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Victims to be given a voice and new rights in Victims Bill

“As a stalking victim, I experienced first-hand a torrent of abuse and re-victimisation at the hands of our Criminal Justice System. I naively believed the system was there to help victims, instead it compounds their trauma. It placed the rights of my stalker above my rights to be protected” said Claire Waxman founder of Voice4Victims.

After a successful campaign, a Bill giving victims of crime enforceable rights, will be introduced in the House of Commons today by Elfyn Llwyd MP with all Party Support.

The Bill was drafted by Claire Waxman and Harry Fletcher of the Digital-Trust. They strongly believe that the strengthening of victims’ rights can only come via robust legislation. *“We have had a victims’ code for over a decade, yet this code is not working effectively to protect victims’ rights. It is routinely ignored and breached with no remedial sanctions. This is evident in the latest victims’ commissioner report, and those that completed our victims’ rights survey in 20141”*, says campaign lead, Claire Waxman.

The campaign’s Victim survey showed communication with victims was consistently poor across all agencies. The CPS, HMCTS, Witness services, CICA, Probation/ Victim Liaison Unit, Parole Board all scored over 50% in the extremely poor category, with Parole board scoring the highest with 67%.

One victim from the survey comment shows the frustration over lack of communications “'my case was dragged out for 18 months before getting to court, longest 18 months of my life. And in the dark for most of that time causing me more trauma'

The campaign team believes that Victims’ Rights should be placed in to statutory legislation and have drafted a bill based on their victims’ survey, current victims’ code, EU Directive and meetings with a number of victims’ organisations and services.

The Bill places a responsibility on the Secretary of State to publish a victim’s legal framework and outlines over 25 specific rights for victims under the following key areas:

1. Advice

2. Treatment

3. Representation

4. Parental rights

5. Vexatious Claims

6. Disclosure

7. Compensation & Costs

The bill also defines an easy route for victims to complain and gain redress through a statutory body; something currently missing with the Victims code.

Claire Waxman *states ‘‘we believe that the bill will help victims’ access justice and will enforce mandatory training of criminal justice and victim support agencies. This bill could create the culture shift needed in order to address the current imbalance of the criminal justice process. ‘*

Harry Fletcher, Criminal Justice Director at the Digital-Trust said “*There is also an urgent need for the establishment of a Professional body to regulate victim services and to have powers to investigate and act on complaints. These suggestions would ensure that proper quality standards were in place and that victims had redress”*

## Notes to the editor:

Clare Waxman and Harry Fletcher are both available for interviews

Contact: Claire Waxman, Voice4Victims e: info@voice4victims.co.uk

Harry Fletcher, Digital-Trust 07860 540145 e:harry@digital-trust.org

## 1 **Victims’ Rights survey:**

* These same agencies scored over 40% in the extremely poor category when victims were asked to score the way these agencies treated them, with Parole board scoring the highest at 59%
* 55% of victims were never informed about criminal injuries compensation
* 44% were never given opportunity to make a victim personal statement
* 64% of victims never received any advice or support on writing their victim personal statements

## **Quotes from Victims Survey**

* I will never forgive the CPS and the Police for the stress they added to my case'
* 'at the trial of my murdered son, I was given a strict warning from the judge not to show any emotion during the 3 and half month trial ..if I had I would have been removed from court instantly'
* 'the offender (murderer of my brother) was remanded to a bail hostel just a few minutes from my home pre-trial. It traumatised me to feel so unsafe'
* 'delays in getting personal property of murder victim when not going to be used in evidence'
* ''all my evidence that I compiled has now been lost by the CPS and without any consideration into the emotional trauma, I have been requested to compile the file again'
* 'the police were cruel and mocked me and the court date was set for 3 days before I was due to give birth. I have since left the country because of our justice system'
* 'My personal information was disclosed to my stalker by criminal justice agencies'
* 'I was advised by police that if i got some actual bruises or injuries from him, that would be better evidence'

## **About Voice4Victims**

*“As a stalking victim, I experienced first-hand a torrent of abuse and re-victimisation at the hands of our Criminal Justice System. I naively believed the system was there to help victims, instead it compounds their trauma. It placed the rights of my stalker above my rights to be protected”.*

*Claire Waxman, founder of Voice4Victims*

The Voice 4 Victims campaign seeks to address the imbalance of equality though enshrining rights of victims in a Victims’ Law. Working with several victims’ organisations and charities, the campaign has amassed substantial evidence about the difficulties and injustices victims face within the criminal justice system. They have also highlighted, and looking to address the legal loopholes within the Civil and Family courts which allow perpetrators direct contact to abuse or harass their victims further.

Together with the expertise of Harry Fletcher, Criminal Justice Director of the Digital Trust and colleague Kate Whaley, MAMAA, a Victim’s Rights Bill was drafted and has now gained cross party support. Claire is optimistic that it will become law and ensure that there is a culture shift towards the treatment and support of victims in this country.

## **About Digital-Trust**

The Digital-Trust is a new not-for-profit organisation that brings technologists together with those professionals working within the criminal justice system and the associated support charities. This new organisation actively campaigns for more responsive legislation for victims of abuse. It also identifies risks and continuously develops new advice, tools and guidance to combat the rapidly escalating problem of digital abuse.