



21st November 2017

To party leaders in Westminster

We are writing to party leaders and the Speaker in Westminster further to the ongoing revelations of sexual harassment and assaults in British politics. We know that you are committed to tackling this issue and to creating the conditions for change, which must ensure such behaviour is robustly challenged, and that victims have a clear and appropriate route to access support and redress.

The End Violence Against Women Coalition's legal review of Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat party policies on sexual harassment in 2014 found them "hopelessly inadequate". Common to all parties were poor reporting procedures for activists and employees, and weak guarantees that anyone who reported harassment or assault would not face 'victimisation' consequences (this legal review available on request).

The example set by Parliament and political party leaders matters because women in any workplace or social institution should have the right to participate equally and without fear of harassment or assault. It also matters because MPs and those around them determine broader policy on women's equality, and the criminal justice and public services response to violence against women and girls, and it is not credible that this can be done well if political leaders' own 'House' is not in order. What we've heard about in politics unsettlingly resembles the Churches' response to sexual abuse – using victims' loyalty to the institution as an extra layer of pressure not to report so as not to damage the cherished broader 'family'. Political leaders have a responsibility to ensure there is no climate where activists, party members, and employees feel unable to voice concerns or report abuse due to party loyalty.

We hope new procedures will apply to all workers and activists

Recent reports of abuse and harassment across British political parties underline that a radical new approach is needed. The new system must be comprehensive, covering unpaid members and activists as well as those in paid employment in politics working

for elected representatives and in other supporting roles. It stands the best chance of success if new systems and leadership commitments are cross-party.

Independent reporting and adjudication of complaints is essential

We welcome the work which is underway by both party leaders and the Speaker to develop new arrangements both within Parliament and within party political structures. We hope you are consulting with specialist women's sector experts, such as Rape Crisis, as part of your review. We would like to see political parties ensure those who want to report sexual harassment or assault are able to approach an independent third party to do so, and ensure there is credible independent adjudication of complaints. We would ask you to commit to making cast iron guarantees that no worker or activist will face any detrimental consequences for making an allegation of harassment or assault. Receiving and responding to complaints should be positioned at a clear distance from whips and senior party officials.

As party leaders and others who those working in politics look to for leadership, we hope you will send a strong message that roundly rejects misogynistic attempts to undermine revelations of sexual harassment and abuse with the term "witch hunt".

We are in a moment of enormous change – it is clear the revelations that started with women speaking out against Harvey Weinstein and sharing stories with #MeToo have empowered those in many walks of life. We need our political leaders to use this opportunity to not only tackle sexual harassment that occurs on the Parliamentary estate, but beyond, in workplaces and education settings up and down the country (you will know the Department for Education is soon to publish new guidance to schools on their response to sexual harassment and assaults).

Thank you for your attention to our concerns. If you would find it helpful, we are available to discuss any of these issues further and would be happy to introduce you to our members, many of whom run services which support women affected by this behaviour.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Green & Rachel Kryz
Co-Directors, End Violence Against Women Coalition