



Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales  
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Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP  
Secretary of State for Justice  
102 Petty France  
London, SW1H 9GL

Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP  
Home Secretary  
2 Marsham Street  
London, SW1P 4JA

Dear Lord Chancellor and Home Secretary,

### **Putting investment in victims at the heart of criminal justice reforms**

With today's publication of the Independent Sentencing Review and the imminent announcements of Comprehensive Spending Review allocations and recommendations from the Independent Review of Criminal Courts, we are entering a critical period which will shape this country's criminal justice system for years to come – including the decade in which this government has set out to halve Violence Against Women and Girls.

I am writing to you today to share my views on how your departments can work together and use the opportunity of these reviews to ensure that – with the context of pressures on the wider systems – perpetrators of domestic abuse are brought to justice and victims are safeguarded.

Recommendations from the Sentencing Review, if implemented as drafted, will see far more perpetrators of domestic abuse managed in the community either without having served any time or only having served a minimal amount of their sentence in custody. Although I recognise the significant risks of the prison capacity crisis, I remain concerned about the reliance on an overburdened, under-resourced Probation Service and police forces for the community management of perpetrators of domestic abuse. It is not right that survivors pay the price for prison overcrowding.

Although it is positive to see the £700m uplift in funding for the Probation Service, this alone is not enough to ensure victims are kept safe while their perpetrators are being managed in the community. This is why, in my Spending Review submission, I have recommended a number of additional funding requirements.

### **Investing in justice data and technology to improve accountability**

With more perpetrators on licence in the community, it is vital the police and probation officers have the data and information that they need at their fingertips. It is also critical that national data allows us to track perpetrators from report to court, sentencing, prison, and community management in part so we can understand the impact of these changes.

I welcome the recommendation to ensure that domestic abuse perpetrators can be identified at sentencing, and once this is implemented, I would expect to see all those sentenced for a domestic abuse-related offence excluded from opportunities for earlier release, including the earned progression model proposed by the Sentencing Review. In the interim, it is vital that at a minimum the domestic abusers which we can identify – those sentenced for Coercive and Controlling Behaviour, non-fatal strangulation and suffocation, and breaches of VAWG-related orders – are excluded.

However, we must go further. I request that your departments invest £36.5m to link court and police systems so that information about protective orders is shared, and an additional £14m to integrate criminal justice agencies' data systems.

### **Ensuring access to specialist behaviour change and intervention programmes for domestic abuse perpetrators**

My 2022 mapping report found that only 7% of survivors who wanted their perpetrator to receive support to change their behaviour were able to get it. A lack of consistent, sustainably funded provision limits rehabilitation and fails to prevent reoffending or keep victims safe. I request that your departments rollover the existing Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Fund, investing £27.5m, and ensure that an additional £5.3m per annum is made available to ensure consistent implementation of high risk, high harm perpetrator management programmes in the 1/3 of PCC areas which currently lack such provision.

### **Ensuring all victims and survivors can access specialist support**

Perpetrator programmes can play an important role in survivor safety, but most valuable is the specialist support which the domestic abuse sector provides to victims and survivors both in crisis and recovery. These services can also be essential in preventing domestic abuse and can enable a survivor to remain in their home, avoiding potential disruption to their children's schooling or their work. Women's Aid Federation England's research shows that with the adequate provision of specialist support services, the domestic abuse sector could save the public purse as much as £23 billion a year. Every pound invested in domestic abuse support services will see a saving to the Exchequer of at least £9.

However, at present, these services are severely underfunded. I therefore request that your departments coordinate to ensure that £303.8m per annum is invested in the specialist domestic abuse sector, of which £88.3m must be ringfenced for 'by and for' services.

### **Improving communication with victims and survivors while the perpetrator is in prison**

I welcome provisions in the Victims and Courts Bill to establish a helpline which would allow all victims and survivors to access information and updates about their perpetrator's sentence, so they can adequately safety plan. I look forward to working

with you to ensure that this works for victims, and the advocates who support them, in practice.

I also support the Sentencing Review's recommendation to expand the use of Specialist Domestic Abuse Courts and was pleased to hear this noted by the Lord Chancellor in today's statement in the House. I would hope to see the Ministry of Justice implement this nationally through an investment of £7.8m per annum to fund court coordination across all magistrates' courts in England and Wales.

I would welcome a meeting with you both to discuss how we can work together to ensure that, amidst prison capacity pressures and tight financial settlements, the safety of victims and survivors is at the heart of our justice system and measures implemented to relieve capacity pressures do not put them at risk of harm.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Nicole Jacobs', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dame Nicole Jacobs

**Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales**