

Dame Vera Baird QC
Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales

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2 September 2019

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London

Dear Prime Minister

DOMESTIC ABUSE BILL

One of the consequences of proroguing Parliament next week is that the Domestic Abuse Bill, which has already had its First Reading, will fall. Clearly this is an incidental effect and not your purpose, and whilst I appreciate that many things may happen in the meantime, I am writing to ask you to commit to reintroducing the Domestic Abuse Bill within the first few weeks of the next Parliamentary session.

The Domestic Abuse Bill was brought forward by former Prime Minister, Theresa May, in June and launched to acclaim by her at a No 10 event involving the main organisations in the VAWG sector. Whilst she and the sector are agreed that there are amendments and additions which she intended to be made and officials have been working on with cross Party Parliamentarians and the sector, the Bill is the result of years of work with MPs, charities, survivors, and those working with abuse victims in frontline services. It is likely, with sufficient funding and with supportive public awareness work to change the agenda significantly.

The Domestic Abuse Bill has the potential to be a landmark piece of legislation, which transforms society's response to a crime that has scarred too many families for far too long. It can raise public awareness, help effectively to tackle and change perpetrators and to enable provision of better protection and support to victims and recognising the damage to children. I emphasise that additions to it are essential for this level of achievement but that is well understood.

About two million people suffer domestic abuse in England and Wales every year and there cannot be many families who do not have the acquaintance of someone who has experienced this abysmal crime. The VAWG sector and the related organisations specifically supporting male victims is diverse and is supported by many MPs and peers too. Domestic abuse is not a niche interest; it is endemic insidious criminality in our society and this Bill and its potential impact is supported by many.

It would be a tragedy for this work to be wasted, and for victims and children to wait even longer for the potential change offered by the Bill. This is a once in a generation opportunity to legislate.

To mention just one provision, the Bill will restrict abusers from cross-examining their victims in the family courts. This is a particularly pressing need for victims and children. This abysmal practice was originally to be abolished by the Prisons and Courts Bill, which fell when Parliament was dissolved ahead of the June 2017 general election. It would seem particularly unjust if yet more victims were to be subject to this ordeal because of another delay.

I urge you to make the completion and passage of this Bill a priority for your government and urgently to give a public commitment it will be included in your Queen's Speech.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V Baird', written in a cursive style.

Dame Vera Baird QC
Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales