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Dear Lord Chancellor

Welcome to your new position. It is an exciting and important time to be leading the department as the criminal justice system recovers from COVID and is, through its Victims Bill consultation, reasserting its determination to deliver what other governments have long promised and failed to deliver, namely to place victims at the heart of its work. As Victims' Commissioner, it is my role to promote the interests of victims and witnesses and I look forward to working with you to do so.

Victims tell me that they want to be treated well by the criminal justice system, in the simple sense of being listened to, treated with respect and kept well informed and up to date on case progression. It is surely our duty to help people who we have failed to protect from crime, to cope and recover from its impact and the criminal justice system plainly plays an important role in doing this. How victims are treated by the police, CPS and the courts service is well evidenced to be as important in restoring their confidence as getting their assailant's conviction and more so that the delivery of a long sentence. The new Victims' Code has been a step in the right direction by setting out victims' rights. However, there have been similar Codes since shortly after the passage of the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004 which established the need for a Code. Repeated research projects carried out by my predecessors in this role and by the Ministry of Justice itself have demonstrated that these Codes have not been observed. Victims applaud the commitment to ensuring compliance with the Code by placing these rights into statute, through the Victims' Bill, to ensure that public agencies deliver for justice and for victims. On behalf of victims whose interests I do my best to represent to you and on your behalf, I commit to doing everything possible to support and assist you in delivering the proposed Victims Bill and thereby to achieving that essential aim of putting victims at the centre of the criminal justice system

In contrast, when victims are not kept well-informed and are not treated with respect, the harm that they have already experienced through crime is compounded and victims tell me that they *"felt isolated and as though I was fighting a battle with the very people who were supposed to be fighting for me."* This, in turn, leads to victims dropping out of cases, unable to continue. It is only by enshrining victims' rights into legislation through the Victims' Bill and by holding agencies to account that we can regain public confidence in the system and get the criminal justice system back on its feet. As the Victims' Commissioner, I regularly consult victims. My [recent Victims' Survey](#) produced some deeply troubling responses. Victims' confidence appears to

be plummeting, and urgent action is needed to turn this worrying trend around. I found that only 43% respondents would report a crime again based on their previous experiences of the criminal justice system. Moreover, 83% of respondents said they didn't have confidence in the effectiveness of the Crown Prosecution Service in prosecuting those accused of a crime.

Expectations for the Bill are high. We know that a Victims' Law has long been a priority for the Conservative Party, having been a 2015 manifesto promise. The government has maintained its drive for this legislation throughout the turbulence of recent years and has driven stakeholder engagement and appetite for the new legislation over the past year. This commitment has been embraced by your stakeholders, many of whom deliver lifesaving services to victims, and the public who are keen to see the promised reforms come to life.

In anticipation of the new Bill, my Office ran a series of stakeholder roundtables in late 2020 and used these, alongside further research, to develop a [Victims' Law Policy Paper](#). This paper comprises research and experience and delivers 34 recommendations for the Victims' Law. The stakeholders who volunteered their time and expertise are keen to see action. This appetite for change is further strengthened by recent Government commitments in the recently published VAWG Strategy, Beating Crime Plan and End-to-End Rape Review which promise to improve the support offered to victims of some of the most devastating crimes. Expectations are high and there is an appetite for immediate action.

The officials in your department have developed a detailed and thoughtful consultation document that can deliver immediate results. The document is based on careful engagement with victims' organisations and support services through the 'silver call' run and chaired by your department. Whilst 'silver' originated to respond to the impact of the pandemic, it has evolved to a close working relationship between victims' organisations and Ministry of Justice officials. Furthermore, the consultation document has been much discussed with me as Victims' Commissioner and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner. We have commented and helped to shape this thoroughly considered document.

The consultation document is ready to be published to a keen group of stakeholders who have an appetite to engage and secure victims' rights. I will, of course, promote the consultation and will participate in pre-legislative scrutiny to support the passage of the consultation and the development of the Bill. There is a parliamentary slot available and much expectation for the consultation's publication.

It is the right time to listen to victims and meet their needs to enable the criminal justice system to recover, thrive and improve. I look forward to working with you on this flagship legislation.

As is my regular practice, I will publish this letter on my website.

Kind regards



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