

Submitted to Housing (Amendment) Bill - Call for Evidence
Submitted on 2026-09-03 15:48:27

Consent and introduction

What is your name?

Name:

[REDACTED]

What is your email address?

Email address box:

[REDACTED]

If you are providing a submission on behalf of an organisation, please state its name.

Organisation name box:

Niacro

Please confirm you have read the Northern Ireland Assembly's Committee privacy notice by clicking the button below.

I have read the privacy notice

Do you consent to your submission being published on the Committee's website and included in the Committee's report?

Yes, publish but with my personal information and any content that could be used to identify me redacted.

General views on the Bill

Do you support the overall purpose of the Housing (Amendment) Bill?

Yes

Please explain your answer, including any areas where you believe the Bill should be amended.:

Niacro supports the overall purpose of the Bill and, in particular, the proposed extension of the homelessness prevention period from 28 to 60 days. Our support is grounded in over 50 years of experience supporting people leaving prison and our direct experience of supporting people at risk of homelessness.

In the last year, Niacro supported over 700 people with accommodation-related issues, including people at immediate risk of homelessness who would be affected by this Bill. Our experience is that the earlier we can work with an individual, the greater the opportunity to explore the full range of accommodation and support options and achieve a sustainable outcome**.

We do not consider that the current 28-day period provides adequate time. In complex cases, 28 days may not be sufficient to gather the information and evidence required for a robust assessment, understand an individual's circumstances and make appropriate referrals. By the time a housing option is found, there may be only a few days remaining to put wider support in place. A person may have accommodation identified but little opportunity to become tenancy ready, prepare for a move or establish links with services in a new area.

This is particularly significant for people leaving custody. Around 15% of people released from prison in Northern Ireland have nowhere permanent to stay. Even where accommodation has been identified, we see tenancies break down following release as individuals and families struggle with reintegration and resettlement. People leaving prison who are homeless are twice as likely to reoffend, while 45.4% of those released from custody reoffend within one year. This demonstrates why accommodation alone is not necessarily a sufficient solution.

The value of extending the period to 60 days is therefore not simply having more time to find someone another property. It provides greater opportunity to understand the wider circumstances putting someone's housing at risk and bring the right services around them. This could include addressing affordability, rent arrears, benefits, debt, tenancy management, relationships with landlords and other support needs. In some cases, the best outcome will be that the person does not need to be rehoused at all.

We therefore support the Bill and believe the proposed amendment can **strengthen the approach to homelessness prevention by enabling earlier, coordinated support that looks beyond housing to achieve sustainable outcomes**.

Current 28-day period

Do you consider that the current 28-day period provides adequate protection for people who are threatened with homelessness?

No

Please explain your answer, including any practical examples or evidence.:

In many cases, our experience is that 28 days is also not sufficient to gather the information and evidence required to complete a robust homelessness assessment, particularly where a person's circumstances are complex. Understanding the circumstances that have led to the risk of homelessness, establishing the relevant facts and identifying the appropriate housing and support options can take time. This is particularly the case where information needs to be obtained from several agencies or where the individual requires support to engage with the assessment process.

There is also a practical issue with the timing of decisions and referrals. Under a 28-day period, by the time a homelessness decision has been made, there may be only a very short period remaining before the person's accommodation needs to be addressed. This can mean that referrals to other services, including specialist support services such as ours, are not made until the final days of the process. Although accommodation may then have been identified or secured, there may be little or no time for the person to receive the support they need to prepare for the move, sustain the accommodation or adjust to a new area.

This is particularly significant for people leaving custody. Someone may technically have accommodation available at the point of release, but this does not necessarily mean that they are adequately prepared to move into that accommodation or that the placement is sustainable. They may need time to engage with support services, understand where they are moving to, establish links with local services, address practical issues such as benefits or finances, and put appropriate support in place before release. Where referrals are made only in the final days because of the constraints of the 28-day process, there is a significant risk that these preventative and resettlement needs cannot be properly addressed.

Proposed 60-day period — Clause 1

Clause 1 would amend the definition of “threatened with homelessness” so that a person is included if they are likely to become homeless within 60 days rather than 28 days. Do you support this change?

Yes

What impact would this change have on homelessness prevention?

Text box for entering data:

We consider that extending the period from 28 to 60 days has the potential to lead to better and more effective homelessness prevention. This is not simply about giving the Housing Executive more time to assess an individual or determine their priority need. The real benefit is that an earlier identification of the risk of homelessness creates a longer window in which a person's circumstances can be understood and a wider range of housing and support options can be explored.

In our experience, the earlier someone is identified as being at risk, the greater the opportunity to achieve a different and more positive outcome. There may be issues around affordability, rent arrears, income, benefits, family circumstances or other support needs which are contributing to the risk of immediate homelessness. Having additional time allows these issues to be considered alongside the immediate housing need.

It also provides greater opportunity to make appropriate referrals to housing and other support services. These services may not provide accommodation themselves, but their involvement can address underlying issues and help create a more sustainable outcome. This could include exploring alternative housing options, accessing specialist homelessness services, addressing financial or benefits issues, or putting support in place to help someone sustain accommodation.

This is particularly important in complex cases, where 28 days can be quickly taken up by assessment, gathering information and reaching a decision. By the time a decision is made, there may be only a few days remaining to make referrals and put the necessary support in place. A person may have accommodation identified, but there may be insufficient time to properly prepare them for the move or ensure that appropriate support is available, particularly where they are moving to a new area.

This is especially relevant for people leaving custody, where securing accommodation is only one part of preventing homelessness. Earlier intervention provides more time for housing and other services to work together, establish links in the area the person is potentially moving to, and ensure that the individual has the support needed before release including being 'tenancy ready'.

The proposed 60-day period would therefore provide a greater opportunity for earlier, coordinated and preventative intervention, rather than services having to respond when a person is already at crisis point.

Practical impact on people at risk of homelessness

Would extending the period to 60 days make it more likely that homelessness can be prevented before a person or household reaches crisis point?

Yes

Please explain your answer.:

We believe that extending the period to 60 days would make effective homelessness prevention more achievable, because it would provide a greater opportunity to understand what is putting a person's housing at risk and to address those issues before the situation reaches crisis point.

The benefit is not simply having an additional 32 days to find someone alternative accommodation. It is about having more time to look at the wider

circumstances and support needs of the individual, and to consider whether homelessness can be prevented without the person having to leave their existing home.

In our experience, organisations such as ourselves are already undertaking homelessness prevention work through initiatives such as the Homelessness Awareness Toolkit and training provided through the Homelessness Prevention Forum. However, often the first time the Housing Executive becomes aware that someone is in crisis is when they present as homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness. At that point, the focus can understandably become finding somewhere else for the person to live, rather than asking what could be done to prevent them from losing their existing accommodation.

Earlier intervention could create more opportunity to work with the individual, their landlord and relevant support services to address the issues contributing to the risk. This could include affordability, rent arrears, managing the tenancy, understanding and complying with tenancy requirements, benefits or debt issues, and accessing appropriate support. In some cases, addressing these issues may mean that the person does not need to be rehoused at all.

For example, there may be an opportunity to speak with a landlord about affordability or tenancy concerns and identify practical solutions before the situation progresses to eviction. Similarly, specialist support services may be able to address issues affecting a person's ability to sustain their tenancy. These interventions can be much more effective when there is sufficient time to build engagement and put the right support in place.

We therefore see the 60-day period as providing an opportunity to broaden the focus of homelessness prevention beyond finding another property. Where the right intervention is available at the right time, the outcome may be that the individual remains safely and sustainably housed, avoiding the disruption, debt and financial and emotional costs associated with losing their accommodation and having to move.

Temporary accommodation and housing supply

Could the Bill increase demand for temporary accommodation, including non-standard accommodation such as hotels or B&Bs?

Yes

If so, how should this risk be addressed?:

There is a potential for the change to increase the number of people identified as being at risk of homelessness at an earlier stage. However, we do not consider that this would necessarily translate into a corresponding increase in demand for temporary accommodation. In fact, better homelessness prevention could reduce the need for temporary accommodation, where earlier intervention results in a person remaining in their existing accommodation or finding a sustainable alternative before homelessness occurs.

It is important to recognise that many of the people who would be identified at 60 days are likely to be the same people who would otherwise present at 28 days. The difference is that, under a 60-day period, there is greater opportunity to intervene earlier and potentially achieve a different outcome. Under the current 28-day approach, some of that opportunity is lost, meaning people may reach the point where statutory support and temporary accommodation are required with fewer options available to prevent homelessness.

There is also an important relationship with the existing 56-day eviction notice period. Someone served with an eviction notice may already have 56 days in which to explore their housing options and access support. This provides an opportunity for appropriate services, including Supporting People Housing Support services, Housing Rights and other homelessness prevention providers, to intervene before temporary accommodation becomes necessary.

In March 2025, the Minister for Communities announced an initiative for the NIHE to purchase up to 600 homes over three years for use as temporary accommodation, with the aim of reducing reliance on costly hotel and B&B accommodation. This additional supply should help mitigate any potential increase in demand and reduce reliance on more expensive forms of temporary accommodation.

Overall, we believe the focus should be on the net impact of earlier intervention, rather than assuming that identifying people earlier will automatically create additional demand for temporary accommodation. If the additional 32 days are used effectively to provide the right housing and wider support interventions, some people may avoid homelessness altogether. This would not only reduce the need for temporary accommodation but could also avoid the financial, social and personal costs associated with repeated homelessness and the disruption of moving into temporary accommodation.

Commencement — Clause 2

Clause 2 provides that the Act would come into operation 6 months after Royal Assent. Is this an appropriate period to allow for preparation and implementation?

Yes

Please explain your answer.:

Suggested amendments

Please identify any specific amendments you would suggest, including the relevant clause where possible.

A textbox for adding comments: