



Rt Hon Robert Jenrick

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

By email: 25 March 2020

Re: COVID-19 – Gypsy, Traveller and Boater communities

Dear Secretary of State

We write as the All Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma about the coronavirus outbreak specifically in relation to those living in caravans. We echo the concerns laid out in the attached letter from civil society organisations. Because of the different living arrangements for those living in caravans, urgent and special consideration is required on how to ensure Gypsies and Travellers living in caravans can follow Government guidance on managing the spread of the virus and how those with different needs can be supported through this national health emergency.

Gypsies and Travellers have disproportionately high levels of poor health, including respiratory problems such as COPD, heart disease and diabetes, meaning many are in the high risk category. It is crucial that these marginalised communities are not forgotten in the drafting of guidance and legislation to protect our communities. Our primary concerns relate to those living in caravans, because of the reasons outlined below.

How to support those living on unauthorised encampments

Primarily, local authorities need to stop evicting unauthorised encampments as a matter of urgency. Moving vulnerable families around at this time of crisis must stop. There was clear instruction from the Prime Minister yesterday for people not to be moving around, and local authorities should be clearly instructed from the Department to apply these principles to unauthorised encampments. We know local authorities are not acting responsibly on this matter and have heard of a number of cases where families are being evicted from roadside camps. Of course families then simply turn up at another location, for what else is one to do in the absence of an authorised stopping place. Moving families around in this way increases the public health risk for all concerned.

It is also important to note that it is near impossible for families who live in caravans to follow the procedures on increased frequency handwashing and self-isolation. This is because people living on unauthorised encampments do not have access to water and sanitation, and live in more crowded conditions (with whole families in a caravans, meaning there is no separate space to self-isolate). There are measures that can be considered to overcome these issues and an organisation working with Gypsies and Travellers produced [guidance](#) outlining some of these issues. This guidance has been shared with some of your officers. However, what is urgently needed is for the Department to be issuing official guidance and instruction to local authorities on this issue, otherwise lives will be put at further risk with the spread of the virus.

How to support those living on local authority or privately owned Traveller sites

Your announcement on emergency legislation to protect renters facing eviction neither goes far enough, nor does it do anything to protect those renting a pitch on a Traveller site. Clearly Gypsy and Traveller families living on local authority or private site will face the same financial strain through job insecurity and loss, and should be afforded the same protection as those renting in bricks and mortar.

It's very encouraging to see the Government thinking about special considerations for homeless people and rough sleepers due to their increased vulnerabilities and the 'ticking time bomb' of night shelters. Plans to find temporary places to live such as in hotels and offices are helpfully being considered for those experiencing homelessness. Alternative measures and approaches are very much possible with unauthorised encampments, following the principles of 'negotiated stopping'.

We appreciate this is an incredibly busy time for you but we call on the Government to act on these pressing issues.

Yours sincerely

Kate Green MP

Baroness Whitaker

Lord Bourne

John McDonnell MP

Rosie Duffield MP

Andrew Slaughter MP

Baroness Brinton

Baroness Lister of Burtersett

Lord Bird

Lord Judd

Caroline Lucas MP

Baroness Bennet of Manor Castle

Catherine West MP

Gill Furniss MP

Lord Murphy of Torfaen

Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville

Baroness Young of Hornsey

Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies Travellers and Roma