



Women and Equalities Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

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From Caroline Nokes MP, Chair

Rt Hon Jacob Rees-Mogg MP
Leader of the House of Commons
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

30 June 2021

Dear Jacob,

Ministerial attendance at Committee meetings

I am writing to express my concern about the approach being taken by GEO Ministers to the Women and Equalities Committee and its essential scrutiny work. We have become increasingly frustrated by a lack of positive engagement from Ministers and have experienced difficulty when seeking ministerial attendance at our evidence sessions.

The Committee has been undertaking a large inquiry into Reform of the Gender Recognition Act, to which it received over 2000 pieces of written evidence. Since the Minister for Women and Equalities made a statement on the policy area in September, the GEO has made a number of further policy announcements that will significantly affect the lives of Trans people in the UK. It was extremely important for us to hear from a Government Equalities Minister at the final evidence session of the inquiry, to allow us for proper scrutiny of Government policy. Despite us contacting Rt Hon Liz Truss, the Minister for Women and Equalities, two months prior to the session, she declined the invitation and forwarded it onto the Minister for Equalities, Kemi Badenoch MP, who also repeatedly declined our invitation. Whilst Minister Badenoch informed us that the Government was represented at the evidence session by Minister Jo Churchill from the Department of Health and Social Care, Minister Churchill was understandably unable to answer key questions on equalities issues given it was outside her remit.

As I have already stated, this is not an isolated example of the GEO's refusal to engage with the Committee. We were unable to agree any suitable dates for the Minister for Women or Minister for Equalities to give evidence as part of our inquiry into the GEO, despite giving three months' notice of the session and offering six alternatives. Furthermore, no GEO minister was available to attend the final session of our inquiry into Body Image.

The continued lack of engagement from GEO Ministers shows a worrying lack of respect for Parliament. It is limiting our ability to scrutinise Government effectively and positively contribute to the policy development process. Furthermore, under the Ministerial Code, Ministers of the

Crown have a duty to Parliament to account, and be held to account, for the policies, decisions and actions of their department and agencies (para 1.3(b)). My Committee does not feel as though GEO ministers have met their duty to Parliament in relation to this inquiry.

I am therefore seeking reassurances that this situation will not continue, and that the Government and the GEO will seek to improve its relationship with the Committee.

I have also written to the Speaker and to the Chair of the Liaison Committee in similar terms.

I look forward to hearing from you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Caroline". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP
Chair, Women and Equalities Committee