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Dear Matthew,

I hope that you are enjoying your role at the Home Office, and I look forward to working with you closely in my position as the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales.

I wanted to bring to your attention some issues regarding the Home Office's process for consultation on issues relating to domestic abuse and the challenges faced by disabled representatives with regards to accessibility issues.

A key element of my role as Commissioner is to ensure that the needs and experiences of all survivors of domestic abuse are reflected in service provision and national policy making. This includes disabled survivors of domestic abuse, who often face exclusion from mainstream services and for whom we know there is very limited specialist provision to meet their needs.

It is therefore of the upmost importance that disabled survivors and the specialist services that work with them are able to contribute to government policy making on an equal footing.

I wanted to bring to your attention an event that took place on 29th October. The meeting was a thematic sub-group on disability for the statutory guidance for the Domestic Abuse Bill, hosted by the Domestic Abuse Team at the Home Office. A representative from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's office was present at this meeting. These problems have also been raised with me by a number of representatives from the domestic abuse sector. There were several issues that meant that the session was inaccessible to deaf and disabled sector colleagues who were representing the needs of disabled survivors of domestic abuse:

- The meeting was scheduled at very short notice, with some colleagues only given three working days' notice. This made it very difficult for deaf and disabled colleagues to arrange communication support. We have been

advised that a minimum of two to three weeks' notice is required, especially in the current context when many interpreters and palantypists are booked weeks ahead.

- The use of Skype for Business rather than Zoom or Microsoft teams meant that the meeting was not accessible for deaf and disabled attendees. I recommend that the Home Office roll out Microsoft teams as a matter of urgency to resolve this problem. As an arm's length body of the Home Office, my office is also only able to use Skype for Business, impacting our ability to make our work accessible to disabled colleagues.
- The Home Office did not provide an Easy to Read or larger font version of the statutory guidance.
- It should be noted that the Home Office officials who ran the meeting were clearly trying to facilitate the needs of disabled attendees, and this is no reflection on individual members of staff. However, it was clear that they were restricted in what they were able to do as a result of a lack of specialist training and they were hampered by the limitations of Home Office technology.

While this is only one example, these problems are reflective of wider consultation processes at the Home Office and across a number of central government departments.

I am clear that it is the Home Office's intention to work closely with and consult the domestic abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls sector. I would like to reiterate my praise of the Domestic Abuse Team at the Home Office, who I know are working extremely hard to ensure that the views of all domestic abuse survivors are represented both in the emergency planning for the Covid-19 pandemic as well as in longer term strategic work.

I therefore strongly recommend that the Home Office invest in specialist training and the resources needed to facilitate meaningful and inclusive consultation processes. Strong senior leadership is needed by the Home Office and across Government on the importance of meaningful engagement with disabled representatives; a small investment of time and money will go a long way in addressing the issues set out in this letter.

I am happy to assist you in any way to support our shared aim that disabled voices are fully represented in policy development.

Nicole Jacobs

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicole Jacobs". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales