



Draft

1.

Victim Support Scotland (VSS) is the largest charity supporting people affected by crime across Scotland through the provision of practical help, emotional support and essential information. Therefore, we welcome the draft proposal on **The Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-Restricted Sales Etc.) (Scotland) Bill** and the opportunity it brings to better protect shop and retail workers, so they receive adequate protection from the law, providing a clear threshold at which obstructive, abusive or threatening behaviour is considered a crime in its own right.

2.

VSS recently designed and delivered bespoke training on the impact verbal and physical abuse against shop workers has on its victims. We completed the training in partnership with Scotmid, exploring the impact crimes in this setting have on victims, witnesses, families and the community as a whole. As such, we support the Bill as a potential legislative extension to our recent work with retailers and victims in this area.

3.

We understand crimes of this nature can have a physical, social, emotional and financial impact on the victim with the ripple effect effecting family, friends and the wider community, often leaving workers unable to return to work due to physical injury or fear of attack.

4.

We know from our case studies that many workers do not report harassment to the police and when they do some believe their reports are not taken seriously due to the culture of accepting hostility as part of life within pub, retail, and call centre roles. The latter we note is not contained within the draft proposal.

5.

As part of this proposal we would encourage extending any future offence to include people on the receiving end of verbal abuse on the telephone as part of their call handling role. Many call centre workers are in insecure employment, often not complaining after a verbal attack for fear of losing their job and because of the normalisation of verbal abuse in their role. A legislative response is needed to protect them and also to send a message to those who abuse people on the telephone that there is no safe place for them to carry out this behaviour.

6.

VSS acknowledges research which evidences denial of sale or service, particularly age-restricted goods such as alcohol and tobacco, is increasingly felt by some to justify abuse, harassment or even violence against staff trying to do their job.

7.

We are supportive that this proposal should cover those selling age-restricted goods and services that are not in a shop setting, such as bar staff, door staff and supermarket delivery drivers. If workers are expected to uphold the law and are liable to prosecution if they do not then they should be provided with reciprocal legal protection. We accept retailers play a crucial role in preventing children from accessing alcohol, tobacco, fireworks, knives and other age-

restricted products. We are content therefore they should be protected under the law.

8.

We would be interested in seeing more detail contained within the Bill on alternative approaches around creating statutory aggravations. For example, if a worker is upholding a statutory age-restriction when he/she becomes the victim of an offence it should be taken into account by the Sheriff during sentencing.

9.

We note the evidence on the effects of increasing rates of work-related violence and the finding that self-blame is common among victims. This means they do not report incidences of abuse due to lack of confidence that their complaint will be dealt with properly by authorities and is in keeping with our findings from our work in this field.

10.

We agree that there are specific groups in the retail and hospitality sectors who would be classed as vulnerable, such as lone workers, those who work unsociable hours and those who come into regular contact with intoxicated customers. We understand the culture of convenience has led to an increase in 24-hour retail, with delivery drivers required to work lone shifts at unsociable hours, and the automation of sale with the use of in-store self-service checkout machines, meaning the number of staff required to work at any one time has decreased, leading to increased vulnerability.

10.

VSS believes this Bill could help address the problem of violence and verbal abuse in specific work settings, increase reporting, and importantly, raise awareness of the prevalence and unacceptability of the tensions experienced by workers in retail and the supply of goods services.

11.

We would encourage consideration be given to the unique position and vulnerability of call centre workers, often receiving verbal abuse as part of their daily existence. No one should go to work and get abused, but if they are they should be confident that appropriate legal redress is available.

12.

We support the intention to protect workers and look forward to being involved with the detail of the Bill.

ENDS

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