

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP, Secretary of State for Education  
Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Minister for the Cabinet Office  
(Co-Chairs of the Care Leaver Covenant Board)

Cc: Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP,  
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities  
and Local Government

14<sup>th</sup> July 2020

Dear Secretary of State and Minister,

**RE: Care Leaver Covenant Board and support for homeless care leavers**

We very much welcome your commitment and focus on care leavers through the establishment of the Care Leaver Covenant Board and are very keen to work with you to ensure care leavers get the support they need. As a group of children's and homelessness charities we are writing to ask you to prioritise homelessness in the Care Leaver Covenant Board as one of the key issues facing care experienced young people as they transition to independence.

As you will know, care leavers are at significantly higher risk of becoming homeless than other young people<sup>1</sup> and as such it is a key barrier for many care leavers seeking to start their adult lives on the right track. There are many factors which contribute to this: problems or delays with benefits, working in minimum wage or zero-hour jobs, and not having family members to rely on for somewhere to stay.

Without somewhere safe to live, it is very difficult for these young people to start or continue with education or employment or to maintain personal relationships. Many have told us they feel hopeless but for those who are able to secure accommodation, this can make all the difference in enabling them to turn their life around.

We are pleased that the Housing Secretary will be a member of the Board and would urge the Board to prioritise expanding support for homeless care leavers. The COVID-19 pandemic has made this issue all the more urgent. Although the Government has rightly taken steps to ensure rough sleepers were housed during the pandemic, our evidence shows that care leavers are often the 'hidden homeless' such as those sofa surfing, which means they won't have benefitted from this emergency support. We are concerned that there is the risk of a wave of care leavers becoming homeless in the next few months, including many who are extremely vulnerable.

To prevent this happening, in line with the extension of other corporate parenting duties for all care leavers up to 25 and given the additional risks created by COVID-19, it should now be an urgent priority for the Government to **extend homeless 'priority need' status to all care leavers up to 25** (not just those who can evidence vulnerability from 21 onwards). This

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<sup>1</sup> The Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy cites data from the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) which shows that 11% of people sleeping rough were in care as a child. A survey of 87 care leavers by Centrepoint in 2017 found that 26% have sofa surfed and 14% had slept rough since leaving care.

would mean that all homeless care leavers up to 25 would be eligible for emergency accommodation from their local authority and would not be at risk of sleeping rough.

For the many young people we work with, this would be a lifeline, which would enable them to take the first step towards getting their life back on track, finding a permanent home, continuing their education or getting a job and ultimately making a positive contribution to society in the long-term.

We very much look forward to working with you and your officials.

Yours sincerely,

**Enver Solomon, Chief Executive, Just for Kids Law**

**Louise King, Director, Children's Rights Alliance for England**

Imran Hussain, Director of Policy and Campaigns, Action for Children

Javed Khan, Chief Executive, Barnardo's

Katharine Sacks-Jones, Chief Executive, Become

David Graham, National Director, The Care Leavers' Association

Balbir Chatrik, Director of Policy & Communications, Centrepont

Azmina Siddique, Policy and Research Manager for Child Poverty and Inequality, The Children's Society

Mike Thiedke, Chief Executive, Depaul UK

Martha Wansbrough, Chief Executive, Drive Forward Foundation

Rick Henderson, Chief Executive, Homeless Link

Phil Kerry, CEO, New Horizon Youth Centre

Rita Waters, Chief Executive, NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service)

Valerie Clark, Director, Youth Legal



