

Thousands could avoid jail under SNP's soft touch justice

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Thousands of criminals could avoid jail if the SNP's presumption against sentences of up to 12 months is passed by the Scottish Parliament today.

It's expected that only the Scottish Conservatives will vote against the statutory instrument in the Scottish Parliament this afternoon with Scottish Labour, Scottish Liberal Democrats and the Scottish Green Party supporting the SNP's soft touch justice agenda.

The latest statistics show that last year 9,500 criminals were sentenced to less than 12 months in jail so, as a result of this vote, there will be a presumption they would remain at large, in the community.

Out of that 9,500, 100 were convicted of attempted murder or serious assault, 98 were sexual offenders and 329 were convicted of handling offensive weapons.

The community justice system is already overstretched – almost a third of community payback orders are not completed and two thirds of drug treatment and testing orders are not completed.

Victims' groups have repeatedly raised concerns about the increased risk to victims, particularly to victims of domestic abuse this presumption poses.

In addition, Lord Turnbull, a former chairman of the **Scottish Sentencing Council**, has stated that since an early guilty plea can lead to a reduction of a third on a sentence, a conviction which should attract an 18 month sentence, could be reduced by an early guilty plea to 12 months.

This would mean that, under the SNP's plan, domestic abusers, child pornographers and those who have attacked emergency workers and police officers could receive community sentences.

The Scottish Conservatives have condemned this policy as the latest SNP soft touch justice tactic which could seriously increase the risk to public safety, and deny justice to victims.

Liam Kerr, Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary said:

"This SNP soft-touch justice tactic could increase the risk to public safety, fail to punish criminals and deny victims justice.

"This SNP policy could let attempted murderers, sexual and violent offenders and those who've attacked emergency workers back out onto the street.

"Victims groups have already warned that this policy could increase risk to victims of domestic abuse.

"The community system is already over-stretched – increasing offender numbers so dramatically could stretch it to breaking point.

"The Scottish Conservatives are the only party completely opposed to this presumption and will continue to stand up for victims and the safety of the public."