

Press release: Survivors of domestic abuse now able to vote anonymously

The changes will make it easier for an estimated 12,000 survivors of domestic abuse living in refuges to register to vote anonymously as well as those living elsewhere.

The changes will come into force in England, Wales and Northern Ireland tomorrow (8 March) and in Scotland on 1 April.

Survivors of domestic abuse will be able to register to vote without their name and address appearing on the electoral roll and without the fear of their former partners finding their address.

The changes to make it easier for survivors of domestic violence to register to vote anonymously include:

- broadening the professionals able to provide an attestation to include police inspectors, medical practitioners, nurses, midwives and refuge managers.
- expanding the list of court orders to include Domestic Violence Protection Orders and Female Genital Mutilation Orders.

This forms part of the government's commitment to tackle violence against women and girls.

Minister for the Constitution Chloe Smith said:

It's simply unacceptable that fear of revealing their address to an ex-partner has stopped victims of domestic abuse from voting.

Which is why this government took decisive action and is making it easier for those at risk to register and vote anonymously.

I'm proud of how seriously this government is tackling domestic abuse – we have pledged £100 million in dedicated funding until 2020 to tackle violence against women and girls.

Claire Bassett, Chief Executive of Electoral Commission, said:

Everyone should be able to vote safely, no matter what their circumstances, and these important changes are a vital step towards achieving this.

Nurses, midwives and refuge managers will now be able to attest to someone's request to register anonymously; we are working with organisations that support these professions to publish guidance,

to ensure they understand these changes to the law and can support their service users.

Katie Ghose, Chief Executive of Women's Aid, said:

For too long survivors of domestic abuse have been silenced because it was too dangerous for them to sign up to an electoral register, which would reveal their location, and too difficult for them to register anonymously. For them anonymity is a matter of life or death; with the very real threat of being hunted down by the perpetrator.

Following our Right to Vote campaign in partnership with survivor Mehala Osborne, we have worked with the government to bring about decisive action on this issue. We're delighted that on the 100th anniversary of the first British women securing the right to vote, the government will be making it easier for survivors to vote in safety.