



Renters' Rights Bill
House of Commons
Written evidence for Public Bill Committee

Strengthening the Bill to protect the rights of bereaved renters

Marie Curie is the UK's leading end of life charity. We're here for anyone with an illness they're likely to die from, and those close to them. We bring 75 years of experience and leading research to the care we give at home, in our hospices and over the phone.

We are dedicated to improving the experiences of people affected by death, dying and bereavement. The charity was one of the founding partners of the [UK Commission on Bereavement \(UKCB\)](#), established to make recommendations to better support bereaved people.

In October 2022, the Commission published a major report: [Bereavement is everyone's business](#). As part of its evidence gathering process, the Commission heard from many bereaved renters who had experienced difficulties following the death of someone they lived with. The survey found that 43% of respondents reported financial difficulties following a bereavement, and this increased to 50% for those who experienced the death of spouses/partners.

Our research report into [housing insecurity through bereavement](#) published in April found that an estimated 11% of bereaved renters are forced to move home as a direct consequence of their bereavement, equating to 335,000 people across the UK each year. Being evicted within weeks of being bereaved causes huge distress and upheaval during what is already one of the most difficult times in an individual's life.

Following this year's General Election in July, which brought an end to the progress of the previous governments' Renters (Reform) Bill, Marie Curie believes that this Bill will provide the opportunity that we have been waiting for. The new Labour government must address the challenges faced by bereaved renters, by securing the rights of renters when someone they live with dies.

This new legislation must be strengthened to ensure bereaved people are sufficiently protected following the death of a named tenant.

Key asks of the government

We were grateful to have received support from Labour's Shadow Housing team throughout the development of the previous government's Renters (Reform) Bill, with amendments tabled by then Shadow Housing Minister Matthew Pennycook MP at Committee and Report Stage.

Whilst we were glad to see that the new Bill no longer plans to extend the 12-month period within which a social landlord can initiate proceedings under Ground 7, we were

disappointed to see that our previously tabled amendment to remove Ground 7 (death of a tenant) as a ground for possession in the private sector, as put forward by the now Minister of Housing himself, has not been included in the Renters' Rights Bill.

We are therefore calling on the government to do more to protect bereaved renters, and are asking for members of the Committee to seek the following clarifications from the Minister:

- Does the Government agree that if there are no other grounds for evictions, private renters shouldn't face the threat of eviction purely due to the death of the named tenant?
- What protections will the Government provide to bereaved private renters to ensure that bereaved people don't face eviction solely on the grounds of bereavement?

Marie Curie is specifically calling for:

A change to the Bill to **ensure that private renters are not put at risk of eviction purely because of the death of someone they live with.** The existing mandatory grounds for possession should be revised to **remove Ground 7 (death of a tenant) for the private sector.** If there are no other grounds for eviction, private renters should not have the threat of eviction hanging over them purely because a tenant has died.

Why changes to the Bill are needed:

The death of someone you live with, whether they be a family member, a partner or a friend, is a uniquely distressing event.

We recognise that when a tenant of social rented housing dies, given that social housing stock is limited there may be grounds for a council or housing association to regain possession of an under-occupied property. However, there are truly no grounds for this application to the private rented sector, and private renters who lived with the terminally ill, cared for them and are experiencing bereavement should not be at risk of eviction.

How the Renters Rights Bill can better support bereaved renters

Remove Ground 7 (death of tenant) so that bereavement is no longer a ground for possession in the private sector: The Bill should recognise the uniquely distressing circumstances that bereaved renters face, and ensure that private renters are not at risk of eviction purely because the person they live with has died. In the aftermath of a bereavement, renters often experience not only a significant and immediate loss of income, but additional costs, preparing funerals and memorials for their loved ones. The threat of eviction and the stress of finding a new home, on top of processing their grief, is a cruel burden to place on the bereaved.

If there are no other grounds for eviction, private renters should not have the threat of eviction hanging over them purely because a tenant has died. **Marie Curie is calling for an amendment to the Bill to remove Ground 7 (death of tenant) from the 1988 Act (grounds for possession of dwelling-houses let on assured tenancies) altogether.**

During Committee stage of the previous governments' Renters' (Reform) Bill, the then Minister argued in favour of Ground 7 in the private rented sector, *saying*, 'it is right that private tenants cannot name anyone they want to succeed their tenancy, as that would leave the landlord with no control over who lives in their property.'

However, **the removal of Ground 7 would not allow private tenants to name anyone they want to succeed**. Only a spouse or civil partner has a statutory right to succeed to a tenancy on death of the tenant (s.17, Housing Act 1988). The removal of Ground 7 in the private sector would therefore simply strengthen the rights of someone *already* living in the property. If there are no other grounds for the eviction of someone living in a private property, they should not face the threat of eviction purely because they have been bereaved.

Previous arguments in favour of retaining Ground 7 in the previous Bill noted that Ground 7 is relatively 'rarely used', so few bereaved renters are evicted on this basis. However, Marie Curie's own research and the work of the UK Commission on Bereavement has shown that this is not the case. We estimate that **an alarming 144,000 people per year are forced to leave their property following the death of someone they live with**, purely because of their bereavement.

Additionally, even if the landlord chooses not to use Ground 7 to initiate possession proceedings following the death of one of the people who lived in the property, **it is wrong that a bereaved renter should live with the risk of being evicted purely on this ground**.

What's at stake: Alexis lost her rented accommodation after caring for her mum, Fay, for 9 years.

"She wasn't even gone a week when they told me I had to leave. I hadn't even made the arrangements for her funeral yet. It was 26th of May she died, they told me the following week that I had until the end of July to leave, so two months. My mum was 96 years old with a loft full of photographs and possessions from nearly a century on this earth, and I had to get rid of it all, because I had nowhere to go."

"My mum lived in her house for 24 years, and she said to her landlord before she died, "make sure my daughter is all right, she's sacrificed everything for me."

"Oh yes, she'll be all right, she's of an age now and she can have a home here," he said. Well, Mum died on a Friday and the following Thursday they came in and told me to get out."

Marie Curie would be delighted to give oral evidence on how the bill could be strengthened to better protect bereaved renters. For further information please contact parliament@mariecurie.org.uk