

September 2026

Re: Committee for Communities Call for Evidence Housing Amendment Bill

Dear Committee for Communities,

The WRDA welcomes the Housing (Amendment) Bill and its proposal to extend the period in which someone is considered “threatened with homelessness” from 28 to 60 days. This will bring Northern Ireland in line with accepted practice in Scotland, England and Wales.

The WRDA has two recommendations:

1) Extension of the “threatened with homelessness” period is only the first step.

The WRDA endorses the views of organisations working in this field.¹ We welcome the extended period and recognise its potential to enable earlier intervention to prevent homelessness. However, WRDA cautions that this can only be seen as a necessary first step and not a solution to homelessness. Greater investment, more resources and better services are also needed to ensure that the extended period is used to improve prevention.

2) Embed a gender analysis.

Homelessness is not a gender neutral issue. Women are disproportionately impacted by homelessness and housing precarity. Women are the majority of homeless householders in Northern Ireland and their homelessness is connected to specific factors such as domestic abuse, poverty, caring responsibilities and

¹ Simon Community, Shelter NI, Homeless Connect and Housing Rights.

financial insecurity. The Simon Community's analysis of Housing Executive figures revealed that that 56% of homeless households are headed by women.² Between October 2024 and March 2025, 83% of households presenting as homeless because of domestic violence were headed by women.³

These figures matter because for many women, homelessness is closely connected to domestic abuse.⁴ Remaining at home may not be the safest option for women who are trying to leave an abusive partner, dealing with financial control, facing eviction or trying to find somewhere safe for herself and her children.

Using a gender analysis means that understanding “prevention” cannot simply mean helping someone to keep the home they are currently in. For a woman experiencing domestic abuse, the safest preventative intervention might be helping her leave that home and secure somewhere safe.

Some recommendations for embedding a gender analysis into homelessness prevention include:

- Training Housing Executive staff need to recognise domestic abuse, coercive control and financial abuse as important drivers of women's housing insecurity. Women should be able to seek help without having to wait until their situation becomes an emergency.
- Not requiring proof of abuse before receiving help. A woman might be frightened of involving the police, or getting evidence may put herself at risk.
- Homelessness prevention should never mean encouraging a woman to remain with an abusive partner because that is the easiest way to avoid homelessness.

WRDA has additional recommendations to address the impact of VAWG on women's homelessness as part of the Shift the Shame⁵ campaign. These include that the Department creates specific action plans for all

² Simon Community (2025) 'Homelessness in NI is a Women's Issue'. Available at: https://simoncommunity.org/what-we-do/knowledge-hub/news/homelessness-in-ni-is-a-womens-issue-new-service-opens-to-meet-urgent-need/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

³ Ibid, n2.

⁴ McMordie, Violence Against Women & Homelessness (2024) Available at: <https://researchportal.hw.ac.uk/en/publications/violence-against-women-and-homelessness/>

⁵ <https://www.wrda.net/stepstosafety>

women facing violence, including women living rurally, women with No Recourse to Public Funds, the LGBTQ+ community, women living with disabilities and other minority communities who can face significant barriers seeking help. In addition, we recommend ensuring access to appropriate housing options for women with complex needs, including those who use substances, by expanding the Housing First model to provide stable housing as a foundation for addressing other needs.

The WRDA supports the Housing (Amendment) Bill, however, we recognise that extending the period in which someone is considered to be “threatened with homelessness” is only the first step and recommend that the Committee embed a gendered analysis when considering how to improve prevention.

For any questions or queries relating to this submission, please contact:

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