

Dame Vera Baird KC
Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales

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The Rt Hon Brandon Lewis CBE MP
Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice
Via email

21 September 2022

Dear Lord Chancellor

Expenses for Victims delivering Victim Personal Statements

I have recently had an issue drawn to my attention that I would, in turn, like to raise with you.

Victims, when giving evidence as a witness in court, are able to claim expenses for costs such as travelling expenses, meals, loss of earnings and childcare. This is quite right as they deliver their essential role in the criminal justice system.

However, just as important is the Victim Personal Statement (VPS). Victims have a right, contained within the Victims' Code, to provide a VPS to explain the impact that a crime has had on them. Furthermore, they have a right to read this in court if they opt to do so. A VPS is crucial to criminal justice as judges and magistrates take it into account when assessing the harm caused by an offence. Furthermore, this provides victims with a rare and valuable opportunity to express, in their own words, the profound impact a crime has had in their lives. After a harrowing trial, the VPS is an opportunity to empower victims and give them a meaningful voice.

It has been brought to my attention that, whilst victims are able to claim expenses for providing evidence at court, they are not able to do the same for delivering their VPS at a later date.

This discrepancy between the two court appearances is likely to have a profound impact on victims. Victims are encouraged to provide a VPS and, indeed, it is valuable and empowering for them to do so. However, it cannot be right that they are not able to claim expenses for attending court for this event. This anomaly is likely to mean that some victims are not able to

address the court and the person who has offended against them. Furthermore, it suggests that the court values their attendance for the purposes of giving evidence, but not for delivering their VPS.

I would be grateful if you could look into this matter so that we may understand why this is the case and seek to resolve the issue.

As is my normal practice, and for the purposes of transparency, I publish letters on my website unless there is reason not to do so.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V Baird', with a stylized, cursive script.

Dame Vera Baird KC
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