

## The next mayor must help our poor

AS charities and church groups in London, we call on the mayoral candidates to reaffirm their support for the poorest and most vulnerable.

London is one of the parts of the country hardest hit by changes to the social security system. While the next Mayor will not have the power to stop these changes, he or she will have the power and responsibility to tackle their effects. Developing a housing strategy to prevent families losing their homes as a result of benefit changes should be a priority, and support must be put in place for those forced to move away from their communities.

Although there are clear financial pressures on London's transport system, it is imperative that here, too, the most vulnerable are not overlooked. Disability access should be at the forefront of the transport strategy; it is not simply an indulgence for good economic times. The next Mayor should also seek innovative ways to support affordable access to transport for unemployed Londoners and those returning to work.

**Helen O'Brien, Caritas Social Action Network; Mick Clarke, The Passage; John Coleby, St Joseph's Pastoral Centre; Cathy Corcoran, Cardinal Hume Centre; Alison Gender, Housing Justice; Keith Fennell, Anchor House; Dr Rosemary Keenan, Catholic Children's Society (Westminster); Christine Newman, National Board of Catholic Women; Mike Worthington, St Vincent de Paul Society; Vincent Manning, Catholics for Aids Prevention and Support, and five others**

**TONIGHT** the House of Lords has one last chance to debate criminalisation of squatting in residential buildings. There are now 350,000 long-term empty homes in the UK, and homelessness is growing massively. Research by the charity Crisis shows that 39 per cent of homeless people have used squatting as a last resort.

The Law Society and the Met have stated in consultation that the current law is sufficient to protect homeowners, even if more guidance is needed. Furthermore, a recent report shows the new law could cost as much as £790 million over five years, which would wipe out the entire savings intended by the Legal Aid Bill cuts.

Tomorrow, we could see upwards of 20,000 people made homeless or criminalised at a stroke, without proper consideration. This is no time to make the housing crisis worse.

**Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer, Ronan Bennett, Stuart Hodgkinson, Sarah Blandy, David Watkinson**

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