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Dear Minister Timpson,

I write to you following mounting concern about the implementation of the Sentencing Act 2026, the impact we are already seeing it have on trust and confidence in the justice system, and my concerns for the safety and wellbeing of victims and the public.

I understand and accept the driving factor behind the Independent Sentencing Review was to ease the prison capacity crisis, but I have always been clear that this should never come at the expense of the safety of victims and the wider public.

At the time of the Bill's passage, I was given reassurance that there was no need for specific exemptions to the new 'progression model' because release would be conditional on behaviour in prison and robust risk assessments, and once offenders are released they would be subject to intensive supervision, electronic monitoring, and license conditions that are well enforced. I was also assured of the new dedicated victim helpline being set up for the Victim Contact Scheme, which would allow any victim with questions or concerns to have these answered and explained.

I am grateful for our meetings since the Sentencing Bill's passing but unfortunately, following our recent final meeting ahead of implementation, I do not believe this work has progressed far enough in time for the proposed releases in September and am concerned that victims and the public will be placed at risk. I do not have confidence that offenders' risk will be adequately assessed, that victims' safety will be addressed, or that Probation is in a position to manage this volume of offenders in the community.

Until such time that I am reassured of the above, I believe the commencement of these provisions should be halted. Time should also be taken to consider exempting certain serious offences from this model, recognising the risks to victims and the public, and the reputational damage that will be done to a justice system that already feels like an injustice to too many victims.

Behaviour in Prison

The Sentencing Review was highly complementary of the 'Texas model', linking good behaviour to an earlier release from custody, but we have to be honest that this is not the model being implemented. A lack of opportunities in British prisons means there is simply no way of measuring or rewarding behaviour which is actively 'good'. Instead, our model simply looks to increase time in prison for offenders who 'behave badly'. Unlike an 'earned' progression model, we do not know the impact this will have on reoffending. Furthermore, my understanding is that the threshold for this bad behaviour is quite high, and the penalty – which Government was meant to address by doubling the number of additional days which can be imposed – is quite low.

I have always been clear that behaviour in prison is not inherently related to risk when released. There are dangerous offenders who are adept at manipulation, such as those who commit child sexual offences, domestic abuse, and stalking, and so will often present as model prisoners.

Risk Assessing

As a result, there is a significant reliance on risk assessing prior to release. With thousands of offenders anticipated to be released early, these risk assessments must be robust and have victims' safety at their core.

I welcomed news that the old 'offender assessment system' is to be replaced by a new assessment tool (known as 'ARNS') and am also aware of separate ongoing work specifically relating to risk assessments. However, development has been slow, and I am yet to be reassured that the new tool will be implemented and fit for purpose in time for the first releases in September. I am particularly concerned that it remains unclear how Probation will ensure that the victims' voice and experience is factored into the risk assessment process.

Victim Communication

The letters which have been sent communicating these significant changes to sentencing have been, frankly, disastrous for trust and confidence in the justice system. I have heard from countless victims their feelings of shock, anxiety, anger, and confusion. They feel betrayed by the justice system and insulted at the way in which the communication has been handled.

"The letter left me in a state of shock and confusion. I can't understand how they can do this. It feels like a betrayal" – Victim

I have also heard from staff within the Victim Contact Scheme speaking up on victims' behalf, raising concerns that victims' rights are being overlooked or dismissed in order to address prison overcrowding. Victims are disengaging from the system, they are reconsidering their plans, they are questioning their safety, and their mental health is being severely impacted.

"I've bought CCTV for my house in the last 24 hours... I don't trust the Government to keep me safe anymore" – Victim

We should not be in this scenario. Victims whose offenders will be released in September should have been told by now, in a clear and trauma-informed way, what this means for them, as well as being provided with information and support necessary to keep them safe. For those not immediately released in September, victims need this reassurance along with clear communication about their offender's new release date.

The reaction from victims has hit home the scale of these sentencing reforms, with victims of rape and child sexual abuse, along with families of victims of manslaughter, seeing potential years wiped off their offender's time in custody. Government have not yet provided the necessary reassurance to victims, nor to me, that we are ready to deliver these reforms in a way that keeps victims and the public safe.

In response to a recent review from Dame Lynne Owens on prison releases, this Government committed to improved communication with victims, and collaborative working with the victims' sector. This was a moment to demonstrate these principles, and sadly the moment was not met.

Support and Funding

It is clear that these changes will have a profound impact on affected victims, of which there are thousands. This will inevitably lead to increased pressure on the already under-funded services who provide often life saving support and advice to victims, ranging from housing to safeguarding to counselling and more.

These reforms need to be commenced in close collaboration with services, ensuring that they have the information and resources needed to be able to support victims through this difficult and frightening time.

In the absence of assurances about the points in this letter, I simply cannot say to victims that I have confidence that their safety has been considered in the implementation of these measures, and so on their behalf I ask that the necessary time be taken to ensure that this vital work is completed and reassurance is provided prior to these measures coming into force.

Yours sincerely,



Claire Waxman OBE

Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales