



Andy Slaughter MP
Chair of the Justice Select Committee
House of Commons
London
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10 February 2025

Dear Andy,

COHABITATION & HUMANIST WEDDINGS

Thank you for your letter of 21 January regarding cohabitation and humanist weddings. I am grateful that you have taken the time to write to me on these important issues and would be happy to provide you with an update in relation to both.

Cohabitation

The Government shares concerns about the limited existing protections for cohabiting couples, which you set out in your letter. It is particularly concerning that the weaknesses of these protections disproportionately affects the vulnerable, including survivors of domestic and economic abuse, and women, who are often the financially vulnerable party in a relationship due to losing income to take on childcare responsibilities. Of working families, 3% of women (compared to 44% of men) were employed full-time with their partner employed part-time¹. I was pleased to be able to attend the roundtable which you hosted last November to discuss some of these issues in greater detail. It was very helpful and informative to hear the discussion from members of Resolution, Parliamentarians and academics.

For the reasons set out above, the Government made its manifesto commitment to 'strengthen the rights and protections available to women in cohabiting couples'. We are working at pace to ensure delivery of this commitment.

In answer to your specific questions:

Do you share the previous Government's view that reform to the law surrounding cohabiting couples cannot proceed until existing work on the law of marriage and divorce is concluded?

We do not share the previous Government's view that cohabitation reform must wait until work on marriage and divorce law have both concluded. Protecting those who would benefit from cohabitation reform is of utmost importance, and I would like to assure both you and the

¹<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/familiesandthelabourmarketengland/2021>

Committee that we have no plans to delay our progress on delivering cohabitation reform because of our work both in relation to marriage law and divorce law (including responding to the Law Commission's recently published scoping paper on the law of financial remedies on divorce).

What is the Government's current timeframe for implementing its commitment to strengthening the rights and protections available to women in cohabiting couples?

We are working hard on delivering our manifesto commitment and I am happy to share that we plan to issue a formal consultation as a next step later this year in order to build public consensus on what cohabitation reform should look like.

Humanist Weddings

I fully recognise humanists' strength of feeling about humanist weddings, and I know humanists have long-campaigned for legal recognition of their weddings. Humanists have often been at the forefront of the fight for social justice in our society, seeking to make our nation and our communities fairer and advocating for mutual respect.

When does the Government intend to respond to the Law Commission's report on 'Celebrating Marriage: A New Weddings Law'? In particular, what is the Government's position on future reform to Humanist marriages?

It is a matter of frustration that the previous Government chose to ignore the Law Commission's report on 'Celebrating Marriage: A New Weddings Law'. The Law Commission concluded that weddings law is not working for couples belonging to many different groups, and that it is unfair and inconsistent. As a new government it is therefore right that we give this lengthy report proper and careful consideration. I am sure you will agree that marriage will always be one of our most important institutions, and we have a duty to consider any changes, including humanist marriages, very carefully. We are continuing to actively work on this and will set out a public position in the coming months.

Thank you again for getting in touch. I hope this letter has been helpful in setting out my views.

Kind regards,



LORD PONSONBY OF SHULBREDE