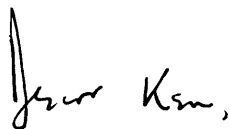


The Right Honourable The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

2 June 2010



We are delighted that the Government is committed to 'radical action to reform the criminal justice system'. In National Family Week we hope you will pay particular attention to both the impact of crime on families, and the importance of strengthening family relationships as part of any long-term crime reduction strategy. Police, prison and sentencing reform alone will not protect the public and reduce reoffending.

The reality is that much of the heavy lifting in enabling improved social outcomes in this area will fall to families. In National Family Week we are writing to a number of government departments highlighting the fact that without a champion at the heart of government, the family-friendly agenda is unlikely to succeed. There needs to be clear top-level leadership on the family and family policy should have a central role in government, based perhaps at the Cabinet Office. Becoming family-friendly requires a co-ordinated plan as there are implications for every government department. The Government has recognised this is true of the Big Society – it has Cabinet level responsibility and a clear strategy. In light of this I hope you will recognise the role of families in improving outcomes by ensuring that your department commits to fully support an integrated government-wide approach to strengthening families.

The ability of your department to play its part in reducing the fiscal deficit and protect the public will depend on the actions of other departments with regard to families. We would be interested to know what proportion of crime reduction you see as being dependent on strengthening family relationships and how the department will monitor progress in this area.

The Relationships Foundation estimates that the annual civil and criminal justice costs linked to family breakdown are over £7 billion a year.¹ These costs include a significant proportion of police, prison and court costs spent dealing with those from broken families. It also includes the amount spent on family court cases and the costs of running the Child Support Agency and the new Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission.

¹ See *When Relationships Go Right/When Relationships Go Wrong* (2009) <http://tiny.cc/WhenRelationships> updated for 2010 in *Counting the Cost of Family Failure* <http://tiny.cc/FailureCost>

The evidence on the link between family relationships and crime is strong, and not fully explained by the poverty that is all too often associated with broken families. 70% of young offenders are from single parent families.² Half of under-18s in prison have a history of being in care or social service involvement, and 27% of all prisoners were taken into care as a child.³ *The Cost of Domestic Violence* report estimated that domestic violence alone cost the criminal justice system around £1 billion in 2001.⁴

During their sentence 45% of prisoners lose contact with their families and many separate from their partners.⁵ However, prisoners who had at least one visit from family or partners were twice as likely to have an employment, education or training place arranged on release and three times more likely to have accommodation arranged as those who did not receive any visits. The frequency of visits also increased the likelihood of having a job or accommodation.⁶

We hope that you will take the opportunity of National Family Week to signal a clear commitment to support a government-wide strategy for the family. We were very encouraged to see in the *Invitation to Join the Government of Britain* the assurance that 'Britain's families will get our full backing across all our policies.' This commitment must, surely, be built into the heart of the policymaking process. Stronger, more stable families could over time save your Department billions of pounds each year – satisfying continuing demands for progress while reducing the fiscal deficit.

with best wishes,

Michael.

Michael Trend CBE
Executive Director
Relationships Foundation

² Breakdown Britain, Volume 2 Fractured Families, (Social Justice Policy Group, 2006).

³ Bromley Briefing: Prison Factfile (Prison Reform Trust, Nov 2006), p 18-21.

⁴ Sylvia Walby, op cit.

⁵ *The Forgotten Majority* (London: Nacro, 2000).

⁶ S Niven and D Stewart, *Resettlement outcomes on release from prison*, Home Office Findings 248 (London: Home Office, 2005).