

Sturgeon stands by plan to let tagged criminals off the hook

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Nicola Sturgeon has defended her own government's decision not to impose additional punishment on criminals who remove their electronic tags.

Despite pleas from victim support groups, the SNP this week rejected a Scottish Conservative plan to make tampering with a tag a specific offence resulting in stiffer punishment.

It comes as the Scottish Government plans to release more offenders into the community – wearing a tag instead of being sent to prison.

At First Minister's Questions today, Ruth Davidson pointed out there was no additional sanction on those who cut their ankle tag off.

Given their tag is a direct replacement for jail, the Scottish Conservative leader said, removing it is akin to "scaling the prison walls and making a run for it".

In relation to the Management of Offenders (Scotland) Bill, Scottish Women's Aid said: "To be a credible deterrent, breach of electronic monitoring condition must be an automatic criminal offence."

Victim Support Scotland added that such breaches had to be punished "to maintain the trust of victims and the community".

Despite that, today Ms Sturgeon said the bill would "make our country safer" and it was about "smarter justice".

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"The SNP wants to start emptying jails, letting criminals out on tags as a direct alternative to prison.

"That means removing the tag is the equivalent of an inmate scaling the prison walls and making a run for it.

"So quite why the SNP doesn't want to make this an automatic offence is staggering.

"Instead, a criminal who tampers with their electronic tag will get a nice letter asking them to please turn themselves in.

"That doesn't sound like justice to me, and victim charities back that up.

"Victims of crime are being let down by this needlessly soft-touch approach,

and the First Minister owes them an explanation.”