

Dear John Campion

Victims of serious crimes are enduring the worst Crown Court backlog on record, which is leading to delays of up to 4 years before many get their day in court.

More than a quarter of all crimes aren't being prosecuted because victims are dropping out of the process entirely. That means that 1 million victims every year are being failed by the very system designed to protect them.

In this context, it is more vital than ever that victims get the legal rights and protections they deserve.

For too long victims' trust in the justice system has been eroded by successive Conservative governments' broken promises. In the past three manifestoes, the Conservative Party has pledged to introduce a bill that would give victims legally enforceable rights. Most recently, your 2019 manifesto stated:

"We will pass and implement a Victims' Law that guarantees victims' rights and the level of support they can expect."

This commitment has been reiterated in departmental plans from the Ministry of Justice, the 2018 Victims Strategy, and several Queen's Speeches (including the Queen's Speech for the most recent parliamentary session). The Home Secretary, Priti Patel, even publicly called on the Conservatives to introduce a Victims' Law in 2014.

But victims don't need warm words or manifesto commitments, they need legislation. This is exactly what Labour has provided. Building on a Private Members' Bill Keir Starmer authored in 2015, my frontbench colleague Peter Kyle has recently introduced an ambitious Victims' Bill to the House of Commons. This achieves exactly what your rhetoric promises. It puts victims at the centre of the criminal justice system, rendering both them and their rights inalienable. It establishes clear procedures for victims to enforce their rights, and expands support to groups too often overlooked (including bereaved families, and the victims of persistent antisocial behaviour).

Labour's introduction of a Victims' Law has been welcomed by a range of senior stakeholders, including the Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales, the Victims' Commissioner for London, and antisocial behaviour charities such as ASB Resolve. Many of the proposals echo those set out by the Victims' Commissioner herself.

Legislating to improve the experience of victims in the criminal justice system cannot wait. In a recent survey by the Victims' Commissioner, only 14 per cent of rape complainants believed they would get justice by reporting their crime. Meanwhile, the proportion of cases failing to proceed due to victims dropping out has almost trebled, from 8.7 per cent in 2015 to 25.4 per cent in 2020.

Whichever one of us wins the PCC election on Thursday 6th May, we can both agree that it is vital to improve services for victims in the West Mercia area victims must come first. Therefore, will you join me in calling on the government to introduce Labour's Victims' Law as the first piece of new legislation when the House returns?

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Kuldip Sahota
Labour Party Candidate for PCC – West Mercia Area