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Sent by email

Dear Lord Chancellor,

I am writing to warmly welcome the commitment made in the Chancellor's speech yesterday to ensure that sufficient investment is made to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls and the increase in spending allocation for the Ministry of Justice.

Domestic abuse affected 2.3 million adults in the last year and represents one-third of violent crime recorded by the police.¹ Approximately one-fifth of all adult homicides (and half of adult homicides where the victim is female), are domestic homicides.² The police recorded 758,941 domestic abuse-related crimes in England & Wales in the year ending March 2020.³ In 2019, the Home Office published extensive evidence on the social and economic costs of domestic abuse. Overall, in the year ending 31 March 2017, domestic abuse was estimated to have cost over £66 billion in England and Wales. These costs are estimated by the Home Office to be around £74 billion in today's prices.

The Ministry of Justice plays a crucial role in protecting the public from serious offenders, as well as delivering swift access to justice and helping to deliver specialist services to support victims of domestic abuse, and other forms of violence against women and girls, as they navigate the criminal justice system, ultimately reducing the human and economic costs.

I was particularly pleased to see that £185 million has been allocated for victims services, with specific commitments made regarding the provision of Independent Sexual Violence Advocates and Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (ISVAs and IDVAs), as well as the commitment made to reduce the current court delays which are having a significant impact on those who have been subject to domestic abuse. These measures will be particularly important given the very high levels of harm and high victim attrition rates with regards to these crime types.

I also wanted to welcome the Government's commitment to funding an increase in the threshold for means-tested civil legal aid. This is a very welcome first step towards improving access to justice and will no doubt make a difference to many survivors of domestic abuse who have previously struggled to access legal support for private family law proceedings. Our Spending Review representation recommended that the Government remove the legal aid means test for all victims and survivors of domestic abuse going through private family law proceedings.

¹ Office for National Statistics (ONS), The nature of violent crime in England and Wales: Year ending March 2020, Section 7, Groups of people most likely to be victims of violent crime.

² ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending 2019](#).

³ ONS, Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system, England and Wales: November 2020 [Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

To ensure the sustainable delivery of community-based services to support victims of domestic abuse over the longer-term, I strongly support the creation of a new statutory duty on all relevant public authorities in the forthcoming Victim's Bill. For victims and survivors of domestic abuse accessing support, 70% of them will do so via community-based services, with the vast majority never spending time in refuge accommodation. Community-based services play a significant role in preventing domestic abuse, as well as managing the far higher costs that would be incurred by Government if a survivor is forced to flee to a refuge.

With regards to the allocation of funding for victims services, I would like to draw your attention to several specific recommendations that I made in my representation to the Treasury. These proposals will be particularly effective in helping the Ministry of Justice in meeting its priority objectives of protecting the public from serious offenders, reducing offending and delivering swift access to justice.

Firstly, I would strongly recommend ring-fencing funding for specialist 'by and for' services, that support the most marginalised and vulnerable people in our society. It is well established that victims and survivors with protected characteristics, are best served by specialist "by and for" services. These are services that are rooted in the communities that they serve, and provide wrap-around holistic recovery and support that addresses a victim's full range of needs. As the Government's VAWG Commissioning Framework highlights, "investment in BME-led specialist organisations has been shown to deliver significant financial savings as well as a range of social benefits and outcomes for service users." Despite this, it is well evidenced that specialist 'by and for' services disproportionately miss out on local funding, either due to barriers in accessing funding or where there a single local area may not have the critical mass of victims from a given group to merit commissioning a bespoke service. Either way, the local commissioning system is failing to meet the needs of the most marginalised victims and survivors who most desperately need support. I have recommended a dedicated funding pot be made available to specialist by and for organisations. I strongly recommend that this pot should be administered directly from national government straight to frontline services, and incorporate capacity building to deliver services to victims and survivors wherever they live. A more detailed breakdown of the costs for different sectors in delivering specialist services is attached to this letter.

Secondly, I would encourage you to make use of the Ministry of Justice's Spending Review allocation to transform the response to domestic abuse through the Family Courts. Problems with the Family Courts remain the single most common reason why victims and survivors contact my office. The Ministry of Justice's Harm Panel report found serious structural issues in the way that domestic abuse allegations were handled, the way that risk and potential harm to children was assessed, and the way that survivors themselves were re-traumatised by the court process. The Harm Panel recommended the establishment of a national monitoring and reporting mechanism within the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's office (in partnership with the Victims' Commissioner) to report regularly on the family courts' performance on how cases involving allegations of domestic abuse are treated in private law children's proceedings. The establishment of this mechanism is key to securing the much needed improvements for survivors and children in the family courts, thereby improving children's safety and survivors' experiences, and my office is working with all relevant agencies to establish this. I am therefore calling on the government to invest a minimum of £150,000 for an initial pilot project which will: scope available data; pilot a mixed methods approach for monitoring the Family Court's response to domestic abuse in private law children's proceedings and design a framework for ongoing monitoring. This initial funding will cover the pilot project only (which we anticipate will last one year). Further funding will be needed within the Spending Review period for the mechanism to operate on an ongoing basis following the initial one-year phase.

I have attached a full copy of my representation to the Treasury, which contains more detailed breakdowns on spending with regards to victim support services and reform of the family courts.

I would like to thank you again for the continued dedication from the Ministry of Justice to support victims of domestic abuse and deliver justice, and I look forward to discussing this with you when we meet on 4th November.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicole Jacobs". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nicole Jacobs