



PAVEE POINT
TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE

Damien English TD
Custom House,
Dublin, D01 W6X0

Wednesday 25th March 2020

Dear Minister English,

We would like commend you and other government colleagues for demonstrating strong leadership and implementation of proactive swift measures to mitigate the impact of COVID 19 and protect our health during this unprecedented crisis.

The ongoing pandemic has highlighted a number of significant challenges for our work and to ensure that Travellers and Roma, especially those who are most vulnerable, are protected. It has also underscored the importance of a whole of government and interagency approach in responding to these challenges given that it is a public health issue.

We welcome your Department's issuing of a national circular to all Local Authorities to ensure that they are meeting their obligations to make Traveller homes safer during this crisis. However, we have received concerning feedback from a number of Travellers and Traveller organisations nationally in relation to the lack of implementation of directive measures as outlined in the circular. This includes Local Authorities loose interpretation of the circular and distinguishing between official and unofficial sites. Given that this is a public health issue, Travellers, regardless of whether they are living on official or unofficial sites (now, more than ever) must have access to basic facilities such as toilets and running water if we are serious about protecting them from COVID-19.

Additionally, Travellers and Traveller organisations remain concerned about the omnipresent threat of evictions. The has added to the anxiety and increased stress among Travellers, among whom you know the suicide rate is already 6 times the national average. In the absence of a national moratorium on Traveller evictions, it is imperative that there is a clear mandate from the Department that Traveller evictions will not take place, similar to the ban on evictions among rent payers and mortgage holders.

While we have seen goodwill from some Local Authorities, this is contingent on individual champions exercising discretion which is problematic. Given the clear public health issues involved, we are urging you to issue a mandatory circular to the County Chief Executives/Heads of Housing immediately setting out a clear directive on enforcement measures on these issues, including a ban on Traveller evictions.

Ronnie Fay and Martin Collins
Directors, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre