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Baroness Burt
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10th May 2023

**PRIVATE MEMBER'S BILL -
CHILD SUPPORT COLLECTION (DOMESTIC ABUSE) BILL**

Dear Lorely,

Thank you for your contribution at the second reading debate for the Child Support Collection (Domestic Abuse) Bill that took place on 21st April 2023. I am writing to you as you raised some very important points which I would like to address.

The first point was regarding the secondary legislation and the domestic abuse evidence requirements. While I hope I was able to provide some clarity in my speech, I would like to assure you that the aim is to ensure that parents are adequately supported should they need the additional support that this bill provides and that there are appropriate processes established for verifying evidence requirements for domestic abuse. The Department will consult widely on proposals with relevant stakeholder groups, as well as other Government Departments such as the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office, and with the devolved administrations where appropriate to produce robust evidence requirements which are fully sensitive to the needs of those who have experienced domestic abuse. The work is complex, and we need to take the time to make sure we get it right. The legislation will follow the affirmative procedure so the house will have further opportunity to debate the proposals. Secondary legislation will be brought in as soon as parliamentary time allows which we hope to be early 2024.

You also mentioned the 4% fee for receiving parents who use the collect & pay service. While the Government believes that charging is the right approach for current service users, I hope I provided assurances during my speech that this is an issue which will be looked at as part of the development for the secondary legislation.

You went on to ask about guaranteeing payments when paying parents do not pay their maintenance liability. Operating a scheme where the Government guarantees child maintenance payments if the paying parent does not pay is not the intent of CMS policy. This would in effect be equivalent to the taxpayer underwriting non-payers.

The role of the CMS is to encourage parents to take financial responsibility for their children. The scheme is designed to encourage parents to agree their own family-based arrangements, wherever possible, as this tends to be in the best interests of the children. The statutory scheme exists as a fall-back if they are unable to do so. The CMS does all it can to ensure parents meet their financial obligations towards their children.

Finally, you raised an important point about training. The CMS does provide domestic abuse training for all caseworkers which recognises that domestic abuse can take various forms including physical, psychological, coercive, overbearing, emotional and financial abuse.

Following Dr Callan's independent review of the ways in which the CMS supports victims of domestic abuse, CMS will be undertaking a comprehensive review of its domestic abuse training and will be working with external organisations to ensure it remains up to date and in line with best practice.

I do hope that this adds to the answers I gave during the debate.

With kind regards,
James Younger

VISCOUNT YOUNGER OF LECKIE

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE