunity to show how government and opposition can work together to solve the issues facing our society. Thousands of homeless children need to be recognised in our laws.

## **2. Increase investment in homelessness prevention.**

The programme for government does not specifically commit to investing in homelessness prevention but it does reaffirm commitment to the Lisbon Declaration. The Focus on Homelessness report published this week highlights the hundreds of millions now spent on emergency accommodation, mostly to for-profit providers, with little going towards prevention and long-term solutions. Homelessness figures have risen consistently over the last decade, and we now need a fundamental change in how we address it. More investment into Housing First, and targeted changes to tenancy laws, and the social housing allocation model can make a real difference, particularly to families.

## **3. Ensure Tenant in Situ scheme protects single people.**

With record rents, low availability of homes, and insecure tenancies, single people are particularly at risk of homelessness, making up 66% of adult homelessness. I am concerned that the changes to the tenant in situ scheme will impact on single people. In your response to me in the Dáil at Housing Questions on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> of March, you asserted that I was putting "misinformation out there" when I stated that single people are excluded from the tenant in situ scheme on foot of the circular issued by your department to local authorities on the 2025 Second Hand Acquisitions Programme.

Can you please confirm on foot of the circular which states that: "Local authorities/AHBs prioritise acquisitions for families with children, older persons or people with a disability who are at serious risk of homelessness" if the scheme precludes local authorities for utilising the tenant in situ scheme in respect of single people who do not fit into the above stated criteria. Increasing the overall level of funding for the Tenant in situ scheme would ensure more single people are prevented from entering homelessness. The type of social housing being delivered also needs to be assessed to ensure enough single unit homes for one person households are funded and delivered.

## **4. Review the allocation criteria for social housing.**

It is welcome that the volume of social housing delivery is reaching levels last seen under Labour in the 1970's. Over time this will make a significant impact, but we also need to see increased private sector delivery of houses and apartments for sale. There have been proposals that 10% of new social housing be reserved for those in long term homelessness. Our proposals to recognise the best interests of the child would also have an impact on allocations. An evidence-based review of the social housing allocation model and how it can best support a reduction in the appalling level of homelessness, especially for families is long overdue.

In conclusion Minister, there is no shortage of ideas or proposals to resolve the housing crisis and reduce homelessness, but the model that has been pursued over the last eight years has not delivered results as the numbers continue to rise inexorably. I am asking that you consider a new approach, and as a first step, support the passage of the Housing (Homeless Families) Bill 2017.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sheehan', with a stylized, cursive script.

Conor Sheehan TD,  
Labour Party spokesperson on Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

## HOMELESSNESS [From Labour Party manifesto 2024]

Homelessness has reached record highs under this government with child homelessness soaring by over 76% since Housing for All was published. Official figures also don't capture hidden homelessness. Rough sleeping has significantly increased. Our plan to increase the provision of social and affordable housing and introduce stronger renter's rights will address the underlying causes, and Labour will adopt a new approach that seeks to exit more people out of homelessness, prevent further increases and support those in homelessness. We will:

- Publish a new Homelessness Reduction and Prevention Plan to meet the objectives of the Lisbon Declaration by 2030.
- Introduce dedicated funding for homeless prevention measures including a ban on no fault evictions and collect accurate data on the real level of hidden homelessness.
- Expand Housing First and wraparound supports for those exiting homelessness and explore new pilot projects for those hardest to reach.
- Expand the Tenant in Situ scheme by 300 homes to 1,800, and retain the cost rental scheme, provide more autonomy to local authorities to act on vacant social housing and homelessness prevention and increase their resources.

Labour will put more support in place for families and children, particularly lone parent families which comprise nearly 60% of families in homelessness. Labour will pass our *Housing (Homeless Families) Bill* to require local authorities to recognise and prioritise the needs of the child when assessing families for housing supports, and:

- Ensure that every child experiencing homelessness is assigned a Child Support Worker, dedicated school transport and mental health supports.
- Establish a statutory limit on the time a family or individual can spend in emergency accommodation and introduce regulations on the appropriate type of accommodation and introduce quality inspections.
- Greatly increase the provision of care leaver accommodation and the number of one bed homes to support single people at risk of homelessness.

Labour will audit existing spending in the sector, review existing structures, and ensure the pay of staff in Section 10 organisations is linked to public pay agreements to improve retention.