

Prisons and Probation Ombudsman to conduct investigation into use of restraints on pregnant women

30 March 2026: Announced today, the Minister of State for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending Lord Timpson has commissioned the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) to carry out an independent investigation into the use of restraints on pregnant women in prison during pregnancy-related hospital escorts.

The investigation was commissioned in light of allegations that HM Prison and Probation Service policy governing the use of restraints on pregnant women in prison during hospital escorts was breached at one or more women's prisons.

Ombudsman Adrian Usher said: "HMPPS policy on the use of restraints on pregnant women is clear that they must only be used where there are exceptional circumstances".

"It is my goal to understand how widespread the use of restraints on pregnant women in prison attending hospital is, and where this may have happened inappropriately".

The PPO will investigate and report on the use of restraints on pregnant women across 10 public and private women's prisons between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2025. They will aim speak to women who are still in prison and those who have been released.

In communications issued through their website today, the PPO encouraged women who were restrained whilst pregnant in prison during a hospital escort in the relevant period to contact them¹. This includes women that were immediately post-natal or post-pregnancy loss.

"Restraining anybody carries a degree of medical risk and it is my view that pregnant women should not be routinely restrained", said Adrian.

"If you were restrained whilst pregnant during a hospital escort then please reach out to my office to ensure our investigation is as thorough as possible".

The Ombudsman's office will publish a formal report of their findings.

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¹ Contact details are on the PPO website.

Notes to editors:

1. Adrian Usher was appointed as Prisons and Probation Ombudsman in April 2023.
2. The PPO is appointed by and reports directly to the Secretary of State for Justice. The Ombudsman's office is wholly independent of the services in remit, which include those provided by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), the Prisoner Escort and Custody Service, the Home Office (Immigration Enforcement), HMPPS Youth Custody Service, and those local authorities with secure children's homes. It is also operationally independent of, but sponsored by, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ).
3. The roles and responsibilities of the PPO are set out in the Terms of Reference (ToR), the latest version of which can be found at:
<https://ppo.gov.uk/document/prison-and-probationombudsman-terms-of-reference/>
4. The PPO has three main investigative duties:
 - a. complaints made by prisoners, young people in detention, offenders under probation supervision and individuals detained under immigration powers (detained individuals)
 - b. deaths of prisoners, young people in detention, approved premises' residents and detained individuals due to any cause
 - c. deaths of recently released prisoners that occur within 14 days of release from prison (except homicide)
5. The women's prisons in scope for this investigation are: HMP/YOI Bronzefield, HMP/YOI Downview, HMP/YOI Drake Hall, HMP/YOI Eastwood Park, HMP/YOI Foston Hall, HMP/YOI Low Newton, HMP/YOI New Hall, HMP/YOI Peterborough, HMP Send, HMP/YOI Styal
6. The Terms of Reference for this investigation can be found at:
<https://cdn.websitebuilder.service.justice.gov.uk/uploads/sites/14/2026/03/Annex-A-Restraint-of-Pregnant-Women-Terms-of-Reference-06.03.2026-final.pdf>
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