



Lucy Allan MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA  
By email: [lucy.allan.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:lucy.allan.mp@parliament.uk)

29<sup>th</sup> March 2023

Dear Lucy,

### INTRODUCTION OF THE VICTIMS AND PRISONERS BILL

I am pleased to confirm that today the Government has introduced our landmark Victims and Prisoners Bill to Parliament. The Bill delivers on three key manifesto commitments; to pass and implement a Victims Law, to reform the parole system, and to establish an Independent Public Advocate to support victims of a major incident. Additionally, we will be introducing changes to strengthen the operation of the Parole Board to ensure public confidence in the system. The Bill will also prohibit prisoners who are serving a whole life order from entering into a marriage or civil partnership.

The aim of the Victims and Prisoners Bill is to build public confidence in the criminal justice system in its role to protect victims of crime from further harm, and to prevent the creation of new victims. I know you will take a keen interest in the Bill throughout its parliamentary passage.

This Government remains committed to strengthening victims' experiences and ensuring public confidence in the criminal justice system.

#### **Key victims measures to improve victim support:**

- To ensure the criminal justice system consistently delivers the entitlements in the Victims' Code, we will **enshrine principles of the Victims' Code in law** and **place a duty on criminal justice bodies with PCCs to review their compliance** and raise awareness of the Code.
- To provide greater oversight and transparency over how victims are treated, we will require criminal justice inspectorates to **undertake joint inspections on victims' issues** when directed to do so.
- To make it easier to complain if things go wrong, if you are a victim of crime, we will make complaints against a public body simpler and more accessible **by removing the need to go through an MP when making a complaint to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.**
- The Victims' Commissioner is a powerful voice for victims. To make the role as effective as possible, we will require relevant organisations to **respond to their recommendations and require the inspectorates to consult the Victims' Commissioner on their inspection programmes.**

- To improve join up and target support to where victims need it, we will **introduce a joint statutory duty on PCCs, health and local authorities to work together when commissioning support services.**
- To support victims of sexual and domestic abuse we will **introduce guidance on Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) and Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) to increase awareness and consistency of these roles.**

To complement the victims measures in the Bill, we have committed to bring forward a refreshed Victims' Code and wider measures including those that the Government committed to take forward at consultation:

- **We have increased the Victim Surcharge by 20%**, so that offenders pay more towards vital victim support services. This increase will generate additional income of up to £20 million per year by 2024/25.
- To ensure victims are better informed and heard throughout the criminal justice process, **the Victims' Code will provide for the CPS to meet victims, in certain cases, before a hearing takes place.** We are also working with the judiciary to **introduce a Code entitlement for victims of the most serious crimes to be able to submit a victim personal statement to the Mental Health Tribunal**, where the release of the offender is being considered.

#### **Common sense reforms to the Parole Board:**

We will shortly be bringing forward our plans to set out in the Root and Branch Review of the Parole System, ensuring common sense and public protection are at the heart of its decision-making. The reforms will:

- **Enshrine in law that the only priority for the Parole Board will be whether a prisoner is safe to release.** It had drifted into becoming a balancing act between public protection and the rights of offenders. Public protection will be the only consideration.
- **Create a new veto power for the Secretary of State** to refuse to release the most dangerous prisoners if necessary for public protection. The Bill will create a new "top-tier" cohort of offenders, including murderers, rapists, terrorists and child killers, who will be subject to the ministerial power to review their case. The measures create a new route of appeal to the Upper Tribunal if a prisoner wants to challenge a Secretary of State decision to veto release.
- **Require the Parole Board to include members with a background in law enforcement** and ensure they sit on hearings for the most dangerous offenders to help panels make better decisions in assessing risk. Currently, less than 5% of the Parole Board's membership falls into this category.
- **Reform the role of the Chair of the Parole Board** to ensure it is a strategic leadership role that has no influence over the decisions made in individual cases by parole panels.
- **Create a power for the Secretary of State to remove the Chair** if this is necessary for the maintenance of public confidence in the Board.


#### **Further Measures:**

The Bill has been expanded since publication in draft and will also:

- **Create an Independent Public Advocate** fulfilling a longstanding Government commitment. The IPA will apply to victims of major incidents and will assist bereaved families and the injured in the immediate aftermath of a large-scale disaster (such as Hillsborough) and assist with engaging in any subsequent inquest or inquiry processes. I will work closely with parliamentarians across the House, the Hillsborough families, the Grenfell groups and the families of the victims of the Manchester Arena bombing to ensure that their experiences are taken into account and we get the detail of the IPA right.
- **Prohibit a prisoner serving a whole life order from entering into a marriage or civil partnership.** The Bill will bring forward measures to protect victims from further trauma and restrict prisoners who have been subject to the most severe sentence for the most heinous crimes from being able to marry whilst in prison. Having seen how the case of Levi Bellfield seeking to marry has caused real distress and trauma to his victims, I consider this a matter of public confidence in the Criminal Justice System and am determined that this should not happen in future.

Taken together, I believe this is a powerful package of measures to support victims, enhance their rights and ensure their voices are heard, as well as ensuring that the most dangerous criminals are kept behind bars for longer. I look forward to working with you as the Bill progresses through Parliament.

*As always, v. happy to discuss with you further in the coming weeks if you wish.*



**RT HON EDWARD ARGAR MP**