

**Cross Party Group on Women
Women and the justice system
Friday 17 March 2023, via Zoom, 11:30-12:30**

Attendees:

Sian Gwenllian MS
 Rhianon Bragg (Speaker)
 Joanne Starbuck, Cardiff Women’s Aid
 Sarah Thomas, New Pathways
 Jackie Jones, Women in Europe (Wales)
 Jane Fenton-May, Wales Assembly of Women
 Nancy Lidubwi, Bawso
 Leila Usmani, Race Alliance Wales
 Carwen Wynne Howells
 Leanne Waring, CAVC
 Emma Hall, Chwarae Teg
 Bethan Sayed, Climate Cymru
 Allie Iftikhar, Welsh Women’s Aid
 Tomos Evans, Chwarae Teg
 Megan Thomas, Disability Wales
 Christina Tanti, Race Equality First
 Alison Parken, Cardiff Business School
 Carol Harris, Hafan Cymru
 Jessica Laimann, WEN Wales
 Sioned Williams, WEN Wales
 Joy Matibiri, WEN Wales

Apologies:

Janet Finch-Saunders MS
 Llyr Gruffydd MS
 Delyth Jewell MS
 Sarah Murphy MS
 Jane Dodds MS
 Sioned Williams MS
 Emma Henwood, Sports Wales
 Abi Thomas, Plaid Cymru
 Dr Rachel Minto

<p align="center">1</p>	<p>Welcomes, Apologies, Introduction – Chair</p> <p>Sian Gwenllian MS welcomed everyone and announced that the meeting would focus on women and their experiences in the justice system. Rhianon Bragg, a domestic abuse survivor, would share her experience on how she was let down by the justice system in Wales.</p>
<p align="center">2</p>	<p>How the justice system fails survivors of domestic abuse, Rhianon Bragg</p> <p>Rhianon detailed how she was harassed, stalked, coerced for five years by her ex partner and it had been nine years since the abuse started. During this time, she had been let down by the criminal justice system on numerous occasions. She had been refused a Clare’s Law check and despite the perpetrator’s threatening behaviour towards her and her children, the police returned guns to him, putting Rhianon and her children at danger. She had filed more than 24 complaints and was misinformed of her rights, including being told she was unable to appeal. Additionally, a psychologist’s report detailing the impact of the trauma on her and her children, was incorrectly shared with the perpetrator and his solicitor which she fears would be used against her.</p>

	<p>Rhianon shared a number of recommendations of what needed to change within the criminal justice system to ensure other survivors would be spared such an experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The loss of a ‘shoulder shrugging’ attitude within the entire system, domestic abuse and stalking should be taken more seriously, especially by senior police officers and in the courts; • Better communication sharing between departments and with victims, informing them of their rights; • All staff should be appropriately trained and take a trauma-informed approach; • Misogyny within the criminal justice system must be eliminated; • Magistrate court officials must be trained to deal with domestic abuse and stalking; • Recognise the specific nature of domestic abuse and stalking in rural settings; • Ensure an effective support system is available for survivors and their families; • Devolution of justice and policing to Wales to ensure a joint-up approach; • A Victim’s Commissioner for Wales <p>As an overarching recommendation, the criminal justice system should be designed to prioritise protecting the rights of survivors rather than those of the perpetrators, which is what currently seems to be the case.</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>Discussion and questions from attendees</p> <p>The Chair and attendees thanked Rhianon Bragg for her powerful presentation and raised several questions and comments:</p> <p>Sian Gwenllian noted that a victim-led approach would be vital to ensure a cultural, systemic change within the criminal justice system. She expressed the need for devolution in order to deliver this in a joint-up manner.</p> <p>Jessica Laimann stated that writing letters to ministers, as well as police and crime commissioners would be a way of implementing action.</p> <p>Jackie Jones highlighted the fact that there will be Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May 2024, and noted that it would be a good idea to get candidates in and ask them to support this.</p> <p>Megan Thomas raised the additional challenges disabled women were experiencing due to a lack of accessible refuge spaces and perpetrators sometimes being their carers.</p> <p>Bethan Sayed suggested that Rhianon’s evidence for the need to devolve justice and policing to Wales should be shared with the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales.</p> <p>It was suggested that a further meeting could focus specifically on probation. Rhianon added that the probation service was underfunded, over-stretched and failing, as the constant re-offending by perpetrators illustrate.</p>

	<p>Leila Usmani highlighted the importance of considering the experiences of ethnic minority women and of taking an intersectional approach. There was currently a super-complaint underway on how the police deal with the sexual abuse of women from ethnic minority backgrounds, and those at risk of honour-based abuse.</p> <p>Allie Iftikhar noted that the survivor network at Welsh Women’s Aid echo the concerns regarding the justice system voiced at the meeting.</p> <p>Alison Parker noted that Cardiff University have started looking more into domestic violence, sexual harassment and misogyny and are planning on having a conference in September. She welcomed any suggestions for speakers and topics to be discussed during the conference.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Update from the Women in Europe (Wales) Group – Jackie Jones</p> <p>Jackie Jones highlighted the potentially devastating impact of the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill on the protection of women’s rights and gender equality in the UK and Wales. The Bill proposed a “cliff edge” by 31 December 2023, which meant hard-won protections related to equal pay, family-friendly policies, pregnancy and part-time working could be lost over night.</p> <p>In terms of progress within the EU, the Women on Company Boards directive was a vital tool for the influence of women to encourage institutional and systemic change.</p> <p>The Draft Directive on Combatting Gender Based Violence and Domestic Abuse was progressing, which was a huge step forward after years of blocking.</p> <p>A draft directive on Equal Treatment concerned with updating policy was currently being blocked but had been taken to the European Parliament.</p> <p>The Council of Europe and the EU had looked at trafficking provisions since the new “Illegal Immigration Bill” had shifted the focus away from the protection and safeguarding of trafficking victims to the traffickers. This was damaging as it undermined fundamental human rights. Nancy Lidubwi argued that the negative impact of the ‘illegal immigration bill’ on women trafficked into the UK could already been seen.</p> <p>Jessica Laimann expressed that due to the serious impact of the retained EU law on women workers’ rights, it may be a useful to write letters to Westminster detailing such concerns.</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>AOB</p> <p>Date of the next meeting: 9 June 2023. It was suggested that the meeting could consider the Retained EU Law Bill and its impact on women.</p>
<p>6</p>	<p><i>Close</i></p>