Justice Committee

Jake Richards MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Ministry of Justice

By email only

17 September 2026

Dear Jake,

EXTENSION OF THE USE OF PAVA (INCAPACITATION SPRAY) IN YOUTH OFFENDING INSTITUTIONS

Thank you for your letter informing the Committee of the Government's decision to extend the use of PAVA (incapacitation spray) in under-18 Youth Offending Institutions for a further 12 months.

As you will be aware, the Justice Select Committee is conducting an inquiry on Children and Young Adults in the Secure Estate. As part of this inquiry, several witnesses told us in their written evidence that they disagreed with the Government's initial decision to roll out the use of PAVA and called for its use to be withdrawn. We recently took oral evidence from the Children's Commissioner, the Youth Justice Board and the Youth Justice Legal Board. They all expressed their dismay at the Government's decision to extend the use of PAVA.

Whilst you have stated that the Government is aware of potential issues of disproportionality, the Alliance for Youth Justice has stated that to date, no data has been made publicly available regarding the demographic of the children PAVA spray has been used against. Furthermore, the Independent Restraint Review Panel found that "around half of the deployments we reviewed were judged either to not meet the

policy guidance or we were unable positively to satisfy ourselves from the information available to us that the guidance had been satisfied".

I invite you to answer the following questions:

1. Despite the use of PAVA being available, high levels of violence remain in youth offending institutions. Does this suggest that PAVA is ineffective?
2. Given the worrying findings of the Independent Restraint Review Panel, why was the decision made to extend the rollout of PAVA?
3. Will you publish the data for how many times PAVA was used since its rollout, and the demographic data for these instances?
4. When will the findings of the Government's full review into the use of PAVA be published?
5. How does the Government intend to achieve its long-term ambition of significantly reducing the use of force across the youth secure estate?

Yours sincerely,

Catherine Atkinson

Catherine Atkinson MP

Chair

Justice Committee