Domestic violence survivors' safety at risk from rise in court fees

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Rises in court fees that came into force last week (1 May) could put vulnerable people at risk of violence, according to Money Wellness, an organisation commissioned to provide free debt help.

Anyone who is granted an insolvency solution because they couldn't afford to repay their debts has their details, including their address, listed in the public insolvency register. Domestic abuse survivors and others at risk of violence can ask for their address to be withheld from the register, but this comes at a cost.

To have your details removed, a person must apply to the court for a person at risk of violence (PARV) order. Until 1 May, this cost was £280. It has now risen to £308.

Sebrina McCullough, director of external relations, at Money Wellness, said: "More often than not, individuals fleeing domestic violence leave with nothing – usually just the clothes on their backs.

"Many of them are in a dire financial situation and need support. Scrapping the £90 debt relief order fee last month went a long way in helping survivors access a solution that sorts out their money worries.

"But while debt help is now affordable and accessible because the admin fee has gone, the increase in the cost of PARV has resulted in a dangerous situation, where survivors are having to delay applications for insolvency whilst they save up the fee to protect their anonymity or risk their aggressor finding them."

McCullough adds: "We shouldn't be forcing domestic violence survivors to jump through hoops. Expecting vulnerable individuals who are already experiencing extreme financial problems to find over £300 seems at best unrealistic and at worst cruel. So, we're calling on the government to drop the PARV fee as well."

In some cases, the fee may be waived if applicants meet certain income-related criteria.

Money Wellness has helped two individuals where PARV was a concern.

Customer A, who had fled a violent relationship, was advised by Money Wellness to apply for PARV before completing an application for a debt relief order. One week later Customer A called back to advise they wanted to continue with the application for a DRO as sorting out their finances was a priority and needed to be done immediately. They risked their details being found by their aggressor as there was no reasonable way for them to raise the money to cover the cost.

Customer B was removed from their former property and rehoused due to concerns they would be murdered. Their application for a DRO has not yet been submitted and has been put on hold so they can apply for PARV. Their financial situation will not improve until they have raised £308 for the PARV fee.

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