



Sent by email:

Baroness Armstrong of Hilltop
armstrongh@parliament.uk

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Dear Hillary,

DOMESTIC ABUSE BILL: TRAINING FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

I am writing further to our meeting of 4 March about your Report stage amendment of training (amendment 15). I am grateful to you for your continued constructive engagement on this issue.

We know that it often takes victims of domestic abuse a significant period of time to seek effective help. They may not be aware that they are a victim of domestic abuse, they might blame themselves for the abuse, fear the consequences of leaving the abuser, not know where they can seek help, or fear that they will experience stigma and shame if they do try to seek help. That is why we agree that it is important that public authorities are able to identify victims and know how to provide the right response. Early intervention by the voluntary sector and statutory agencies working together can help to protect adults and children from further harm, as well as preventing escalation and recurrence of abuse.

As discussed with you, last week there is a significant amount of work underway to improve the response of frontline staff to domestic abuse, whether that is in, police forces, across the National Health Service or in job centres. Of course, there is always room and scope for improvement in the response.

Under clause 73, guidance will be issued regarding the effect of the definition of domestic abuse. One of the central functions is to provide guidance and support to frontline professionals who have responsibilities to safeguard and support victims of domestic abuse. The document outlines the strategic and operational frameworks that produce the most effective commissioning of domestic abuse services also.

The guidance was published in draft last year, and a chapter is dedicated to the agency response to domestic abuse. Here the guidance details best practice, specific consideration and guidance for schools and colleges, adult social care, health professionals, housing, employers and the criminal justice system. I would like to assure

you that the guidance has been subject to extensive engagement with expertise from the sector, Commissioners, academics and those on the frontline. There will be a formal consultation following Royal Assent, and we would welcome any feedback and comment you may have ahead of its final publication.

The guidance issued under clauses 73, will complement rather than replace, sector specific guidance, training materials and reporting protocols. This is best produced by and for each sector to reflect their circumstances and the nature of their professional relationship with victims of domestic abuse; moreover, such tailored guidance can draw on the expertise and knowledge within the relevant sector.

We have always been clear that the provisions in the Bill must be viewed alongside the significant number of preventative measures we are implementing which do not require legislation. The forthcoming Domestic Abuse Strategy will build on the work of the Bill to transform our response to domestic abuse. The strategy too will provide a comprehensive framework for responding to and supporting victims, and will be published later this year.

On the detail of your Report stage amendment, I might add that existing provisions in the Bill already address many of the points raised. Relevant public authorities, as listed in clause 15, are subject to the duty to cooperate with the Commissioner and this would include the provision of statistics and other information specified in subsection (1) of the new clause. Clause 14 already places a duty on the Commissioner to publish an annual report and it is, of course, open to her to address matters relating to training and reporting in such annual reports (as subsection (3) of your new clause seeks to provide). Finally, in relation to subsection (2), public authorities are required to have regard to any guidance issued under clause 73.

I hope that this reassures you of the Government's deep commitment to ensure that all victims of domestic abuse, can be identified and the vital support they require can be tailored accordingly.

I am copying this letter to Baroness Burt, Baroness Crawley, Baroness Helic and Lord Marks of Henley-on-Thames. I will arrange for a copy of this to be placed in the library of the House.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan', written in a cursive style.

Baroness Williams of Trafford