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Honorary Patrons – Lord Cotter, John Penrose MP, Sara Westle, Ann Goodchild, Erin Pizzey and Paul Chivers

15 January 2020

Rt. Hon. Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary
The Home Office
Marshall St
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Home Secretary,

Re: A New Government Approach to Domestic Abuse and the Domestic Abuse Bill

I am writing on behalf of the ManKind Initiative, the first charity in Great Britain to support male victims of domestic abuse directly, and to provide support to other agencies that also support abused men (police forces, the justice sector, local authorities, health services and other charities). We work with a range of government agencies¹ and statutory bodies including the Home Office to improve support given to the men and their children who are victims of this crime.

We believe that, to better serve all victims of domestic abuse in the UK (women, men and children), the new Government should take the opportunity to consider an inclusive, non-ideological, 21st century approach to domestic abuse and its victims, rather than simply adopt the same approach of previous governments (from Gordon Brown to Theresa May). Such an approach would mean this Government no longer classes domestic abuse as a “gendered crime”, which is an ideological position that places different priorities for victims because of their gender rather than the severity or impact of the crime against them. It is a position that is based on a political world view, rather than one based on a crime against an individual – the basis of the British Constitution since 1215.

The charity has been at the forefront in this country in wanting domestic abuse to be recognised as a crime that equally affects individual women, men and children – a position that has met (and continues to be met) with considerable resistance, albeit not from front line professionals who support domestic abuse victims in their communities.

This resistance has included several previous governments (as stated above) and has centred on an ideological view of domestic abuse which is out of step with the reality of domestic abuse in Britain today. This ideological view, adopted most recently by Theresa May’s government, was that “*We know that crimes such as domestic abuse.... are both a cause and consequence of wider gender inequality*”².

Whilst we readily accept that there are more female victims of domestic abuse than male (a ratio of 2:1 according to the Office for National Statistics³), to frame domestic abuse in this context gives a higher political and service priority to female victims compared to other victim groups. This includes their children and their wider family. It also minimises the experience of male and LGBTQ+ victims, making it harder for them to come forward and harder for society to support them when they do. Moreover, it leads to a lower priority in the provision of services and resources.

¹ We worked with both the Home Office and CPS on their respective male victims statements

² Letter to the ManKind Initiative from the Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability (29 July 2019) and other Government policy documents

³ Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2019

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2019>

A key reason given for this gendered approach is the widely given justification that “domestic abuse *disproportionately* affects women”. However, we would argue that, despite there being more female victims than male, the proportion of female to male victims (2:1 as indicated by government sanctioned Office for National Statistics) does not warrant this extreme characterisation. Moreover, we would argue that, at an individual level, the number of victims does not and should not affect the consideration and support given (statistics and academic literature both suggest that the impact on long-term physical and mental health is severe for all victims). This view has been exacerbated by the decision of previous governments to only utilise and consult a limited range of research and academic views, without reviewing or taking into account more recent research which showed longer term impacts on physical and mental health for all victims.

New Approach

Throughout the recent General Election campaign the new Government set out clearly that it wanted to be more inclusive, modern and to bring the country together. We believe this should apply to the new Government’s approach to domestic abuse policy.

By moving from an ideological policy that domestic abuse is a “gendered crime” to one that sets out clearly that it is a “crime” based on the impact that it has on an individual woman or man (and their children) including LGBTQ+ victims, the Government would be adopting a more inclusive, equality and fairness-based approach. This would be one that does not give priority to someone because of their gender, but one that supports all victims equally and does not set up a false competition between victims because of their gender.

We would therefore like the Government to adopt a more inclusive, modern 21st century approach to domestic abuse policy in the UK by changing its view, narrative and framing on domestic abuse.

Domestic Abuse Bill and Statutory Guidance

On the above Bill, we have welcomed the previous Government’s view that the statutory definition remains gender-neutral in keeping with the British Constitution and the foundation of British Law. This was despite huge pressure from many large organisations in the domestic abuse sector who wanted a gendered statutory definition.

In the previous version of the Bill, there was a clause (Part 5, Clause 79(3)) that stated that Statutory Guidance had to reflect the disproportionate effect of domestic abuse on women. The impact of this clause will be to create an implicit hierarchy of victims in the statutory guidance based on gender (women first, men and LGBTQ+ victims second) and not on the individual crime(s) a victim has endured. This would embed this ideological position into the very heart of domestic abuse legislation, professional practice and will lead to discrimination against male and LGBTQ+ victims.

We would hope the Government in adopting a new modern, inclusive and 21st century approach to domestic abuse will drop this clause in any forthcoming legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter and we hope that our positive approach to supporting the Government is welcomed. If you or your officials wish to discuss this matter in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Brooks

Mark Brooks OBE

Chair of Trustees

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