

16th of March, 2020

FAO: Minister Damien English

Reference: Emergency Safeguards for Travellers during COVID-19 health crisis

Dear Minister,

The government has issued measures to limit the spread of the coronavirus and protect people who are most vulnerable. On March 12th, the Taoiseach confirmed that schools, colleges, childcare and other public facilities were to close and restrictions put in place on public gatherings.

We are deeply concerned that no special measures have been put in place for Travellers living in overcrowded conditions and/or without adequate onsite sanitation facilities. No circular has been issued to give guidance that would assist Travellers and those most vulnerable within the community who are at greater risk.

We would ask urgently that emergency protocol be put in place, in conjunction with National Traveller representatives, for Traveller-specific accommodation by all local authorities. The opportunities for practicing social distancing are significantly reduced for many Travellers given their living conditions, and safeguarding must be considered as a matter of utmost urgency.

We also call for a moratorium on evictions of Travellers, with immediate effect, particularly Section 10 evictions, for the duration of the crisis. It has been brought to our attention that families were served with such notices last week, and the notices enforced - after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. This cannot continue.

Evictions lead to Travellers living in even more unsafe conditions, with less access to basic sanitation, or it forces families into homes with other family members, in contravention to current HSE social distancing guidelines.

As we all work together to ensure the safety of all of Ireland, it is pertinent that no one is left behind or deprived of their ability to adequately protect themselves and their family.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,
Bernard Joyce