



Scottish Women's Aid has joined Victim Support Scotland, Rape Crisis Scotland and ASSIST in issuing a statement on the planned Long-term Release of Prisoners in Scotland.

15 August 2024

As leading organisations upholding the rights of victims and witnesses of crime as well as women and girls affected by domestic abuse and gender-based violence in particular, we have come together to share joint concerns regarding proposed changes to the release of long-term prisoners.

In collectively acknowledging the dangers of an overcrowded prison estate, however, we maintain that short-term approaches like these are not the answer.

Specifically, we are concerned about:

Automatic release of long-term prisoners

The proposal is for long-term prisoners to be automatically released after serving two thirds of their sentence (only some terrorist offences, life sentences and extended sentences are excluded). There are no plans to conduct risk assessments for the purposes of determining whether or not a long-term prisoner will be released under these provisions. We note that these proposals would apply to prisoners who have been previously denied parole and would be back-dated to 2016. We therefore have grave concerns about victims' and public safety.

Impact on victim safety

We note with alarm that the only method by which victims would be notified in advance is via the Victim Notification Scheme. We are aware from the independent review published in 2023 that this scheme is fundamentally flawed and there is very low uptake by victims. Given this, we are extremely concerned that there will be no mechanism to ensure safety planning for victims to prepare in advance of long-term prisoner release. Victim Support Organisations hear often of victims coming face to face with their perpetrator having not been informed of their release and the trauma this causes as well as genuine safety issues.

Confidence in the criminal justice system

Victims have often fought long and hard for justice in their case and feel let down when the main driver for change is prison overcrowding with little or no focus on victim rights. Recent figures show a decline in trust and confidence in the justice system and we are concerned that this approach will exacerbate that deterring victims from reporting crimes against them.

Lack of exclusions

Given victims recent experience with Emergency Early Release, we are concerned regarding the lack of exclusions for sexual offences and domestic abuse, and no facility for a Governor Veto. Victim Support Organisations lobbied strongly for the inclusion of a Governor's Veto in the Bail and Release from Custody Act, and this provided a further point at which to check a prisoner's eligibility for

release and the prospect of them going on to cause further harm on release. We fully believe that exclusions should be strengthened and a Governor Veto applied.

We are urging all those who have concerns to complete the consultation, the closing date is the 19th August

[Long-term prisoner release process: consultation – gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/topics/justice/prisoners/long-term-prisoner-release-process/consultation)

Signatories

Victim Support Scotland

Scottish Women's Aid

Rape Crisis Scotland

ASSIST