

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

30 July 2019

Dear Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP

Re: The collapse in rape prosecutions and need for urgent leadership

We are a national coalition of women's organisations working to end domestic and sexual violence and all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) writing to you regarding new Home Office statistics, which reveal that only one in every 65 cases of rape reported to the Police in England and Wales is now making it to trial. We hope you find this deeply concerning and ask you to require all those with responsibility in this area to take urgent action to change this.

Although you have been Prime Minister for only a few days, you made it a clear priority to tackle sexual violence and other forms of VAWG during your years as London's Mayor. As well as funding new Rape Crisis Centres in the capital, you established the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy in London which crucially enabled criminal justice system leaders to be held to account together, which is what we need now on a national level.

The new Home Office statistics reveal that in the year 2018-19, only 1.5% of rapes reported to the police (886 cases) led to a charge or summons, compared to 14% (4,908 cases) in the year 2015-16¹. This is truly shocking and an observer might say there has been effective decriminalisation of this extremely harmful crime.

Rape is of course, sadly, very common - the ONS estimates that 560,000 women were raped or sexually assaulted last year – and does enormous harm to survivors, their families and the whole community. Justice system failures indicated by the recent Home Office statistics, at a time when more victims than ever before are reporting the crime, are unacceptable. It is now the case that those who will report rape this week stand a less than two per cent 'chance' of going to court, when just four years ago the likelihood was one in seven. We feel that this measure of performance in another area of public service provision would not be tolerated.

We ask you to bring the highest level of leadership to bear on this crisis. We are also writing to your newly appointed Justice and Home Secretaries, and we hope that together you will demand answers

¹ Home Office Crime Outcomes in England and Wales: year ending March 2019 (July 2019)
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/817769/crime-outcomes-hosb1219.pdf

from the leaders of policing, the prosecution service and the courts as to how this has happened on their watch, and set a course for speedy change.

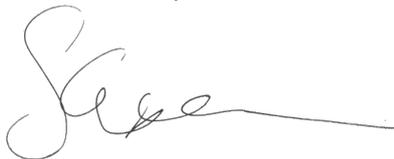
There is an ongoing 'Rape Review' run by the Criminal Justice Board (launched in March this year following earlier revelations on appalling justice outcomes) and whilst the recommendations from the review must be considered in due course, we feel that this new data means highest level political engagement is needed here as a matter of urgency. The review itself also needs to make better use of voluntary sector and survivor group experts who have not yet been consulted in any depth (there has been one meeting of voluntary sector stakeholders since March). At a minimum, we would suggest there are more frequent meetings of the Criminal Justice Board sub-group, which should have Ministerial attendance to signal the importance of, and commitment to urgent improvement in this area.

We urge you to be forensic in asking justice system leaders to report to you on how and why the prosecution figures have fallen off a cliff. For those of us working in the VAWG sector, supporting victims of abuse and campaigning for better law and policy, this is deeply concerning because so much work has gone into challenging the stigma and victim-blaming attitudes to rape in order to enable more survivors to come forward and report. We also know how important it is for victims to have access to specialist support and advocacy during the criminal justice process. We urge you to require those system leaders to tell you what they know about who does and does not report rape, recognising that there are poorer justice outcomes for younger women and girls, BME women, those with insecure immigration status, and those living in poverty, for example.

In addition to this widening justice gap, survivors of rape currently also find it very difficult to access therapeutic support. Fern Champion is a survivor of rape who launched a petition in March this year, calling on the Prime Minister to ensure counselling services are available to rape victims when they need it, after she couldn't get help because of Rape Crisis centre waiting lists which were too long or closed. The petition has been signed by 160,000 people. In April, we met with your Justice Minister Edward Argar MP, alongside Fern, and he reassured us that government is working to find a policy answer. Fern is now keen to meet with you as Prime Minister to explore solutions, and we hope you will consider giving her this opportunity.

We hope you understand why we write to you with an urgent appeal - those of us who have worked in this area for many years, and whose lives are dedicated to supporting survivors, cannot stay silent as the justice system fails to provide an effective deterrent or prosecution record on rape. We look forward to hearing from you and are available to meet with you or your advisors with more data and case examples of what is going wrong.

Yours sincerely,



Sarah Green
Director, End Violence Against Women Coalition