

To: Rt Hon David Lammy MP, Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice; Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, Secretary of State for Education

THE IMPACT OF THE SENTENCING BILL ON FAMILIES AND CHILDREN WITH PARENTS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Thursday 23 October 2025

Dear Deputy Prime Minister, Secretary of State

There is much to welcome in the Sentencing Bill that was published in September. It sets out a number of much-needed changes that will contribute to the delivery of a more sustainable criminal justice system.

Robust and well-managed unpaid work schemes fulfil an important function, allowing people who have committed a crime to pay back to their community. However, we are deeply concerned by the measure set out in clause 35 of the Bill that proposes public disclosure of names and photographs of people delivering unpaid work as part of their community sentence.

We do not believe that ‘naming and shaming’ people in this way will support rehabilitation or efforts to reduce reoffending. In an age where content remains online indefinitely, it will cast a long shadow, making it harder for people to get a job or find somewhere to live.

Moreover, it will greatly exacerbate the stigmatisation of tens of thousands of family members every year who themselves suffer a hidden sentence when a loved-one is punished for a crime.

In particular, this change would bring unintended, yet undeniably harmful consequences for many thousands of children and young people whose parents are subject to unpaid work requirements. These consequences could take a number of forms:

- Stigmatisation and bullying, in particular at school, where public exposure of this kind can have a serious impact on children’s education.
- Physical threats of violence or vigilantism. In extreme cases, children have had to change schools or even change their names because they have faced harassment following public exposure of a parent’s criminal record.
- The emotional and psychological impact of the stigma and shame, where children feel implicated or judged by association.

The implementation of clause 35 in the Sentencing Bill to ‘name and shame’ would greatly compound the damage already done to these children. It is also in contravention of the Government’s stated commitment to protect vulnerable children and support families impacted by the criminal justice system, and the UN Convention on the Rights

of the Child, which stipulates that the best interests of children must be a primary consideration for policymakers, legislators and institutions.

The rights and wellbeing of children, young people and families must not become collateral damage in a rush to 'toughen up' community sentencing.

For the reasons above, we are calling for the withdrawal of clause 35 from the Bill.

Yours sincerely

Abbi Ayers, Director of Strategic Development, National Women's Justice Coalition
Dr Caroline Bald, Open University and Co-Chair BASW England Criminal Justice Group
Tracey Burley, CEO, St Giles Trust
Sarah Burrows, CEO, Children Heard and Seen
Naomi Delap, CEO, Birth Companions
Andrea Coomber KC, CEO, Howard League for Penal Reform
Anne Fox, CEO, Clinks
Alison Goddard, CEO, Lincolnshire Action Trust
Paula Harriott, CEO, Unlock
Dr Carol Homden, CEO, Coram
Andy Keen-Downs CBE, CEO, Prison Advice and Care Trust
Amanda Lacey, CEO, NEPACS
Elaine McConnell, Growth and Development Lead, YouTurn Futures
Parental Imprisonment Collective
Jo Wells, CEO, Firebird Foundation
Alyson Rees, Retired Professor of Social Work, Cardiff University
Pia Sinha, CEO, Prison Reform Trust
Janey Starling, Co-Director, We Level Up
Lee Stephenson, Director, Jigsaw
Mark Turnbull, CEO, OutThere
Emma Wells, Founder, Unseen Victims CIC

Quotes from people who have had parents in the criminal justice system

"I'd never confided in anyone about my Dad having been in prison. My Dad had been a nasty man, and I knew one word uttered and people would go about finding his story all over the internet. The shame I felt at that made me feel sick, and I'd spent so long trying to distance myself from it I had a breakdown by age 17. Fast forward a few years and I was sat in an Inside Out class at my university, a module designed to explore themes of prison, rehabilitation and justice. I remember going around in a circle explaining our reasons for joining the course. 9 out of 10 students that day mentioned they had never been into a prison and it would be interesting to see. The tenth? She declared loudly and proudly in a strong northern accent that prisoners were not zoo animals, and visiting her Mum had been one of the most traumatic experiences of her life. She bit back with such certainty, I smiled and knew...I was going to be friends with that girl. We graduated 12

months later, arm in arm, and had I have never met her I would still to this day have never spoken on my experiences because of the fear and stigma I felt.

"Struggling with identity as a young child fighting to understand who I was and where I belonged in this world. Having a parent in prison coupled with the stigma of such a fact led me to believe even more strongly that I had no place where I was welcome. Self-doubt, lack of self-worth - my mind told me I was a bad person, the eyes of the onlookers confirmed the cruel noise I called my thoughts".

"22 years on I still feel the stigma of once having a parent in prison. My younger brother has no idea my Mum was once imprisoned and her husband of 12 years does not know either. It is very much a family secret. When entering a new job in a child safeguarding role, a colleague on the interview panel asked, 'what brought you into this line of work?' I was not embarrassed; however, I still held feelings of anxiety and shame when I replied, 'my Mum went to prison when I was 12. Services failed me. I want better services for that 12-year-old me'".