

## **Embargo – 00.01 Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2014**

Bill to make domestic violence a crime introduced today

A 10 Minute Rule Bill will be introduced in the House of Commons today, 26 February, to make domestic violence and coercive control crimes. The Bill has all party support and has been spearheaded by Elfyn Llwyd MP (Plaid Cymru).

The Bill sponsors include Cheryl Gillan (Conservative), Robert Buckland (Conservative), Sir Edward Garnier (Conservative), Sandra Osborne (Labour), John McDonnell (Labour), Margaret Ritchie (SDLP), John Leech (Liberal Democrat), Hywel Williams (Plaid Cymru), Caroline Lucas (Green Party) and Sir Bob Russell (Liberal Democrat). The objectives of the Bill have so far been supported by 67 MPs of all Parties who have signed an early day motion calling for domestic violence to be an offence in its own right.

The purpose of the Bill is to introduce a statutory framework around domestic violence; currently there is no specific law. The absence of the criminalisation of coercive control is a contributory factor to low reporting, arrest, charging and conviction rates. According to Women's Aid only 6.5% of domestic violence incidents reported to the police lead to conviction. Currently 25% of domestic violence cases passed on to the Crown Prosecution Service result in no action being taken.

The Bill follows on from the highly successful campaign during 2011/12 for the introduction of stalking laws in England and Wales, which was spearheaded by Elfyn Llwyd MP, Laura Richards, criminal behaviour psychologist, and Harry Fletcher of Napo.

A person convicted of coercive control would under the terms of Bill face up to 14 years imprisonment. The Bill also places statutory responsibilities on the police to develop and implement domestic violence policies, to provide written policies that encourage the arrest and charge of a perpetrator and to make investigation of complaints a priority.

The Bill also creates domestic violence protective orders which would prevent further contact that amounts to domestic violence, prohibit the perpetrator from engaging in certain activities, including contact with the victim or children of the victim, and exclude the perpetrator from the victim's home. In addition the Bill would prevent a victim having to disclose details of their address or whereabouts in open court, thereby preventing the perpetrator from having this information. The Bill also gives the court the power to undertake a risk assessment on the impact of domestic violence on the victim and their children.

Probation staff have been concerned for years about the extent of domestic abuse, low reporting rates and few convictions. The Probation Service provides victim liaison, women's safety officers and perpetrator programmes. All of these services are under threat from privatisation and cuts.

Tania Bassett, National Official for Napo, said: "For years concerns have been raised in Napo forums and annual general meetings about the extent of domestic violence and the lack of resources to deal with it. This Bill will put violence on a statutory footing and will go a long way to protect predominantly female victims."

Harry Fletcher, who drafted the Bill and is parliamentary advisor to Napo and its former Assistant General Secretary, said: "It is outrageous that so few women have confidence to report domestic violence to the police and that the number of convictions as a percentage of all violence is so low. The Bill is based on the successful experience of naming domestic violence as a crime in the United States. It is excellent that it has all party support and that nearly 70 members of parliament have expressed support for the notion of criminalising domestic abuse by signing an early day motion to that effect. These measures will go a long way towards protecting vulnerable women."

In the UK there are scores of domestic violence related homicides or incidents of serious harm every year. Last year 7% of women, according to the Home Office, reported having experienced domestic abuse, which is equivalent to 1.2 million women per year. Two out of three incidents were experienced by repeat victims. The Home Office also reports that in addition two women are killed by a partner, ex-partner or lover per week. Last year 400,000 women were sexually assaulted of whom 70,000 were victims of rape or attempted rape.

By contrast the situation in the United States where specific laws exist is startling. Since laws were introduced at various times over the last 20 years, reporting has increased by nearly 50% and incidents of violence have decreased by over a third.

### **Notes for editors**

- Women on average do not report to the police abuse until there have been at least 30 incidents.
- Police across the UK report that they receive a call from members of the public or victims for assistance with domestic violence every minute. This amounts to over 1,300 calls every day.
- One in three women who attend an A&E department do so because they have been domestically abused.
- The cost to the NHS of the physical care of abused women is £1.2 billion.
- The cost of mental health care is £176 million.
- The overall cost of domestic violence for all government departments is £15.5 billion.
- 1.2 million women per year are the victim of domestic abuse.

- Two out of three incidents of domestic abuse are experienced by repeat victims.
- Two women are killed by a partner, ex-partner or lover each week.
- 4% of women last year experienced stalking.
- 400,000 women were sexually assaulted or raped last year.
- Since the age of 16, 31% of women have experienced domestic abuse.
- Women in younger age groups are more likely to be victims of domestic abuse.
- Women who are separated have the highest risk of domestic abuse.
- Women living in the East Midland or Wales are more likely to be the victims of domestic abuse than anywhere else in England and Wales.
- Women living in households with an income of less than £20,000 are more likely to be the victims of domestic abuse.
- Women who are unemployed are more likely to be the victims of domestic abuse (15%) than those who are employed (6%).
- Women with long term illness or disability are more likely to be the victims of domestic abuse, by some 13%.

*The above statistics come from Ending Violence against Women and Girls – Home Office 2013 or Women’s Aid (Statistics about domestic violence 2013) or both.*

Ends