

Press release: More legal aid support for victims of domestic violence

The current 5 year time limit on abuse evidence in the family courts will be scrapped, while the range of documents accepted as evidence of abuse will be widened to include statements from domestic violence support organisations and housing support officers. The changes will come into effect from January.

The move represents the latest step to protect and support victims of domestic abuse. Earlier this year the government announced a £17 million fund to support 41 projects across the country to tackle violence against women and girls.

Justice Minister Dominic Raab said:

We have listened to victims' groups and carefully reviewed the criteria for legal aid for victims of domestic abuse in family cases.

These changes make sure that vulnerable women and children get legal support, so their voice is properly heard in court.

Legal aid is available to people involved in private family disputes if they are victims, or are at risk of becoming victims, of domestic violence or child abuse. To qualify, applicants must provide objective evidence of the abuse while their case is also subject to means and merits tests.

The changes announced today follow a review of the evidence requirements set out in the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO) 2012. A Statutory Instrument amending the relevant regulations will be laid in Parliament in the coming days.

The government has also committed to bringing forward a landmark Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill which will ensure that no stone is left unturned in protecting and supporting victims and children.

Notes to editors

- Currently documentation is accepted as evidence of abuse from social services, law enforcement and medical professionals.
- Evidence provided by domestic violence support organisations or housing support officers as part of an application for legal aid in disputed family court cases will need to include:
 - a statement that in the letter writer's reasonable professional opinion, the applicant is a victim of domestic violence or at risk of being a victim;
 - the matters relied on in support of that opinion;
 - and a summary of the support the individual or organisation

provided following the determination.

- The SI will also amend the regulations to accept evidence of abuse against previous partners, to better evidence an applicant being 'at risk' of domestic violence.
- The Legal Aid Agency has existing powers to withdraw funding in the event that evidence of domestic violence is proven to be false.