

15th May 2026

Catherine Atkinson MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Victims and Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

By email

RE: PREVENTING HIGH-RISK OFFENDERS FROM USING ONLINE DATING AND SOCIAL DISCOVERY SERVICES:

Dear Catherine,

Congratulations on your appointment as the Minister for Victims and Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls.

The Online Dating and Discovery Association (ODDA) is the recognised trade body for the sector with a mission to create safe, responsible and enjoyable experiences for everyone. Representing nearly 500 brands worldwide, a key priority for the ODDA and its members is to prevent the risk of harm from individuals who pose a threat to others, including those who have committed serious sexual or violent offences against women.

To achieve this, the sector has worked hard to implement a range of trust and safety measures that include better data sharing between platforms, human and AI content moderation as well as giving users more control over what information they share with others.

But to tackle the problem effectively requires a more joined-up approach within the criminal justice system to bring about sustainable change.

At the Enough! campaign partnership event last week, I took the opportunity to speak to officials from the Home Office as well as Deputy Assistant Commissioner Helen Millichap about how the police and Government can help. Set out below are the changes we would like to see that will help our sector better protect women and girls from harm.

Extending Clare's Law to Users of Dating Apps:

Last year, we wrote to Jess Phillips MP following a meeting we had with the mother of a murder victim whose killer was found to be using dating apps following their release from prison. In our

letter, we called on the Government to extend Clare's Law, giving users of dating apps the 'right to ask' and 'right to know' about a potential partner's offending behaviour.

While we recognise that an extension would place additional pressure on police resources in terms of capacity and capability, this shouldn't be seen as an excuse for not doing it.

Imposing Pre and Post Bail Conditions:

We have recently written to the National Police Chiefs' Council, the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Magistrates Association to encourage them to impose pre and post bail conditions to prohibit individuals arrested, charged or convicted of certain offences from accessing online dating and social discovery services.

Academic research points to the fact that many offenders arrested for serious offences continue to target victims while out on bail putting vulnerable users at greater risk. In our view, anyone who has been arrested for, charged with or convicted of an offence involving violence, sex, stalking, harassment or romance fraud should be prohibited from accessing certain websites or apps. Cases like Anthony Burns who targeted hundreds of women and girls on dating apps despite already being categorised as a high-risk offender following previous convictions, serves as a reminder of what can happen when the system breaks down.

Of course, we recognise that the decision to grant bail and impose certain conditions rests with the Courts and is decided on a case-by-case basis following careful consideration of the risks. But we firmly believe that the Police, Crown Prosecutors and the Courts have an important role to play in protecting women and girls from violence and abuse by removing the opportunities to cause harm. We feel this is a proportionate response that reflects the seriousness of the risk and would welcome your support in ensuring these conditions are applied more widely across the country.

Managing High-Risk Prisoners Released on Licence from Prison:

At the other end of the criminal justice system, we have called for the Probation Service to use the powers available to them within the Licence Conditions Policy Framework to prevent high-risk offenders released on licence from prison from accessing online dating and social discovery services. Following discussions with officials from your Department, we are pleased to see the latest version of the Framework include a link to a form on our website where convicted sex offenders can be reported. This (publicly available) information is then shared with our members where the individual can be removed and blocked.

We have also written to several offender charities to remind them of their legal obligation to share information with the police if they believe an individual under their care is likely to cause harm.

Together, we believe that these measures, which can only be achieved through Government direction, will make a significant difference to the safety of women online.

Our members are not seeking to abdicate their responsibilities to protect women and girls, but instead, want to make it as hard as possible for anyone who poses a risk of harm to access apps or websites where they can continue to target vulnerable users. This requires platforms, policymakers and others to work together in taking a systems-wide approach to this growing problem.

The ODDA is doing its part through a new Consumer Safety Panel which will launch later this year. Bringing together survivors of abuse among others, the aim of the Panel is to inform best practice by giving victims a voice and putting them at the heart of platform design. We are also launching a dedicated Research Hub, building on our partnership with the Centre for Protecting Women Online to explore ways our sector can enhance existing trust and safety measures.

Ultimately, our goal is to make the internet safer for everyone. We can only achieve this by working together and we hope that you will support our efforts in reducing the risk of harm to users of online dating and social discovery services.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Simon Newman
Chief Executive Officer
simon@theodda.org