



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

15th December 2023

Jean Contrevent

RE: THE MEDIA BILL

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of your concerns about the *Media Bill*, and in particular the Government's manifesto commitment to repeal Section 40 of the *Crime and Courts Act 2013*; I have read your comments with interest.

Freedom of the press is one of the pillars of our democracy, holding the powerful to account without fear nor favour; and a core principle of that freedom is that the press should be free from government interference. If commenced, Section 40 could force publishers to pay the costs of the people who sue them, even if the publishers win, unless they are signed up to a state-approved regulator.

Ministers believe that Section 40 risks creating a chilling effect on freedom of speech, undermining high-quality investigative journalism, and causing serious damage to newspapers, who play a vital role in our democracy. A number of newspapers, including the *Guardian* and the *Financial Times*, have noted that Section 40 would hurt the sort of investigative journalism that uncovered the phone-hacking scandal that prompted the Leveson Inquiry.

The majority of traditional publishers, including 95 percent of national newspapers by circulation, are members of the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) - the independent regulator for most of the newspaper and magazine industry in the UK.

In addition, in the years since the Leveson Inquiry, many publishers have introduced comprehensive guidance on topics including accuracy and harassment. Where participating publishers fall short of their legal standards, IPSO offers support to victims of libel, slander, or malicious falsehood in the form of low-cost arbitration, which offers quick access to fair and independent redress. IPSO can also act against publishers that do not comply with the 'Editors' Code of Practice', as it has done on many occasions.

I note that you also raised the issue of SLAPPs, or 'strategic lawsuits against public participation'. Powerful people have been able to weaponise the legal system to silence criticism, undermining free speech and public interest journalism. The Government has taken action to tackle the proliferation of these lawsuits, to ensure journalists can continue to hold power to account. This includes expanding the National Committee for the Safety of Journalists to deal with these legal threats, and legislating to tackle SLAPPs concerning economic crimes in the *Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023*.



I stood on a manifesto in 2019 that pledged to repeal Section 40 and the *Media Bill* delivers on this promise for public interest journalism, and our wider democracy. I will of course closely follow the debate as the Bill progresses.

Once again, thank you for taking 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 'Tom Pursglove', written over a horizontal line.

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