



# Joint Committee on Human Rights

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From Rt Hon Harriet Harman MP, Chair

**Rt Hon Jacob Rees-Mogg MP**

Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons

By email.

29 March 2021

Dear Jacob,

## **Scrutiny of Bills by the Joint Committee on Human Rights**

I am writing on behalf of the Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) to ask you to ensure that, when scheduling second reading debates for Government bills with potentially significant human rights implications, you allow sufficient time for the JCHR to consider and then report. I would suggest at least one week is the time which is necessary. When it comes just a few days after a bill is published the second reading ends up going ahead without the House having the benefit of JCHR's considered and expert view on any human rights concerns.

The JCHR was established to consider matters relating to human rights in the United Kingdom and since its creation in 2001 has scrutinised bills which raise human rights issues. It reports whether, in its opinion, any provisions of a bill are likely to raise questions of compatibility with Convention rights within the meaning of Section 1 of the Human Rights Act 1998. Our work is thorough and guided by the expertise of legal experts from within the House and beyond.

However, our ability to conduct this work on behalf of the House is hampered when the Government leaves little time between the initial legislative stages in the House of Commons.

For example, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill—a very complex and wide-ranging bill with implications for a range of Convention rights—was introduced on Tuesday 9 March, with the second reading debate only four sitting days later on Monday 15 March.

Parliament must be given sufficient time between the first reading of a Government Bill and the second reading debate for the JCHR to be able to meet to consider whether the legislation is likely to give rise to concerns and to report in order to inform the House before Second Reading .

I am therefore asking the Government to have much greater regard for the important work of the JCHR when scheduling stages of future bills, particularly where it is clear that new legislation is likely to engage Convention rights.

Yours sincerely,

**Rt Hon Harriet Harman QC MP**

Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights