

## Call for Evidence Submission

Northern Ireland Communities Committee – Private Tenancies Bill

Online Survey - Private Tenancies Bill - Northern Ireland Assembly -

Citizen Space (nia-yourassembly.org.uk)

28 October 2021

### **33. On Clause 10: Please give us your views on this clause which introduces Schedule 3 and enables the Department to make regulations concerning electrical safety standards in private tenancies.**

Electrical Safety First fully supports the provisions relating to electrical safety in the Private Tenancies Bill. As the UK's leading charity on electrical safety, we have long campaigned for the introduction of periodic electrical safety checks in Northern Ireland's Private Rented Sector (PRS). As such, we welcome this important safety prevention measure that will be delivered through the Private Tenancies Bill.

This will bring electrical safety protections for private tenants in Northern Ireland in line with those in England and Scotland, which have required electrical safety checks in the PRS since 2020 and 2015, respectively. The Welsh Government has also committed to bringing forward analogous legislation in 2022.

However, Electrical Safety First is concerned that the Bill does not specify the frequency of electrical safety checks and would strongly encourage the Committee to support a simple and straightforward amendment to the Bill that ensures the electrical safety checks are undertaken on a five yearly basis.

Costing around £200 per check, which equates to as little as £40 per year, this would create safety parity for private tenants in Northern Ireland with their counterparts living in the PRS in England and Scotland. Tenants in Northern Ireland deserve the same protections. Safety should not be a postcode lottery.

It is also worth noting that specifying the regularity of electrical safety checks provides a range of wider benefits for the key actors involved in the delivery and enforcement of the measure. It would provide much needed clarity and certainty for both landlords and local authorities, who will be responsible for enforcement, and allow them to prepare and forward plan.

Moreover, electrical safety checks are already undertaken on a five yearly basis in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in Northern Ireland. Given the significant overlap between HMOs and the PRS, to provide certainty to landlords (and indeed, tenants), the PRS should be required to have electrical safety checks undertaken at the same frequency.

Consultations and reviews undertaken by the Department for Communities have shown that there is majority support for five yearly electrical checks which are recommended by the UK's Wiring Regulations – the UK national standard (BS7671) for electrical safety.

In conclusion, Electrical Safety First welcomes the electrical safety provisions but suggests that the Committee propose an amendment to require electrical safety checks be undertaken on a five yearly basis. Electrical Safety First has prepared an amendment to this effect which we would be happy to provide to the Committee on request.

**34. On Clause 10: Please give us any thoughts you may have on how compliance with the standards should be monitored and enforced.**

Electrical Safety First supports the proposals in Schedule 3 around compliance, particularly the requirement for landlords to provide a copy of the electrical safety check to tenants. We also support the provision to fine landlords for non-compliance. However, we would welcome some clarity on the level of fines to ensure they were proportionate.

We believe PRS landlords should also be required to provide the electrical safety check to the local authority (LA) which would support enforcement and compliance.

Electrical Safety First worked closely with the Scottish Government on the implementation of this measure in Scotland in 2015. In particular, we assisted with the development of the statutory guidance. On this basis, we would welcome the opportunity to work with the Department for Communities on their guidance for this duty to ensure the provisions are effective and have the desired outcomes for both tenants and landlords.

**35. On Clause 10: Please share any further comments on property standards/property fitness in the private rented sector.**

Electrical Safety First supports any provisions that ensure properties in the PRS are safe and fit for habitation.