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The Rt Hon Keith Vaz MP
Chair, Home Affairs Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

20 August 2014

Dear Keith

PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON STRENGTHENING THE LAW ON DOMESTIC ABUSE

Tackling domestic abuse is a key priority for this Government. This letter is to inform you that a public consultation on whether the law on domestic abuse should be strengthened to give better protection to victims begins today. Specifically, we are asking for views on whether the law needs to be more explicit regarding coercive and controlling behaviours in intimate partner relationships. The consultation will close on 15 October.

This Government is clear that domestic abuse is not just about physical violence. Coercive and controlling behaviour can be harder to recognise but can have an equally devastating impact on its victims. In recognition of this, in March 2013 we expanded the Government definition of domestic abuse to capture non-violent behaviour. I will now publicly consult on whether the law needs to be strengthened to keep pace with these developments.

In recent years, much has been done to improve the response to domestic abuse. Our 'This is Abuse' campaign helps young people recognise abusive behaviours. We have increased the tools available to the police through the national roll-out of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme, also known as Clare's Law, and the introduction of Domestic Violence Protection Orders.

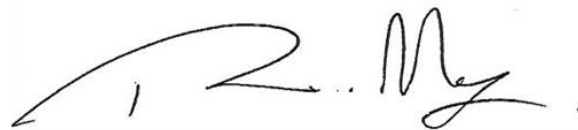
As you know, last September I commissioned Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) to conduct a comprehensive review of the police response to domestic violence and abuse. I did this because I was concerned that the response was inadequate following a succession of reports by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) into specific domestic homicides. On 27 March, HMIC presented its findings and they are deeply worrying.

The report finds that the current police response to domestic abuse is failing victims, and that the police do not treat domestic abuse as the serious crime it is. I have met police force leads and now chair a National Oversight Group that brings together leadership from across the organisations that must deliver change, and those with expertise in tackling domestic abuse who offer a victim-focused perspective, to set the direction for lasting improvement.

I am clear that delivery against HMIC's recommendations – particularly those on leadership and reward and recognition – is critical to improving the reality for victims of domestic abuse. Since the report's publication I have been encouraged by the number of forces that have written to me setting out immediate action they have taken. For example, Merseyside Police have re-trained 1,500 frontline officers to improve their investigation skills and Warwickshire Constabulary has signalled its commitment to build victim feedback into its plans for improvement. However, I also want to explore whether the law could be strengthened to deliver better protection for victims of domestic abuse.

I am keen to seek the views of victims of domestic abuse and those who work with them, as well as other experts in this field and the wider public to ensure the legal framework is as robust as it can be. The public consultation has been launched on the GOV.UK website and can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/strengthening-the-law-on-domestic-abuse>.

I will place a copy of this letter and the consultation document in the Library of both Houses.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Theresa May', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

The Rt Hon Theresa May MP