Domestic Abuse Bill

Draft letter for individual members or Groups to send to their MP:

Dear

*Personalise the first paragraph. Perhaps thank them for anything they’ve done that you appreciate. Perhaps refer to previous contact you’ve had, or say this is the first time you’ve written to them, because Domestic Abuse is so important to you. State that you live in their constituency.*

I am writing to you in connection with the Domestic Abuse Bill, which as you know has now passed to the House of Lords.

This Bill addresses a major scourge on our society – statistically, 1 in 3 women worldwide will be affected by domestic abuse. *Add in something about why it’s important to you – perhaps you know a family that’s been affected, perhaps it’s because as a Christian you believe everyone is entitled to be treated with dignity and respect and no-one should be faced with any sort of domestic abuse, and if they are they should receive all the support they need; perhaps refer to your interest coming from the fact that you have been supporting the local refuge.*

I am even more concerned because there has been such a significant increase in domestic abuse as a result of the control measures against Covid-19, as has been highlighted in the media, for example, the Panorama programme in August. The World Council of Churches has referred to this as “the second pandemic”.

I am really pleased at how much is covered in the draft Bill, but remain concerned about 2 areas:

* Women with insecure immigration status suffering violence and abuse are routinely refused access to support of any kind, owing to the government’s ‘No recourse to public funds’ (NRPF) policy.  
   It cannot be fair that simply because of their immigration status they are put at such serious risk. In practice it means they are forced to choose between homelessness or destitution on the one hand and returning to the abuser on the other.   
   I feel very strongly that all survivors, regardless of their status, should be entitled to support and protection.This will require the cancellation of the NRPF as it applies to them. There is no moral justification for the current situation.
* The Bill ignores matters of faith. There are two elements that need to be covered. First, the fact that religious beliefs can be used as a justification for domestic abuse, and the sad fact of the potential for spiritual abuse; secondly, the role faith leaders can play in recognising signs of domestic abuse in their communities, and signposting survivors to local services.   
  As a Christian, this makes me sad, and I think it is a wasted opportunity. Although I would prefer the Bill itself to cover these points, at the very least, the Home Office guidance as to how the Bill is put into practice should do so. Some specific suggestions:
* Training should be quickly put in place to enable faith leaders to respond well to suspected domestic abuse in their communities
* Faith literacy training should be made available so that those making decisions and offering support in relation to complaints of domestic abuse are more able to respond appropriately; and
* The Domestic Abuse Commissioner’s Advisory Group, and the Local Partnership Boards, should both include faith representatives.

It is not too late for these matters to be dealt with, and I am therefore asking you to do whatever you can to raise them with your contacts in the Lords, with the Domestic Abuse Commissioner-designate, and with the Home Office. Please let me know what response you receive.

I look forward to hearing from you, and will be most grateful for anything you can do to make the Bill even more supportive of some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

With my best wishes

*Add in your postal address so your MP knows you’re a constituent and therefore they have to respond*