

Press release: Domestic Abuse survivors given a voice to vote.

Under existing legislation, domestic abuse survivors must provide a court order or have their application supported by a senior independent witness, such as a police superintendent, in order to appear anonymously on the electoral register.

These strict requirements have deterred many from registering at all – prompting a campaign by charities and survivors to make it more accessible.

The Government's changes will increase the number of people who can act as witnesses, including medical and healthcare professionals and refuge workers, and expand the type of evidence which can be put forward.

Chris Skidmore, Minister for the Constitution, said:

Ensuring every eligible person is able to vote is a matter of social justice. Every voice matters and this Government will continue to encourage our record levels of democratic participation by ensuring we have a democracy that works for everyone.

Women's Aid estimates that up to 12,000 women are receiving support in their refuges at any one time.

The changes are expected to be of particular benefit to these women or those who have left a refuge but continue to be in hiding from their perpetrators.

Welcoming the move, Katie Ghose, Chief Executive of Women's Aid, said:

The changes announced today will help survivors of domestic abuse to regain their voices. For too long these women have been silenced because it was too dangerous for them to sign up to an electoral register, which would reveal their location, and too difficult for them to register anonymously.

We are proud to have worked in partnership with the courageous Mehala Osborne and other partners to bring this issue onto the political agenda. We also want to thank the Government for their decisive action on this. The new measures send out a clear message to all survivors of domestic abuse: that their voices matter, and their right to vote should never be taken away.

To complement the legislative changes, the Cabinet Office will launch further research to identify and explain other barriers to electoral registration faced by survivors of domestic abuse. This research will be critical in

shaping new policies, projects and future engagement.

It forms part of ongoing work across Government to tackle domestic violence and abuse and violence against women and girls.

Sarah Newton, Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability said:

Domestic abuse has a devastating and often lifelong impact on victims, their children, family and friends.

These changes come at a time when the Government is bringing forward a landmark Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill which will protect and support victims, recognise the devastating impact domestic abuse can have on young people, and ensure agencies respond effectively.