

News story: Government backed Stalking Protection Bill receives Royal Assent

A new civil order that will help protect victims of stalking has received Royal Assent today, and is included as part of the government's wider commitments to tackle violence against women and girls.

The Stalking Protection Bill will see the introduction of new Stalking Protection Orders – a civil order that police can apply for that will enable them to tackle so called “stranger stalking” sooner and more effectively.

The orders will have the flexibility to impose both restrictions and requirements on perpetrators and will carry a criminal penalty for those that breach them. The police will apply for the order, so the burden of going through the process does not lie with a vulnerable victim.

The Bill was brought forward by Dr Sarah Wollaston MP as a Private Members' Bill that was backed by the government. Baroness Bertin sponsored the Bill during its passage in the Lords.

Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerabilities Victoria Atkins said:

Stalking is a sinister crime that can leave victims feeling vulnerable and can have terrifying consequences.

The new Stalking Protection Orders will help provide safety and security earlier than ever before for some of those who need it most.

MP Sarah Wollaston said:

I am delighted that the Stalking Protection Bill has received Royal Assent and is now an Act of Parliament. Stalking Protection Orders will soon be available to police so that they can intervene more rapidly to protect victims of this awful crime.

I am grateful to everyone who has helped with advice and support, especially those who have personal experience of stalking, MPs from all parties who have worked with me, and to the Minister Victoria Atkins MP and her team as well as Baroness Bertin for their commitment to making this important change to the law.

Baroness (Gaby) Bertin said:

I am delighted that this important Bill has become law. It will plug a gap in the law which leaves people suffering the unwanted

attention of strangers. Stalking protection orders will ensure that victims do not have to wait for prosecution before protection kicks in.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales reports that more than 1 in 5 women and nearly 1 in 10 men aged 16 to 59 have been victims of stalking since the age of 16. In 2017 to 2018 there were 1,616 prosecutions commenced under stalking offences, with 73% related to domestic abuse.

While victims who are suffering from stalking in the context of domestic abuse will benefit from Domestic Abuse Protection Orders and Notices that form part of the Draft Domestic Abuse Bill, the Stalking Protection Orders will be particularly valuable for those being harassed by perpetrators not previously known to them.

The Stalking Protection Order can apply to any case of stalking, but is designed specifically for occasions where stalking occurs outside of a domestic abuse context and will allow courts to not only ban perpetrators from going to certain locations or contacting victims, but also force them to seek help, such as attending a mental health assessment.

Suzy Bhaker, acting CEO of the Suzy Lamplugh Trust said:

The rapid passage into law of the Stalking Protection Act is welcome. The introduction of Stalking Protection Orders, with criminal sanctions for breaches, will provide a strengthening of the tools to protect all victims of stalking at an early stage.

Support for the introduction of Stalking Protection Orders is one of the many positive measures that the Home Office has committed to as part of its Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. In addition to this, the Home Office has also:

- provided £4.1m to fund the Multi-Agency Stalking Interventions Programme, which aims to improve responses to stalking across the criminal justice system, through robust management of offenders in a multi-agency setting, including police, probation, health, the CPS and victim advocacy services
- provided £50,000 a year for the National Stalking Helpline, which has helped over 30,000 people
- introduced the draft Domestic Abuse Bill which will introduce new Domestic Abuse Protection Orders, to protect victims and survivors from perpetrators of abuse