

Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP

Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London, SW1P 4DF

13 February 2018

Dear Home Secretary

We welcome the Government's commitment to deliver a Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill to make victims safe in the knowledge that the state "*will do everything it can to both support them and their children.*" As leaders within the police service, we fully share this commitment to better protect and support victims of domestic abuse. The scale of the challenge remains significant; whilst considerable improvements have been made within the police response in recent years, demand on forces remains acute. The level of domestic abuse recorded by the police has risen by over 60 percent in less than three years.

We are therefore concerned that the Bill's promise to transform our criminal justice response to domestic abuse risks being undermined by "supported housing reforms" proposed by the Department for Work and Pensions and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. These planned funding changes risk dismantling a critical component in the response to domestic abuse - the national network of refuges - from 2020. Across all forces, the police rely on refuges being available to house women and children who they know may be at risk of further, potentially fatal, harm when they attend a domestic incident. These vital services enable the police to help a family into a place of safety, where their needs will be met with compassion and understanding, so they can continue their investigations. Without these services our duty of care to families affected by domestic abuse would be much harder to meet. Refuges are a vital part of our national response to domestic abuse.

The planned reforms would fully devolve future funding for refuges to local areas. As leaders of the police response to domestic abuse, we are clear that such a model is inappropriate for a national network of services. As recognised by the cross-party House of Commons Work and Pensions and Communities and Local Government Select Committees, refuges have to operate within a national framework for essential safety and protection. As over two thirds of women flee to a refuge outside of their local area to escape a perpetrator, these services cannot be commissioned or funded on the basis of local need alone.

The removal of refuge's secure national income stream, currently provided through housing benefit, seriously risks significant refuge closures and reductions in provision. An increased number of women and children unable to access refuge services, and put at continued risk as a result, is of the utmost concern for the police response to domestic abuse.

The plans compound existing concerns about the future sustainability of the national network of refuges, which your Government acknowledges has been adversely impacted by differing local commissioning and funding practices in recent years. We note MHCLG's commitment to review funding of refuges in this regard, and urge you to ensure the Government halts planned funding reforms before this full review is undertaken. We hope that you will work with experts to deliver an alternative funding model that delivers sustainability for these services. Without a long-term solution for the provision of specialist refuges and other domestic abuse services in the future, we are concerned that the aims of the Bill simply will not be achieved.

We look forward to working alongside you to realise the Government's commitment that 'no victim is turned away' from the essential support services, including refuges, which they need.

Yours sincerely

Police & Crime Commissioner for Northumberland and APCC Portfolio Lead for Supporting Victims and Reducing Harm, Dame Vera Baird QC

Crime Commissioner for Lincolnshire and APCC Deputy Portfolio Lead for Supporting Victims and Reducing Harm, Marc Jones

Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire, David Keane

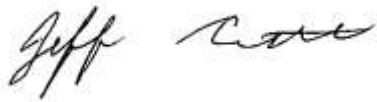
Police & Crime Commissioner for Cleveland, Barry Coppinger

Police and Crime Commissioner for Derbyshire, Hardy Dhindsa


Police and Crime Commissioner for Dorset, Martyn Underhill

Police and Crime Commissioner for Durham, Ron Hogg

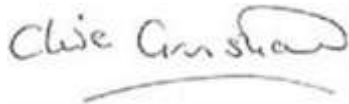
Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime in Greater Manchester, Baroness Hughes



Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent, Jeff Cuthbert



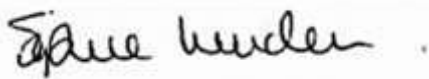
Police and Crime Commissioner for Humberside, Keith Hunter



Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire, Clive Grunshaw



Police and Crime Commissioner for Leicestershire, Lord Willy Bach



Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime for London, Sophie Linden



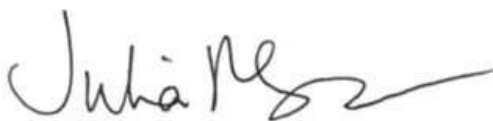
Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside, Jane Kennedy



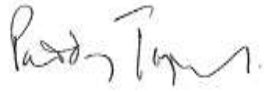
Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside, Emily Spurrell



Police and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire, Stephen Mold



Police and Crime Commissioner for North Yorkshire, Julia Mulligan



Police and Crime Commissioner for Nottinghamshire, Paddy Tipping



Police & Crime Commissioner for South Wales, Alun Michael



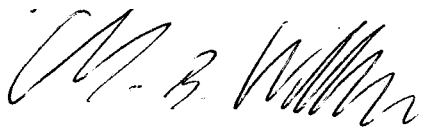
Police & Crime Commissioner for South Yorkshire, Dr Alan Billings



Police & Crime Commissioner for Suffolk, Tim Passmore



Police & Crime Commissioner for West Midlands, David Jamieson



Police & Crime Commissioner for West Yorkshire, Mark Burns-Williamson