

Home Secretary to introduce 'Kay's Law' reform to better protect victims

New laws to reform pre-charge bail will provide better protection for victims and witnesses in cases of violent and sexual offences, Home Secretary Priti Patel announced today (Thursday 14th January).

The Home Office has published its [response to a consultation on pre-charge bail](#), which allows police to release a suspect from custody subject to conditions, while they gather evidence or await a charging decision.

The new measures will ensure a system where individuals are not held on bail for unreasonable lengths of time, whilst enabling police to impose strict conditions on more suspects in high-harm cases, including most cases of domestic abuse and sexual violence.

The full package of reforms will be named 'Kay's Law' in memory of Kay Richardson, who was murdered by her ex-partner following his release under investigation, despite evidence of previous domestic abuse.

The name 'Kay's Law' also intends to help raise awareness of the new reforms amongst police and the public, and encourage greater use of pre-charge bail where necessary and proportionate, as well as increased engagement with victims.

The measures will be brought before Parliament in a major criminal justice bill, which will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows. The Bill will provide better support and protection to police, create safer communities, and make sure those guilty of heinous crimes spend longer behind bars.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

I can't imagine the pain and suffering of the families of victims like Kay Richardson, and I want them to know their voices have been heard.

Victims and witnesses of the most distressing crimes – including domestic abuse and sexual violence – must be protected while allegations are investigated.

It is my priority to deliver justice for victims and Kay's Law will put victims at the heart of the bail system, empower police to ensure that suspects are closely monitored, and protect the public.

Ellie Butt, Head of Policy at Refuge says:

Refuge is pleased to see the government making changes to pre-charge bail. Far too many survivors of domestic and sexual abuse who bravely report crimes to the police see alleged perpetrators released under investigation, meaning there are no restrictions on contacting the survivor.

This puts many women and children at real risk of harm and is a huge disincentive to reporting. Due to the dynamics of domestic abuse and sexual violence it is vital that bail is used in all cases, we hope these changes will achieve this and will be swiftly passed into law.

The pre-charge bail consultation ran between February and May last year, and received a total of 844 responses from groups including law enforcement, charities and legal bodies.

More than four in five respondents agreed with removing the presumption against pre-charge bail. This presumption has led to large numbers of suspects being released under investigation for lengthy periods, where they are not required to report to police at regular intervals.

Reforms to pre-charge bail timescales will also be introduced, with the initial pre-charge bail period increased from 28 days to three months (90 days), with further extensions requiring sign-off from an inspector or above.

The new timescales will cut red tape for police while also ensuring that individuals are not held on bail for unreasonable lengths of time.

National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Bail Management, Chief Constable Darren Martland said:

We are committed to doing everything we can to protect victims and witnesses as investigations progress.

It's important to ensure bail is properly used to best effect, which includes respecting the rights of suspects and balancing the impact on victims and witnesses.

We will continue to work with the Home Office and College of Policing so that we are striking that balance between protecting vulnerable victims and witnesses while upholding the rights of suspects. Our first priority will always be to keep people safe.

The new measures also come as the Home Office today launches its domestic abuse codeword scheme, to help domestic abuse victims get immediate help from police or other support services. Working with independent pharmacies and Boots pharmacy chains during the new lockdown, the scheme helps ensure victims receive easier access to much needed support from thousands of pharmacies across the UK.