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Rachel Maclean MP  
Minister for Safeguarding  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Dear Rachel Maclean MP, Minister for Safeguarding,

I am writing on behalf of the London Modern Slavery Leads (LMSL) Network, a cohort of professionals representing every council in London and the City of London Corporation to request a meeting to discuss our concerns about Part 5 of the Nationality & Borders Bill.

Whilst we welcome the Bill's stated commitment to tackle slavery, we seek to draw your attention to the Bill's unintended negative consequences on victims of trafficking and slavery in its current form and the impact this may have on local authorities and health services.

To begin, we have concerns about the inclusion of Part 5 in the Bill, as it conflates immigration and modern slavery, despite high numbers of British nationals trafficked within the UK. We also have concerns that Part 5 discourages identification and disclosure, and will not only put additional pressure on local authorities to provide support when victims are disqualified from the NRM, but will increase the number of vulnerable people targeted in our boroughs, and also harm the UK's position as world leaders in the fight to tackle slavery.

**The Bill:**

Unamended, the Bill will penalise victims of slavery entering the UK if they don't reveal they have been enslaved within a set period of time (clause 57 and 58). It will also disqualify from support any victim of modern slavery who is considered to be a '*threat to public order*' (clause 62), when in reality we are concerned this will disqualify from support anyone who has a criminal record.

**Risks include:**

- Victims of slavery often don't self-identify or reveal their exploitation until trust has been garnered. Police, medical and even Conservative Party research evidences that it can take approximately 2 years for disclosure. We have found this in our own experience as Safeguarding and Community Safety professionals – we will often encounter someone we believe to have been exploited but they do not immediately disclose their experience, often due to fear of their trafficker, fear of authorities or due to the impact of trauma. This is similar to our extensive experience of responding to domestic abuse over the years, where it is well accepted that time is needed for disclosure.
- The definition of *threat to public order* within the Bill casts a far wider net than intended. It would include victims of slavery convicted of minor offences such as damage to property, or even offences committed under duress in slavery. It will also include British victims and children. As representatives of councils in London, we know how rife 'county lines' and criminal exploitation of British children and vulnerable adults is. Traffickers target the most vulnerable in our society – care leavers, adults with

substance misuse or homeless people – and take advantage of this. These individuals should not be excluded from support because they have criminal records. We value the work of the NRM and its support providers and feel the removal of this support from some of our most vulnerable residents could prove damaging.

**Consequences:**

- The Bill sends a message to victims that if they have missed an early opportunity to disclose their trafficking experience, or if they have entered the country clandestinely, their credibility will be damaged and they may not be offered support. This encourages victims not to disclose, instead remaining in exploitation or refusing to enter the NRM which leaves local authorities to find appropriate provision.
- Furthermore, the Bill sends a message to traffickers that they are free to exploit people with criminal records as they'll no longer qualify for help. This could lead to a **catastrophic increase in county lines and child criminal exploitation**, with traffickers knowing once they've forced a young person to commit a crime, they will not ask for help as they are unlikely to receive it. It also means **less prosecutions** for trafficking offences as there is no incentive for victims trapped in criminal exploitation to come forward, which means **more traffickers free to operate in our boroughs**.

**What this means for councils:**

- Tightening restrictions on access to the NRM (such as higher threshold for reasonable grounds decision, damage to credibility due to late disclosure and disqualification from protection due to criminal record) could mean less people are supported through the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC), currently held by The Salvation Army. As you know, under the MSVCC, victims are entitled to safe house accommodation, subsistence rates, a support worker, access to legal advice and healthcare. If victims of modern slavery are not able to access the MSVCC, it could lead to an increase in victims, (both British and foreign nationals) seeking this support from councils.
- The implications around making a criminal record a barrier to the NRM is likely to mean vulnerable people with a criminal record could be targeted more for exploitation as the exploiters know they will no longer be able to access protection. This could also lead to the increase in modern slavery crimes, requiring more resources from councils and putting vulnerable residents at greater risk.

Caroline Nokes MP, speaking of the Bill as a whole said it *"might place further burdens"* on local authorities and we are concerned about this too. Despite having statutory duties under the Modern Slavery Act 2015, Care Act 2014 and homelessness code of guidance, local authorities are already under-resourced to respond to modern slavery. We are concerned that with less victims accessing support through the MSVCC, this will put even further pressure on our already stretched services.

Dame Sara Thornton DBE QPM, the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, in response to clause 63 which could limit MSVCC support to specific needs that arise as a result of a victim's trafficking experience said, *"It is therefore essential that the Home Office works alongside other safeguarding partners, including local authority adult social care departments, to offer a partnership approach to supporting victims and survivors that aims to address vulnerability and deliver longer-term positive outcomes."* We would therefore welcome the opportunity to work with you to discuss our concerns and how proposed amendments to the Bill could alleviate these.

Yours sincerely



Sharon Burgess

Chair of the London Modern Slavery Leads Network (Head of Safeguarding Adults and Quality for the London Borough of Enfield)