The Home Secretary

Home Office

2 Marsham Street

London

SW1P 4DF

DATE 2019

Dear Home Secretary,

We are writing to you because, as an organisation working to end homelessness, we are concerned that the Vagrancy Act of 1824 is still being used to criminalise people for rough sleeping and begging. We understand that the Government is currently reviewing the Vagrancy Act.

We are one of over 45 organisations supporting the Scrap the Act campaign, alongside organisations including Crisis, Centrepoint, Cymorth Cymru, Homeless Link, Liberty, Shelter Cymru and the Wallich. All of these organisations are calling for the Vagrancy Act to be repealed.

We work every day with people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness, and we know the measures which will have the greatest positive impact on people experiencing homelessness. Criminalisation is not one of these measures. Rather, use of the Vagrancy Act often pushes people further from the support services that they need. When the first response to people experiencing homelessness or destitution is criminalisation, opportunities for outreach services to intervene can be lost.

We understand that the police do of course need to be able to tackle genuinely criminal behaviour, but the Vagrancy Act 1824 does not contain any powers that the police don’t already have through more modern legislation.

Repealing the Vagrancy Act will not end homelessness on its own. For this to happen we need a co-ordinated approach to housing and support for all homeless people, matched with policies to prevent it in the first place. But within this, it is fundamentally important that homeless people are treated with dignity and not criminalised for being poor and destitute. This only pushes people further from the help they need. Repealing the Vagrancy Act would send a clear message that in our society, we believe in treating everybody with dignity and respect.

We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this further, and would also welcome you to visit the services which we provide to people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

Yours sincerely, 

[Chief Executive/Director’s name]