



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

May 2020

## **SAFETY OF THOSE DETAINED IN PRISON AND THROUGH THE COURTS SERVICE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Constituents have contacted me about the justice system as the Coronavirus outbreak continues.

I welcome the collaborative approach taken by Public Health England (PHE) HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). This is essential to ensure the implementation of measures to keep prisoners and prison staff safe, protect the NHS and enable the continued operation of the prison estate. Data emerging indicates that explosive outbreaks of Coronavirus are not being seen across the prison estate and PHE modelling suggests that the measures introduced are demonstrating that jails are successfully limiting deaths and the transmission of the virus within the estate.

I understand that this has been driven by a combination of increased social distancing, reduced transfers of prisoners between prisons and acting within individual prisons to reduce infection. This has reduced the Reproduction Number to 1 or below. However, until a vaccine or effective treatment has been found, the risk of large outbreaks remains. Ministers will of course continue to review and closely monitor the prison estate.

Representations have specifically been made on behalf of Julian Assange. HM Prison and Probation Service is responsible for ensuring those detained in prison have access to the NHS. As with all NHS patients it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the personal health of an individual prisoner. However, I am confident that Mr Assange's Prison Governor continues to work closely with the NHS to support his health and wellbeing and that of other prisoners alike.

Many constituents also have concerns regarding Court cases as the outbreak continues. Courts provide a vital public service and justice must be delivered promptly wherever possible. HM Courts and Tribunals Service has increased the capacity for telephone and video hearings to allow for remote hearings where appropriate. The decision to hold a hearing by telephone or video is for the judge, panel or magistrate, taking into account the needs of the parties, including their ability to access and use the right technology.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Conor Burns', with a horizontal line underneath.