

Murad Qureshi AM
Londonwide Member of the London Assembly

City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA

Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP
Secretary of State
Department of Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London, SW1H 9NA

2nd June 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

RE: Protect renters by raising LHA and removing the benefit cap on Universal Credit

I write to urge you to take immediate measures to support private renters during the current coronavirus pandemic.

I applaud the Government for the action it has taken in ensuring that eviction proceedings could not go ahead for an initial three months during this crisis. However, that suspension is set to end from the end of June, and there are millions of private renters who may be struggling to pay their rent, have begun to fall into arrears and will be very worried about the prospect of losing their home.

This is a particular issue for Londoners. The capital has a higher proportion of private renters than elsewhere in the country, and the average rent is far more expensive. Analysis from City Hall shows that the median rent of a one-bedroom home in London is more expensive than a three-bedroom home in every other region in England.¹

One simple way to help struggling private renters would be to restore the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) to the median (50th percentile) level, so it covers average rents in a local area. The LHA was previously set at the 50th percentile from its introduction in 2008 to 2011.

As record numbers of people are applying for Universal Credit as a result of coronavirus, I hope that you will do all that you can to ensure the benefits they receive covers their cost of living. Without increasing Local Housing Allowance rates, many households will find a huge shortfall between their income and their costs, due to the gap between LHA and average rents. Recent research from Shelter found that this could be more a gap of more than £1,200 for some households in London.²

I urge you also to remove the benefit cap on Universal Credit, to ensure that all households are able to benefit from the increase in support made available. The number of households in London hitting the benefit cap has doubled since the coronavirus outbreak began, so I urge your Department to remove this cap to ensure every Londoner in receipt of Universal Credit can receive the maximum support possible to help them through this crisis.³

¹ https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/reforming_private_renting_-_the_mayor_of_londons_blueprint.pdf

² https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_releases/articles/struggling_private_rentersface55_million_a_month_gap_in_rentwith_out_moregovernment_help

³ <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-calls-for-urgent-lifting-of-benefit-cap>

At the Budget in March, the Chancellor said that the Government would do whatever it takes to support the country through this unprecedented situation. These two simple measures would be incredibly important when it comes to supporting private renters, and I hope that you can implement them as soon as possible.

Kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Murad Qureshi', with a long horizontal stroke extending from the bottom right.

Murad Qureshi AM

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