

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP

Home Secretary
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CC:

Kit Malthouse MP, Minister for Crime and Policing
Victoria Atkins MP, Minister for Safeguarding
Roger Hirst, Association of Police and Crime Commissioners Lead for Prevention
Martin Hewitt, National Police Chiefs Council Chair

18 June 2021

Dear Home Secretary

Safer Streets Funding and 'Safer Streets – Your Voice' Online Pilot

We are writing with regards to the recently published funding guidance for Round Three of your department's Safer Streets Fund. As this prospectus rightly recognises, violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a political and social priority and a fundamental violation of the human rights of women and girls in our country. Action and resources to tackle the root causes of male violence – gender inequality, discrimination, and the sexism and misogyny that women and girls face every day – is urgently needed. However we are seriously concerned that the design of this fund will do very little to tackle male violence and increase women's safety, and could in fact cause further harm.

Firstly, the list of VAWG crime types that will be in scope for funding does not adhere to international or the government's own definitions of VAWG and ignores the realities of women's complex and interlinked experiences of abuse, assault and harassment. The types of crimes women experience 'in a public space' cannot be isolated into separate categories in this way; they exist alongside, for example, trafficking, exploitation, online harm, domestic abuse, forced marriage, so called 'honour based' abuse, FGM, immigration abuse and other forms of VAWG which disproportionately impact Black and minoritised women and girls.

Professor Liz Kelly's seminal research has shown clearly that VAWG is underpinned by women's inequality, male power and control and have shared impacts on women's lives – threatening their safety, limiting their agency and action, and causing physical and psychological harm. It is not possible to prevent and eradicate this continuum by targeting specific and isolated crime types.

Secondly, the 'public spaces' defined in the funding guidance are extremely limited and again disregard women's lived experiences. Whilst we appreciate the focus of the funding is on the public realm, responses to improve women's safety cannot ignore that harassment and abuse may start in a shop, restaurant, bar or nightclub and then 'spill out' onto the streets. Women and girls may experience stalking and harassment at a workplace or in their school, college or university which then continues when they leave or use public transport, or vice versa. A woman experiencing domestic abuse does not only experience that in her own home, and interventions in public spaces can therefore be life-saving.

The types of VAWG and public spaces which are 'in scope' for funding therefore ignore the reality of women's experiences and will not target the vast majority of male perpetrators. We note the focus on bids being 'data driven' and building an evidence base in what works in prevention, but the criteria for the funding itself is not based on evidence. We know that women and girls are at greatest risk of harm from the men they know; the Crime Survey for England and Wales in 2017 and 2020 found that for 85% of women raped, the perpetrator was a partner, ex-partner, family

member or other known acquaintance. Almost half of adult female homicide victims in 2020 were killed in a domestic homicide. Tackling male violence requires targeting intimate partners and family members, work colleagues, teachers, police officers, others in positions of authority, neighbours and community members. The eligibility criteria means that the Fund is highly likely to attract ineffective bids and responses, which target a very narrow proportion of perpetrators and fail to increase women's safety and protection.

There is a welcome focus on supporting innovation, and working with local VAWG stakeholders, within the prospectus, but we do not understand how inventive and effective partnership approaches would be delivered within the extremely limited funding criteria. We fear that, as a result, we are likely to see the majority of funds invested in street lighting, CCTV and narrow public awareness campaigns which will only target a small proportion of perpetrators and fail to positively impact the majority of women and girls.

We also have serious concerns regarding the proposed online pilot 'Safer Streets – Your Voice'. The prospectus details how the pilot will "allow women and girls, and other members of the public, quickly and easily to pinpoint locations where they feel unsafe and the reason for this." However, it is unclear what equalities assessment has been done regarding this reporting mechanism to ensure there is no disproportionate negative impact on Black, minoritised and marginalised people.

It is our concern that this 'pinpointing' of locations where members of the public feel unsafe would reflect stigma, myths and stereotypes that individual members of the public might hold that are rooted in intersecting structural inequalities such as racism, xenophobia and classism. This in turn would very likely result in the disproportionate targeting of areas, where there are significant populations of Black, minoritised and marginalised communities.

Furthermore, we are concerned that this online pilot would add to the over-policing and disproportionate surveillance of Black, minoritised and marginalised communities which would not do anything to tackle the gender inequalities driving male violence. We urge you to reconsider this pilot and work with experts in the VAWG sector to ensure that the over-policing and surveillance of minoritised communities, which undermines Black and minoritised women and girls' confidence in reporting to the police, is not exacerbated.

We hope you will respond to these concerns, and amend the definitions of VAWG and public spaces within the funding guidance as soon as possible, to ensure this funding can provide the best possible framework for preventing male violence in public spaces. If the criteria is not amended, we are concerned the government will commit significant levels of public expenditure to approaches that uphold antiquated and inaccurate myths about women's safety and are ineffective in changing men's behavior. As you will appreciate, such funds would be far better spent on tackling the funding crisis that specialist VAWG services across the country continue to face.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter and, given the short time-frame for applying for this funding, we hope to receive your response to our concerns soon.

Yours sincerely

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Andrea Simon, Director, End Violence Against Women Coalition
Sara Kirkpatrick, Chief Executive, Welsh Women's Aid
Jayne Butler, CEO, Rape Crisis England & Wales
Ruth Davison, CEO, Refuge
Dr Nicola Sharp-Jeffs OBE, CEO, Surviving Economic Abuse
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