



## JOINT STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT ALLEGATIONS MADE AGAINST A CONSERVATIVE MP

4<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Given the seriousness of the allegations we're calling on Parliament to suspend the MP arrested on suspicion of rape, pending a full investigation. The House of Commons should be no different from any other workplace. Safety and the safeguarding of staff must be paramount. Failure to suspend is yet another example of minimising violence against women and girls and failure to believe victims and survivors when they bravely speak out. In 2013, statistics bulletin on sexual violence released by the Ministry of Justice, Office for National Statistics and Home Office revealed that only around 15% of those who experience sexual violence report to the police.

#MeToo highlighted how endemic and pervasive sexual harassment and assault still are in workplaces, including Parliament, and that women are the majority of victims. In 2018, a House of Commons report revealed that 19 per cent of Westminster staff had experienced sexual harassment in a single year. Dame Laura Cox's 2018 review, and Fawcett Society's 2019 research into Sexual Harassment in Parliament, demonstrated legislative changes and action by all political parties is urgently needed to make Parliament a safe workplace for women free from the threat of gender based violence and harassment.

In addition to suspension, we are urgently calling for:

- The Conservative Party to **suspend the whip of the MP**. As the EHRC '[Sexual harassment and harassment at work](#)' Technical Guidance makes clear, in a matter as serious as this, it is wholly appropriate for such action to be taken ahead of the conclusion of a criminal investigation.
- The media to respect the alleged **victims' right to anonymity and justice**.
- If the alleged victim works, or previously worked, within the House of Commons, both Parliament and the Conservative Party **must ensure she is being supported by an accredited Independent Sexual Violence Advisor** via the Independent Sexual Misconduct Advisory Service and her union if she is a member of one.
- **Political parties to revise their own internal sexual harassment and complaint policies** to ensure that they are transparent, quick, victim-focused and independent, and cover volunteers, employees and elected and appointed representatives so that sexual harassment is prevented. The parties' own systems for dealing with complaints should be made publicly available and include specific protocols and training for the Whips or Chief Whip on how to respond to disclosures appropriately
- **Parliament to ensure that MPs and volunteers have access to the same legal protections** against sexual harassment as other employees. MPs, Peers and volunteers are not currently protected as they are not employees.

- The Government Equalities Office to publish its response to the consultation on a **new preventative duty to end workplace sexual harassment**.
- The government to **ratify ILO Convention No.190** on eliminating gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work

It is deeply concerning that more than two years after allegations of sexual harassment and assaults in Parliament surfaced that showed there was a culture that allowed bullying, harassment and sexual harassment to thrive, we are still not confident that it is a safe and equal place for women to work. Our Parliamentarians preside over the law on criminal assaults and workplace safety for all of us when their own Houses are not in order. Parliament has made significant progress in introducing a fully independent procedure for complaints, with the final stage voted on in June this year, however, this case clearly shows that party politics is still interfering in justice and fairness. We need these changes now.

Signatories:

Centenary Action Group  
The Fawcett Society  
TUC  
Women's Aid Federation of England  
Prospect Union  
PCS Union  
FDA Union  
Rights of Women  
Unite  
EVAW  
Rape Crisis England and Wales