

TOM PURSGLOVE MP
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

17th August 2021

Dear Constance,

**RE: POLICE, CRIME, SENTENCING & COURTS BILL – ‘STOP AND SEARCH’,
THE RIGHT TO PROTEST, TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES & MANAGEMENT OF
OFFENDERS IN THE COMMUNITY.**

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of various aspects of the *Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Bill*; your comments upon which I have read with interest. I shall deal with the various points raised in turn.

Let me say at the outset that this piece of legislation is a hugely important one, and was a key part of the manifesto on which I was proud to stand at the last General Election, and on which I was elected to deliver. As part of the parliamentary process, each section of the Bill, like all primary legislation, will go through the intense scrutiny that our democracy demands. I am very clear, and very confident that, once it reaches the statute book, it will provide our country with important new laws that will do much to better keep people safe, toughen sentences for serious criminals, and tackle various unacceptable harms head on. For these reasons, I was proud to vote for the Bill at Second Reading and at all stages to secure its passage through the House of Commons.

That having been said, I do understand your concerns about ‘stop and search’, for which there has to be a balance between deploying tactics to help fight crime, and ensuring no one feels unduly threatened. However, and I want to be absolutely clear, no one should be targeted because of their race, including with information sharing. It is true that frontline police officers have told Ministers that ‘stop and search’ is a vital tool to crack down on violent crime. I am also clear that there is a particular issue that too many people who carry knives and weapons offend again and again. In 2019 for example, 29 percent of offenders had previous convictions. That said, I shall certainly mention your concerns on this to ministerial colleagues for their consideration.

On the setting up of illegal traveller sites, this can be a nuisance for local communities and an inappropriate development of open space. I know that many local residents across the country are concerned about anti-social behaviour, fly-tipping, and noise related to unauthorised sites. That includes residents in communities here in Corby & East Northamptonshire, which have been blighted by totally unacceptable unauthorised developments in recent months.



After two consultations on this issue, I welcome the fact that as part of the landmark *Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Bill*, new laws will be introduced to increase the powers available to the police in England and Wales. The Bill will introduce a new criminal offence where a person resides or intends to reside on any public or private land without permission and has caused, or is likely to cause, significant harm, obstruction, or harassment or distress. In addition, the Bill amends the *Criminal Justice & Public Order Act 1994* to broaden the list of harms that can be considered by the police when directing people away from land; and increase the period in which persons directed away from land must not return from three months to twelve months. Amendments to the 1994 legislation will in addition allow police to direct trespassers away from land that forms part of a highway.

I can reassure you that the Government has taken steps to ensure that those exercising their rights to enjoy the countryside are not inadvertently impacted by these measures.

I believe these new measures are a proportionate and necessary increase in powers for the police. The Government has made it clear that only a minority of travellers are causing problems, such as through abusive behaviour and extensive litter and waste at illegal sites. The vast majority of the travelling community are decent law-abiding people and we must ensure that there are legal sites available for travellers - a point I have made consistently clear locally in stressing that the local authority must meet its statutory duties as part of a reasonable and fair zero-tolerance approach to unauthorised sites.

Indeed, I welcome the fact that as of January 2020, the number of lawful traveller sites increased by 41 percent from January 2010. The Government has also given £200,000 to support projects working with Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities to tackle discrimination, improve integration, healthcare and education.

I am confident that government action will help to reduce the number of illegal caravan sites across the country, while respecting people's right to a nomadic way of life.

You also raise the issue of protest. I have noted your comments on this with interest, but I do not share your interpretation of the situation.

Quite rightly, in this country we have a long-standing tradition that people can gather together and demonstrate, and the right to protest peacefully is a fundamental part of our democracy - and that is categorically not going to change as a result of this legislation, despite what some would try to have you believe. The Government is clear that the right of an individual to express their opinion and protest is a cornerstone of our democratic society.

The issue at hand relates to the balance between the rights of a protestor and the rights of individuals to go about their daily business. There have been examples where protests have caused unjustifiable disruption and distress for other citizens. For example, some of the scenes we saw from the Extinction Rebellion protests, where ambulances were stopped from reaching hospitals, and efforts to prevent the printing and distribution of newspapers, were deeply troubling and concerning.



Therefore, the measures in the Bill are not about stopping or clamping down on the right to protest, but about ensuring the police can better manage highly disruptive protests and maintain the balance I have outlined.

Finally, in respect of dealing with offenders in the community, I support the Government's approach to ensure the most serious criminals spend longer in prison and receive the sentences they deserve. It is also the case that action needs to be taken to tackle the root issues associated with criminality.

It is welcome that the Bill includes measures to make community sentences stricter, better monitored and more targeted, in order to cut reoffending.

The Government will make community sentences tougher by increasing the maximum curfew length to two years so that sentencers will have more flexibility when imposing a curfew. In addition, I believe it is important to make more effective use of these curfew powers and it is welcome that courts and probation staff will be given greater flexibility to use curfews in a way that supports rehabilitation.

Offender employment after release is vital and the changes announced by the Government will mean that there will be scope for reduced restrictions during the week to keep offenders in work, but more stringent curfews of up to twenty hours a day during the weekend. I welcome this robust approach with a keen focus on rehabilitative punishment in the community.

As you may be aware, the Government seeks to make greater use of electronic tags to reduce crime. Over the last twelve months, GPS monitoring has been rolled out and plans have been announced to start using 'sobriety tags' to tackle alcohol related offending. Going forward, the Government has committed to using GPS electronic location monitoring to track burglars, robbers and thieves after their release from prison.

I really do welcome the *Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Bill* and the Government's noble commitment to ensuring justice is properly served and is effective in achieving the aim of reducing reoffending and keeping the public safe.

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 PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**