

Rt Hon James Cleverly MP

Home Secretary

Rt Hon Alex Chalk KC MP

Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

Cc:

Laura Farris MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice

Felicity Buchan MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Housing and Homelessness)

Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP, Chair, Women and Equalities Select Committee

20 March 2024

Dear Secretary of States,

“We cannot keep up with increasing demand and staff are working non-stop and beyond working hours to support women. This is leading to burnout.”

We are writing to you with our severe and urgent concerns about recruitment and retention in the violence against women and girls (VAWG) sector. We are urging you to establish an independent task force to tackle this crisis.

The enclosed paper sets out the scale of the challenge specialist VAWG organisations are currently facing with recruiting and retaining the expert staff needed to provide holistic, trauma-informed, specialist support to women and girls. As you will be aware, specialist VAWG organisations have long faced a funding crisis which is resulting in many survivors unable to access the life-saving support they need. This acutely impacts services led ‘by and for’ Black and minoritised women, Deaf and disabled women and LGBT+ survivors, which must recruit from a smaller candidate pool, and the groups that need their expert support.

These long-term trends have been compounded by the cost of living crisis and rapid inflation, which means salaries in the VAWG sector do not reflect the expertise required to undertake this complex, challenging work. As women make up the overwhelming majority of our workforce, we have been severely impacted by the current economic climate – with women working in VAWG services unable to manage on existing salaries but women’s organisations often unable to increase their wages. In some cases, staff are being forced to rely on foodbanks.

As we are sure you will appreciate, this is unsustainable. Vacancies and in delays in recruitment are highly common. Women are leaving our sector to seek higher pay, a trend compounded by the more attractive, and increasingly prevalent, ‘in-house’ roles within statutory services. This creates a vicious cycle, as the staff who remain are having to support more women experiencing violence and abuse, with less resource. Burnout and trauma are the result.

We have welcomed the government’s £76million in funding for community organisations impacted by the cost of living, which organisations in the VAWG sector have accessed, alongside existing investment in support services within the VAWG Strategy and Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan. However we are aware that this funding needs to be spent in the

current financial year, which fails to resolve the underlying and deep-seated problems underlying this crisis – particularly short term, undervalued contracts, with zero inflationary increases, which are the norm for VAWG services and are leading to significant vacancies, high staff turnover and severe challenges in meeting demand. With local authorities across the country making significant budget reductions in order to avoid issuing a section 114 notice, the problem is only set to worsen.

We know that government, and statutory services, rely on the VAWG sector to deliver expert, life-saving support to women and girls across the country. We are sounding a warning that, without urgent action, our future is at risk. The Home Office, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Ministry of Justice as well as the devolved Welsh Government are all committed to ensuring survivors of VAWG can access the support they need, but we are clear that this will not be delivered without a response to this workforce crisis. We therefore urge you to fund the independent taskforce called for in the attached paper, which must be chaired by an independent VAWG expert and meaningfully involve the specialist VAWG sector, and to listen to its recommendations.

We hope you will contact Sophie Francis-Cansfield, Head of External Affairs at Women's Aid (s.francis-cansfield@womensaid.org.uk) to discuss this recommendation in further detail.

Yours sincerely,

Farah Nazeer, CEO, **Women's Aid Federation of England**

Andrea Simon, Executive Director, **End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW)**

Vivienne Hayes, CEO, **Women's Resource Centre**

Ghadah Alnasseri and Mary Clark, Co-executive directors, **Imkaan**

Sara Kirkpatrick, CEO, **Welsh Women's Aid**

Ciara Bergman, CEO, **Rape Crisis England and Wales**

Jo Todd CBE, CEO, **Respect**

Suzanne Jacob OBE, CEO, **SafeLives**

Abigail Ampofo, Interim CEO, **Refuge**

Richinda Taylor, CEO, **EVA Women's Aid**

Jennifer Calverley, CEO, **The Elm Foundation**

Sarah Hill, CEO, **IDAS (Independent Domestic Abuse Services)**

Dr Shonagh Dillon LLB DCrimJ, CEO, **Aurora New Dawn**

Elizabeth McGarry, Centre Manager, **Sutton Women's Centre**

Jan Tasker, Co-CEO, **Collaborative Women UK**

Dr Rachel Duncan, Chief Executive, **NDAS**

Joyce Simon, CEO, **Anah Project**

Jo Gough, CEO, **RISE**

Tracy Mahoney, CEO, **Pandora Project**

Khaldha Manzoor, CEO, **Rochdale Women's Welfare Association**

Angie Airlie, CEO, **Stay Safe East**

Hollie Venn, Chief Executive, **Sheffield Women's Aid**

Claire Lambon, CEO, **Stop Domestic Abuse**

Kirsten Melbourne, Interim CEO, **VOICES Bath**

Denise March-Palmer, Interim CEO, **Stepping Stones Luton**

Mandy Green, Head of Services, **Nottinghamshire Women's Aid Ltd**

Sophie McGoff, CEO, **Women's Aid Leicestershire Ltd.**

Yvette Hazelden, Strategic and Development Lead, **Look Ahead**

Lesley Storey, CEO, **My Sisters Place**

Paula Nolan, CEO, **Liverpool Domestic Abuse Service**

Souad Talsi MBE, Founder and Interim CEO, **Al Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre**

Janet Dalrymple, CEO, **Safer Places**

Mollin Delve, CEO, **P.H.O.E.B.E.**

Amy Roch, Interim CEO, **Galop**

Sawsan Salim, Director, **Kurdish and Middle Eastern Women's Organisation**

Michelle Blunsom MBE, CEO, **East Surrey Domestic Abuse Services**

Sara Britnell, CEO, **Wycombe Women's Aid**

Yasmin Khan, CEO, **Staying Put**

Maureen Connolly, CEO, **Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid**

Angie Herrera, Director, **Latin American Women's Aid**

Gail Heath, CEO, **Pankhurst Trust (incorporating Manchester Women's Aid)**

Anthea Sully, Chief Executive, **White Ribbon UK**

Liz Mack, CEO, **Advance**

Lizzie Matthews, CEO, **West Cornwall Women's Aid**

Emma Lingley-Clark, Interim CEO, **Suzy Lamplugh Trust**

Becky Rogerson, Director, **Wearside Women In Need**

Sarbjit Ganger, Director, **Asian Women's Resource Centre**

Selma Taha, Executive Director, **Southall Black Sisters (SBS)**

Heidi Riedel, CEO, **Woman's Trust**

Nahar Choudhury, CEO, **Solace**

Yasmin Rehman, CEO, **Juno Women's Aid**

Karen Hague MBE, CEO, **Vida Sheffield**

Karen Lewis, Director of Client Services and Deputy CEO, **Jewish Women's Aid**

Gisela Valle, Director, **Latin American Women's Rights Service**

Diana Nammi, Executive Director, **IKWRO - Women's Rights Organisation**

Indy Cross, Chief Executive, **Agenda Alliance**

Medina Johnson, CEO, **IRISi**

Claire Bennett, CEO, **PAC – Be Free**