

**Press Release:**

***Greenwich Housing Rights fears legal aid changes will increase repossessions***

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**On Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> May at 9.30am, Greenwich Housing Rights and local housing lawyers will demonstrate at Woolwich County Court against Government changes to legal aid as part of a national Week of Action by the Access to Justice Alliance.**

The changes mean that from this October, the Government will pay a standard fee to legal advisers for each case taken on, regardless of how long a case takes to deal with. Greenwich Housing Rights fears that that these changes will lead to lawyers pulling out of legal aid.

Matt Ventrella from Greenwich Housing Rights said “Our fear is that there will be no reason for lawyers to take on difficult cases if they won’t be paid for them. Housing Rights believes that more people will risk losing their homes if they cannot get legal help.

“Day in and day out, we’re helping ordinary people at the sharp end of the law. We know that a lot of those people could have lost their homes without our help. We can help get tenants a little more time to save their homes by helping them at Court, but if they’re not able to get legal advice after Court, they will run out of chances. We take on a lot of legal housing emergencies, both at Court and in our office, but there’s no way that we could help everyone if more solicitors drop out of legal aid.

‘Parliament’s own expert panel, the Constitutional Affairs Committee, says that the Government has got it wrong. The Committee said that if the reforms go ahead, there is a ‘serious risk to access to justice among the most vulnerable in society’.

‘If you’re concerned about this, speak to your MP and find out what they’re going to do about this.’

ENDS

Notes to editors

❖ Greenwich Housing Rights is a charity providing free legal advice on housing problems. It runs a duty advice service for tenants facing possession hearings at Woolwich County Court. Every year, duty advisers represent tenants at over 400 Court hearings, in most cases helping tenants to stay in their homes. The service is supported by the Court and funded by the Legal Services Commission as a key service to prevent homelessness in the Borough.

❖ We are organising a small demonstration at Woolwich County Court, 165 Powis Street, Woolwich SE18 on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> May, from 9.30am to 10.00am.

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