Draft letter for Soroptimist Clubs to send to local MPs

NAME & ADDRESS of Constituency MP

[DATE] 2020

Dear [MP]

**Domestic Abuse Bill – opportunity to strengthen legal protection for those who offend as a result of abuse and coercion**

I am writing on behalf of my local Soroptimists Club to request that you support amendments to the Domestic Abuse bill proposed by the Prison Reform Trust and endorsed by an impressive range of individuals and organisations: <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/WhatWeDo/Projectsresearch/Women/DomesticAbuse>.

Law reform is urgently needed to prevent women being imprisoned for offences linked to their own prior victimisation, which we know is an objective of the government’s Female Offender Strategy. The Domestic Abuse bill provides the ideal opportunity to achieve this but I understand that to date the government is refusing to amend the bill to strengthen protection for those whose offending is driven by abuse.

As explained in the attached short briefing the proposed amendments to the bill would:

 a) create a statutory defence modelled on that which applies to victims of trafficking and

 b) modify the law of self defence akin to the ‘householder defence’.

The links between victimisation and offending are now better recognised but gaps in the criminal law remain and mean women can be unfairly and disproportionately punished – including for acting in self defence. This is a unique opportunity for the government to take action to strengthen the legal protection for women whose offending is driven by abusive and coercive relationships.

We urge you to support these amendments and would also ask that you write on our behalf to the Justice Minister Alex Chalk MP seeking a detailed explanation for the Government’s refusal to adopt them when there is compelling evidence that well over half of women in prison have experienced serious domestic abuse.

Many Soroptimists are involved in supporting local women’s refuges and other women’s services and we are concerned about the continuing shortfall in funding for these vital community services. This has never been more important than during the current pandemic when all the evidence is that whilst most types of crime are falling, violence against women in the home is rising. We support the government’s campaign *You Are Not Alone* but this must be accompanied by funding for community-based women’s services.

Yours etc