



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC MP
Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

Our Ref: SO17016

5 August 2021

Dear Robert,

Re: Justice System & Mental Health

I am writing to voice my concern about the fact that many people pass through the justice system without their mental health needs being recognised. While I write in relation to cases brought to me by my constituents, I believe that this is a widespread issue that warrants your attention.

With three quarters of the population reported to suffer from ill mental health, it is crucial that specialist services exist to ensure that people passing through the justice system receive the care and support they need. Though overrepresented in the justice system, individuals with mental health issues are not always identified, nor is the system designed with them in mind. Suspects and defendants with mental ill health need to be better identified and supported to ensure their right to fair trial.

Many people passing through the justice system have backgrounds and circumstances that are highly complex and characterised by multiple disadvantages. Women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds in particular may require a tailored approach to take into account their mental health and wellbeing.

One of my key concerns is that while practitioners in the justice system are making efforts to create an integrated approach to justice and mental health, courts and the legal profession are not being provided with the sufficient training and guidance to enable them to ensure that mental health needs are properly identified and addressed. This prevents the necessary reasonable adjustments from being made. To do this, however, the justice system must be properly resourced and funded.

In light of the above, will you (a) work with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to make provisions to ensure that the justice system and those working within it are better equipped to recognise and react to mental health needs and (b) review the funds allotted to supporting mental health needs within the justice system?

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Olney

Sarah Olney
Member of Parliament for Richmond Park