

1 October 2021

Dear Prime Minister and Home Secretary

In recent days, it has become clearer than ever that extending further powers to the police is not the solution to ensuring the safety of our communities. I am therefore writing to you to call for the immediate suspension and withdrawal of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts bill and for increased government investment in services which genuinely protect women, migrants and minority communities.

The freedom of women and minority communities to go about their lives free from the fear of harassment, abuse, and murder is already horrifically curtailed by male violence - whether in the street, the workplace or the home. Yet the primary focus of both the police and the government in response to recent attacks on Sarah Everard and Sabina Nessa has been on what precautions people should take to protect themselves, rather than addressing the root causes of violent behaviour.

The sentencing of a Metropolitan Police Officer for the murder of Sarah Everard and subsequent issue of appalling advice by the Met Police has severely undermined trust in the police and government in relation to their ability to keep women and minority communities safe. Sarah Everard was kidnapped, raped, and murdered by a serving police officer, who falsely arrested her as his means of kidnap. By a serving police officer whose previous crimes had been ignored, and who seems to have been emboldened by male colleagues, with whom he exchanged racist, misogynistic, and homophobic material.

Sadly, though, this is not an isolated incident of male violence within the police, rather the latest example of how the carceral institutions of state are not fit for purpose.

Every week, one woman comes forward to report that they are being seriously abused by their partners – police officers. In the past twelve years, at least 15 women have been killed by police officers. Police are five times more likely to use force against black people than against white people, and eight times more likely to stop and search those from black communities.

It is therefore deeply offensive to suggest, as so many politicians have done, that the way to stop violence and protect communities is to grant the police yet more power and resources.

The response of Ministers and the Met Police over recent days to concerns about policing practices has only deepened the existing mistrust between the police and women, migrants, and minority communities. Suggestions that those approached by a lone police officer should call the police for reassurance, or that women

should hail a bus if they fear they are about to be kidnapped, are frankly insulting. They also fail to acknowledge the deep power imbalance which exists between the police and the public, particularly members of minority groups who may feel less able to challenge inappropriate or dangerous behaviour, or experience further violence for resisting police instructions.

Most concerningly, though, these suggestions show a complete disinterest in eradicating misogyny and male violence from the ranks of the police force.

In short, our current approaches are failing. They are failing to keep people safe, to generate public confidence, and to ensure that all citizens are treated equally with respect and dignity.

If your government has an interest in protecting women and rebuilding trust between the police and communities, then the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill – which further empowers the police and imperils basic civil liberties – must be withdrawn.

But that alone will not be enough. It is also imperative that our police forces adopt a zero-tolerance approach to institutional misogyny, discrimination and violence. It must be the norm that urgent, robust and independent investigations are undertaken where concerns about conduct are raised.

Finally, the government should also use the upcoming Spending Review to commit resources towards services that genuinely protect and support women, migrants and minority communities.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jo Grady". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dr Jo Grady  
UCU general secretary