

TOM PURSGLOVE MP
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

23rd January 2023

Jean Contrevent,

RE: FREE SPEECH

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of free speech; I have read your comments on this issue with interest.

Freedom of speech, the rule of law, and equal rights, define us as a society, and I am determined to promote those values actively - and always have.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) recognises the importance of the right of freedom of expression. The CPS seeks to balance the right to freedom of speech and expression with the duty of the state to act proportionately against those who wish to deepen and extend divisions in the social fabric of our nation. The public statements and the guidance are clear.

I have always believed that while the internet can be an open and vibrant mode of communication and conversation, it can also be a source of great harm. The Government is fully committed to a free, open and secure internet and will ensure freedom of expression online is protected. I know from discussions with my colleagues in Parliament that there is a problem with abuse directed at individuals. This is unacceptable and goes beyond free speech and free debate. Indeed, online abuse can corrode the very values on which British democracy rests.

Further, the *Online Safety Bill* aims to strengthen people's rights to express themselves freely online. The Bill will protect against companies arbitrarily removing content or banning users and provide due process if they do. At the heart of the *Online Safety Bill* is a commitment to protect children online, and there will be different measures in place to protect adults. To protect adults, a simple 'Triple Shield' will be introduced which will focus on user choice, consumer rights and accountability, whilst protecting freedom of expression.

Finally, I was incredibly concerned to learn of PayPal's recent decision to shut down certain accounts citing its "Acceptable Use Policy". It is deeply worrying that a company can so quickly, and without warning, withdraw financial services from users likely reliant on continued funding. I will be sure to press upon my ministerial colleagues the importance of delivering a regulatory regime that strikes the right balance between tackling illegal activity taking place online and not granting companies excessive power to act as censors.



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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'T. Pursglove'.

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