

## Written evidence from Greater Manchester Equality Alliance (HRA0061)

### Who we are

[Greater Manchester Equality Alliance](#) (GM=EqAl) is a coalition of representatives of voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector organisations across the Greater Manchester sub-region.

GM=EqAl Working Group [members](#) speak for and work within a wide range of communities which experience inequality and marginalisation, providing insight, advice and evidence to local policy makers.

### Submission

GM=EqAl welcomes the Joint Committee's conclusion earlier this month that the Human Right Act (HRA) "has had an enormously positive impact on the enforcement of human rights in the UK" and that "there is no case for reform under the terms of reference of the Government's review."<sup>1</sup>

We are disappointed that the Government has devoted resources to an inquiry which takes no account of the value and effectiveness of the Act itself.

We view the HRA as an essential cornerstone of the country's legal framework, allowing individuals to enforce their human rights in our home of Greater Manchester and beyond. It has allowed rights which were previously not explicit in UK domestic law to be realised and upheld close to home. We feel this difference at the grassroots level, where it has an impact on people's actual lives.

As workers, leaders and allies, we and the communities we support make use of this important piece of legislation in vital ways.

Without the HRA, people who would face ill-treatment if removed back to their countries of origin would be less protected, more families in our communities would be separated from each other by the force of the state, and people in some of the most precarious situations of homelessness and destitution would have been exposed further to suffering. Specialist domestic abuse and violence against women and girls (VAWG) services often rely on the rights and duties in the HRA in a preventative way – reminding public bodies of their duties to women and children escaping abuse, and preventing a case from reaching the courts.

Those of us who advocate for disabled people have used the Act to challenge the removal of benefits payments. Through recourse to the Act, same sex couples have achieved the same protection in tenancy agreements as straight couples. In short, it is a key part of the infrastructure giving protections to people who face discrimination in our society.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/4934/documents/49399/default/>

The HRA has also had a positive effect on the exercise of power by public authorities and services, who in many cases have taken steps to incorporate human rights principles into their policies and reformed practice in the light of its provisions. For example, without the HRA, the families of people who have died in police custody, or otherwise in connection with the actions of the state, would not have become entitled to inquests looking at the wider actions of public authorities in connection with the death of their loved ones. Similarly, it has been used to bring cases against individual police forces when they have failed in VAWG cases, requiring them to change the way they work.

The threat to our rights lies not in this cornerstone of UK legislation but in the Government's slashing of legal aid, which is denying victims of discrimination access to justice and allowing perpetrators to go unchallenged. Legal aid has been restricted in many immigration and family law cases, opening the way to multiple violations of people's rights. Removing free legal representation from those who cannot afford to pay for it themselves undermines the fundamental principle of equality under the law.

We call on the Government to spend its energies strengthening the local and national infrastructure for promoting and protecting human rights. People should be educated about their rights and empowered to realise them, with the help of VCSE organisations and grassroots groups like our own, and with properly funded legal aid provision.

The Government should not try to dilute the effective operation of something which is not broken - a piece of legislation that is tangible to communities and which has practically protected many amongst us, in our real lives, when we needed it most.

*22/03/2021*