

**I am submitting evidence because I do not believe the GEO is fit for purpose in its current form. I am a grandmother who has been a champion of women's rights since the late 1960's. I have never wavered in my commitment to equality across the board. I am sending my submission to my MP and to the Secretary of State because I have very strong feelings on the issues.**

**The Role of Minister for Women & Equalities:** Liz Truss has confirmed the right of women to single sex spaces yet there seems to be the clear bias in Whitehall and moves to replace Liz Truss will be seen as a way to oust a pro women Secretary of State from her role as Minister for Women and Equalities.

Women should have a dedicated Secretary of State because our rights as women are under attack and because in all the protected groups, a large proportion are women (although this is now being used as ammunition against us). A Secretary of state for women could also ensure the protection of disabled women, lesbian women, religious women, pregnant women, and from all other protected groups. Men in those groups tend to be heard loudest. This has happened with gay rights and trans rights which do not protect women in their groups because lesbian women have been under attack. In order for women to be truly represented, they should be protected as a separate entity. Middle class women are being heard, but none from lower socio-economic groups.

The GEO may not be fit for purpose because women are becoming more distrustful of their own protections because the actions of the EHRC and GEO with regards to the EA and misrepresentation, allowing inaccurate information to circulate. Too many departments were ahead of the curve due to guidance by EHRC and GEO which has caused a conflict between the rights of women and trans rights. Changes were made without gaining consensus. I believe it is a legal duty to ensure conflict does not exist. It has been unacceptable that a government department should have given rise to conflict. If the Government Equalities Office could not see the conflict, then how can it be fit for purpose? The conflict was acknowledged by Justice Cavanagh in a recent case CPS vs. Safe Schools Alliance, who saw that Stonewall ideology was at odds with women's rights groups and lesbians. The law was misinterpreted and unfit for purpose but there were no steps to correct. The GEO should be free from any bias and should ensure bias does not exist yet the women and equalities committee when taking evidence was particularly dismissive and rude to Dr Kathleen Stock, Professor Rose Freeman, and Professor Alice Sullivan which points to a bias against women. There was particular bias shown from the Chair Caroline Noakes and Crispin Blunt.

Women's groups are springing up because they feel their rights are being trounced and women are having to use legal proceedings to protect their rights – this is unacceptable. Women as the primary carers are not always able to write or lobby and can be less informed because of their responsibilities as carers these are important points because those from lower socio-economic groups, need most protection, they are least able to speak out. This has been known for a long time, why has no one in equalities noticed. The GRA is in conflict with women's rights

## Written evidence submitted by Mrs Eileen Higham [GEO0011]

Women need representation together e.g. an orthodox Jewish woman does not have protection against the rights of someone who has transitioned from being male to female, should single sex spaces be dropped and of course there are lobby groups intent on destroying this right of women. It is clear that the conflict will continue to exist, regardless of Liz Truss assuring us the right to single sex spaces. The GRA causes conflict and has been misused by groups' intent on destroying women's rights. The latest travesty for women is that women and girls are being excluded from Last Resort and Emergency Services because mixed facilities have caused immediate risk to their safety – equality is not working for women.

Without resolving these issues, women will continue to be alienated and without women's support there is little chance of good outcomes.

Stereotypes are back in the fray 'pink for a girl, blue for a boy' and I thought this was something from the dark ages of the 1950's and had been left behind. It has/was being taught in our schools? What are the GEO doing to ensure Schools Ministers are highlighting the need for balance and progress? How can women break out and be equal if stereotypes are back in fashion. This is a very backward step and unless these issues are dealt with then women's rights are definitely regressing, if not for wealthy women, then definitely for those lower down the social scale.

There are people who believe that women no longer need any protection because they are not a minority in terms of numbers. This type of argument is unnerving women and yet the Equalities office does nothing to give assurance. These points show that the GEO need root and branch reform. Inequality is getting worse and I would guess that the department is growing (not to tackle these issues, but to compound the problems). After all the years of since the Sex discrimination Act, we are now in danger of needing another act of parliament to cement the rights of women as a biological fact.

**The GEO's Role in highlighting inequality issues arising from the pandemic:** If women are affected, then their children are affected. The GEO should have been on top of this from the start and if there had been an understanding of women and inequality, then the GEO would have been pointing out that this was going to happen. Women have been affected more than any other group and especially women in disadvantaged groups, which of course will include, disabled, BAME, religious etc.

The Geo is behind on pandemic inequality, what questions is the department going to ask itself?

### **Social Mobility:**

Equality is in a worse state than it has been for some time. Someone from a wealthy background does not suffer the same discrimination and because most government departments are staffed by those with education and material benefits, it is difficult to see how there is any real understanding of life without - theory is not understanding. In fact recently some young men 'out on the town' were trounced by middle class people who accused, purely on sight that these must be racists etc. etc. Those would be the very people

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employed by government to resolve issues. One can only assume a patronising attitude would be expected. It is extremely important that socio economic inequality is front and centre and should have been for many years, but as Liz Truss has said, equality has belonged to those who shout loudest, this I fear is true.

My daughter and grandson belong in the lowest socio-economic group. During the pandemic, because of the extra money allotted to Universal Credit, she has been able to support herself and grandson with better food, without worry and has been able to get herself into a better position without my help. This should mean that she is stronger and more able to cope with life and find a job. Money is tight for the Government and it is clear that we will have a great deal to sort out but if we do not help those on the lowest rungs out of their plight, we will consign them and the following generations to remain where they are. The middle classes are saving thousands and they will be the loudest if they are taxed a penny more to support poorer citizens.

Every time a really positive idea is put into action, think Sure Start e.g., perhaps the housing initiatives, the middle classes take what was meant for the less well off, and low and behold, they become even better off. I despair at the sharp elbows. I went into two supermarkets on Saturday and the food bank collections were striking, in my local Lidl in an area of high deprivation, the food bank collection was full and most of the people leaving were putting something in. In my local Waitrose, I didn't see a single person put anything in. I was ashamed.

The middle classes are going to be paying for mental health assistance for themselves. No, any money for any health issues must be reserved for those in the lowest groups, time to start putting back what we have taken out. The years of globalisation have been devastating.

Whilst the GEO has trained itself to destruction and opened up Whitehall's loos to all, equality has become worse.

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