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Ms Jessica Eagelton

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Dear Ms Eagelton,

Thank you for your letter of 7 February about the Online Safety Bill and ending Violence Against Women and Girls.

Tackling violence against women and girls is a top priority for the Government. On 21st July 2021 we published our new cross-Government Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy to help ensure that women and girls are safe everywhere - at home, online and on the streets.

We are committing to radically changing how we end violence against women and girls with a whole system approach focusing on prioritising prevention, supporting survivors, pursuing perpetrators, underpinned by a stronger system.

We are grateful to you for your additional suggestions on where the Online Safety Bill can be strengthened. We are currently considering the views of the Joint Committee on the Draft Online Safety Bill and will be laying the Bill before Parliament soon. We are committed to continuing to engage stakeholders such as yourself throughout the process of Parliamentary scrutiny to make sure that the Bill is as strong as it can be in terms of tackling serious harms like Violence Against Women and Girls.

As you mention, we have recently announced a new list of priority offences which will be listed on the face of the Online Safety Bill. Adding priority offences to the Bill on introduction provides clarity and places a proactive requirement on all in-scope services to prevent users from encountering illegal content and removing it as soon as they become aware of it. These will include so called "revenge pornography" and other offences relating to sexual images, incitement to and threats of violence, public order offences such as harassment and stalking and sexual exploitation. These offences were selected as there is clear evidence of them occurring online and government believes there are reasonable proactive steps that companies can take to protect their users from harm.

The Government also recently announced that we have accepted the Law Commission's recommendations to introduce three new communications offences, which will be brought into law through the Online Safety Bill. These new offences can more effectively capture a wider range of new harms people are being exposed to on social media and will make it easier to prosecute online abusers. They will address harmful online behaviours such as coercive and controlling behaviour and stalking; and threats to rape, kill and inflict serious

injury, or to cause serious financial harm.

Nonetheless, there is more that needs to be done, which is why we are looking favourably at the Law Commission's recommendations around Cyberflashing, and why the list of priority harms will be updated regularly to keep up with the evolving nature of technology.

J Fanshawe

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