

Wednesday  
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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Wednesday 1 March 2023**

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COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION  
(STATUS) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Dame Maria Miller, supported by Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger, Chris Elmore, Steve Brine, Julie Elliott, Harriett Baldwin, Bob Blackman, Layla Moran, Taiwo Owatemi, Sir James Duddridge and Dr Lisa Cameron, presented a Bill to provide for corporate status of and for certain privileges and immunities to be accorded to the international inter-parliamentary organisation of national and sub-national legislatures of Commonwealth countries known as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and to its Secretary-General; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March, and to be printed (Bill 260).*

ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON (LEASES) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Bob Blackman, supported by Ms Karen Buck, Nickie Aiken and Sarah Champion, presented a Bill to amend the Crown Estate Act 1961 to increase the maximum term of the lease that may be granted to the Zoological Society of London in respect of land in Regent's Park; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March, and to be printed (Bill 261).*

**Sexual Offences (Prohibition of  
Name Change)**

*Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No.23)*

2.40 pm

**Mark Fletcher** (Bolsover) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to prohibit a person subject to notification requirements under Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 from changing their name; and for connected purposes.

The Bill is one of several steps that need to be taken to fix safeguarding in this country, and to ensure that those who have committed some of the most heinous crimes—including rape, assault by penetration, indecent photographs of children offences, and sexual communications with a child—are not able to use a loophole to change their names to escape scrutiny and the authorities, and, in some cases, end up working with children and vulnerable people.

As is so often the case, my attention was brought to this situation by a constituent's casework. They know who they are, and I will say no more, other than that they are very brave and what they have been through is horrific and unimaginable for most of us. However, the person who is responsible for their pain is in prison and wishes to change his name. I could not believe that this was possible, but it turned out to be the tip of the iceberg. Further research led me to the excellent work on the issue done by the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) and, in turn, to the Safeguarding Alliance's superb research, and also the advocacy of my right hon. Friends the Members for Harlow (Robert Halfon) and for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid). I pay tribute to their work, and from here on in steal many of their arguments and research.

The crux of the situation is this: registered sex offenders are able to change their names by deed poll, both enrolled and unenrolled, allowing them to go under the radar of the authorities and putting society's most vulnerable at risk. Bizarrely, the onus for keeping details up to date on the sex offenders register lies with the offender, rather than the onus being on the police and other authorities to keep a close eye on the offender. It is illegal not to notify the authorities if you do change your name, and it can result in a sentence of five years in prison, but there is an automatic right for sex offenders out of prison to be able to change their names. It does not take a genius to realise that sex offenders are not the most trustworthy group. The Safeguarding Alliance's report of April 2021 revealed that 16,000 offenders had breached notification requirements in the past five years and 905 had gone missing between 2017 and 2020, and this morning the BBC News website released new figures showing that 729 had gone missing between 2019 and 2021.

Rose West, Ben Lewis, Vanessa George and Ian Huntley all changed their names. The Bichard inquiry of 2004, set up in response to Mr Huntley's horrific crimes, identified name-changing as a problem that needed solving, yet it remains unsolved. The same inquiry led to the establishment of the Disclosure and Barring Service, or DBS, of which many of us will be aware. It is meant to provide an assurance for employers that an employee or volunteer is safe, but a sex offender can

[Mark Fletcher]

now change their name and, with little difficulty, receive a passport or driving licence with their new name. At no point will they be asked whether they have a criminal background. In some cases, that can in turn lead to a DBS check under their new identity, and too often we find these people working in schools, care homes and elsewhere.

A few years ago there was a debate in the House on whether prisoners should have the right to vote, and it was agreed that they should have no such right. The Bill seeks to extend that principle, providing that someone who commits a heinous crime and is on the sex offenders register must in turn surrender their right to change their name while they remain on the register.

Last Monday, the Government announced several new and very welcome additional measures on domestic abuse and violence against women and girls. Two in particular are worth mentioning. Those who receive a sentence of 12 months or more for coercive and controlling behaviour will now be added to the sex offenders register, and the domestic violence disclosure scheme—or Clare’s law, as it is better known—will be put on a statutory footing. However, both measures are redundant if offenders can change their names and slip off the system. The same problem applies to the child sex offender disclosure scheme, or Sarah’s law, which, again, relies on accurate records. This is a major safeguarding breach at the heart of a system that is meant to protect us.

I think most people would be horrified to discover that this loophole exists. There are different approaches to fixing it, as I am sure we will discover during tomorrow’s Backbench Business debate initiated by the hon. Member for Rotherham; but that the current system is not fit for purpose and needs urgent change is beyond doubt. Too many of us have constituents who need us to act, and I hope that a solution will be central to the forthcoming Victims Bill.

Imagine being a young person and having the most horrific thing happen to you. Imagine that offender saying to you, “If you ever tell anybody, I will come for you.” Imagine living with that for decades. Imagine how the parents of that young person feel over decades. Imagine finding out that that offender may be changing their name and bringing back all those memories and that fear that they will come for you again. This Bill is about being on the side of victims and making sure that they do not have to go through that.

Again, I pay tribute to my very brave constituents, who I know are watching the debate, for bringing this mind-boggling matter to my attention; to the Safeguarding Alliance for all the work that it has done on this; and to all my colleagues who have supported the Bill, particularly the more than 50 Conservative Back Benchers who have supported it both publicly and privately. I cannot mention them all today. In particular, however, I draw the Government’s attention to the fact that two former Home Secretaries and a former Justice Secretary have supported the Bill, as does the former Prime Minister and Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May).

Safeguarding is about ensuring that our most vulnerable are protected, and we must end the real, immediate and significant risk of harm that this loophole creates. We cannot wait for another inquiry to tell us what we already know: that the law, and the system as it stands, are not fit for purpose.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Mark Fletcher, Sarah Champion, Priti Patel, Alicia Kearns, Caroline Nokes, Paul Holmes, Mr William Wragg, Sir Chris Bryant, Sir Robert Buckland, Mr David Davis, Alex Davies-Jones and Sajid Javid present the Bill.

Mark Fletcher accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March, and to be printed (Bill 258).*

### BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

*Ordered,*

That, at this day’s sitting—

(1) The Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Secretary Michael Gove relating to the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill [*Lords*] not later than 45 minutes after the commencement of proceedings on the motion for this Order; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings may continue, though opposed, until any hour, and may be entered upon after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply; and

(2) Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply to the Motion in the name of Penny Mordaunt relating to Estimates (Liaison Committee Recommendation).—(*Jacob Young.*)

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Before we come to the motion relating to the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill [*Lords*], I have a brief announcement to make. Under section 107(6) of the Government of Wales Act 2006, inserted by section 2 of the Wales Act 2017, it is recognised that the Parliament of the United Kingdom will not normally legislate with regard to devolved matters without the consent of the National Assembly for Wales. The Clerk of the House has been informed today that Senedd Cymru has agreed a legislative consent motion for this Bill. The Senedd agrees that the provisions of the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill, in so far as they fall within the legislative competence of the Senedd, should be considered by the UK Parliament. Copies of the motion are available in the Vote Office. It has also been published online at the Bill’s web page on the parliamentary Bills website.

### SOCIAL HOUSING (REGULATION) BILL [*LORDS*]

*Ordered,*

That, notwithstanding that such provision could not have been proposed in Committee without an Instruction from the House, amendments may be proposed on consideration of the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill [*Lords*] to provide for the Secretary of State to make regulations specifying action that registered providers of social housing must take in relation to hazards affecting housing provided under a lease and providing for breach of such regulations to be a breach of a leasehold covenant.—(*Jacob Young.*)