



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

16th April 2021

Dear Confrontant,

RE: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of violence against women and girls and sexual harassment; your comments upon which I have read with interest and concern.

I have always been clear that protecting women and girls from violence and supporting victims is of the utmost importance. I was proud to stand on a manifesto which pledged to continue the fight against the perpetrators of violence against women and girls. I am also proud that this country is built on the historic values of unity, inclusivity, tolerance and mutual respect. Hate crime, in all its forms, goes directly against these values and it is completely unacceptable that anyone in our society should live in fear of intimidation or violence. As such, we must stand up for diversity and face down discrimination wherever we see it.

With that in mind, I wanted to provide a thorough and substantive response to you, because I feel it is really important to raise awareness of all the initiatives the Government is pursuing at this time to address these issues. I agree with you that sexual harassment of women and girls, including in public places, is totally unacceptable. No one should be forced to change the way they live to avoid harassment and abuse, and from my conversations and meetings with Ministers, including the Home Secretary, I know how strongly they feel about these issues too.

I am very glad that action is already being taken. You may be aware of the wide-ranging Law Commission review into hate crime. Work on this is well underway and the review will identify any gaps within the current legislation and determine whether sex or gender should be added to hate crime law. The Law Commission's consultation closed on the 24th December 2020 and I am glad that those with an interest - including perhaps yourself - had the opportunity to share their views. The Government will of course consider the review's recommendations when they are complete and I am sure you will agree with the importance of allowing the Law Commission to complete its work in this area.

However, it is welcome that the Government has announced that on an experimental basis, police forces will be asked to identify and record any crimes of violence against the person, including stalking and harassment, as well as sexual offences where the victim perceives it to have been motivated by a hostility based on their sex. I understand that Ministers will shortly begin the consultation with the National Police Chiefs' Council and forces on this, with a view to commencing the experimental collection of data from this autumn.



While this is not making misogyny a hate crime, it can inform longer-term decisions once the Government has considered the recommendations made by the Law Commission.

I also welcome the new *Voyeurism (Offences) Act*, which criminalises the reprehensible behaviour of upskirting. There can now be no doubt that this activity is criminal and will not be tolerated. For the most serious offences, this law will ensure that the offender is also placed on the sex offenders register.

There is of course always more work to do and it is therefore good news that the Home Secretary has appointed Nimco Ali as an Independent Adviser on Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls. They will advise the Home Secretary and other Ministers on the Government's new *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy*. It is welcome that Ministers will be bringing forward the new strategy this year.

You may also welcome the fact that the Government reopened a call for evidence to further collect views from those with lived experience of, or views on, crimes considered as violence against women and girls. The survey has now closed and I understand that 162,513 responses were contributed following the recent, and tragic, death of Sarah Everard. The Government has said that these responses will inform the new VAWG strategy.

You will also no doubt be pleased to learn that relationships education is now compulsory for all primary pupils and relationships and sex education is compulsory for all secondary school pupils. This will help to ensure that concepts such as healthy relationships, consent and boundaries are taught to children.

Since the publication of the *Hate Crime Action Plan* in 2016, I have been encouraged by the progress that has been made, which has seen an increase in reporting and improvements in identification and recording of crime by the police. However, rates of attrition within the criminal justice system remain worryingly high and targeted online abuse continues to present a significant problem. While in contrast to overall trends, under-reporting still exists within specific groups.

As far as sentencing is concerned, it is right that the most serious offenders, including those who have committed violent and sexual offences, should spend more time in prison to match the severity of their crimes. The Prime Minister has been clear that the Government he leads will strengthen public confidence in the criminal justice system and I will support new legislation designed to achieve this. Indeed, Ministers have now outlined plans to legislate, through the *Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Bill*. This will extend the approach mentioned above by ending the halfway release of offenders sentenced to between four and seven years for serious crimes including rape, manslaughter and grievous bodily harm with intent. This change will mean that they will instead have to spend two-thirds of their time behind bars. I will continue to follow the progress of this vital work, and the associated legislation, as it progresses.



I'd also like to say briefly how important I feel it is that street crime must be tackled firmly and effectively. It causes disruption and fear among communities and is particularly problematic in crime hotspots. While of course the Government will support police forces across the country to fight this crime, it is important to focus on those areas where criminals are operating persistently. With that in mind, it is welcome news that the Government has announced that the Safer Streets Fund will be doubled in size to crack down on neighbourhood crimes and provide further reassurance for women and girls, and men and boys. The fund was originally launched in January 2020, and this new funding will bring total funding for these projects to £45 million.

The Government has also committed to work with police forces and Police & Crime Commissioners to target areas of potential concern for women and girls and to focus on preventing sexual violence. I understand that this could include targeting parks and alleyways, and routes from bars, restaurants and nightclubs.

Quite rightly, people here in Corby & East Northamptonshire expect the Government to invest in the police and increase the number of officers – exactly as we promised we would. The Government has been repeatedly clear that this is a key priority and is recruiting 20,000 additional officers by 2023. I welcome the fact that the Government has outlined a funding settlement for the police of up to £15.8 billion in 2021-22. It is good news that this funding package for 2021-22 is an increase of £636 million on last year. This funding will ensure that communities across the country can build back safer from the Coronavirus pandemic and reduce crime.

However, from my discussions with constituents locally, it is clear that more localised and targeted action is also required, hence why the Safer Streets Fund is so welcome. The funding will allow for small and simple changes such as locked gates around alleyways, increased street lighting and installation of CCTV. You may also be interested to hear that this funding will allow PCCs to train community wardens, deliver local crime prevention advice to residents and create Neighbourhood Watch schemes. I will certainly continue to monitor the levels and reports of crime across our constituency and I hope that this funding will help to better link the police with local residents to ensure a united front against criminals causing harm in our communities.

Finally, the Government has also announced it will roll-out pilots of '*Project Vigilant*' across the country. This is an internationally award winning approach taken by Thames Valley Police where both uniformed and plain clothes officers identify predatory and suspicious offenders in the night time economy. This can involve officers attending areas around clubs and bars undercover, to better ensure women are safe in these locations, and increased patrols as people leave at closing time.



As I say, there is undoubtedly more to do and I will be paying close attention to the important work which is already underway to address the pressing concerns you have raised.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you, then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes,
Tom

**TOM PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**