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## Victims and Prisoners Bill – Committee Stage

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July 2023

### About the BMA

The BMA is a professional association and trade union representing and negotiating on behalf of all doctors and medical students in the UK. It is a leading voice advocating for outstanding health care and a healthy population. It is an association providing members with excellent individual services and support throughout their lives.

### Summary

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- The Bill provides an opportunity to improve the treatment and support available to child victims of crime.
  - The BMA is concerned that the Bill does not go far enough to ensure that children receive the appropriate support when victims of crime.
  - The BMA believes that this Bill must include provisions for a whole system joined-up approach to support children and young people.
  - The BMA supports amendments to the Bill that address the current fragmented support system currently facing child victims of child sexual abuse.
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The BMA is deeply concerned that adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) and trauma have profound negative effects on physical and mental health. Recent Office for National Statistics reports highlight that one in five adults in England and Wales experienced abuse before aged 16 years old, and that nearly 75% of children on the child protection register reside in households where domestic abuse occurs. Failure to recognise and tackle these issues contributes to their continuation into adulthood and later life.

In 2022, the BMA passed a motion at its annual policy setting conference, calling on the UK government to:

- introduce a mandatory provision of regularly updated adult and child safeguarding training for all health and social care practitioners and students;
- increase provision of safe houses for survivors of domestic abuse, their children, and their pets;
- foster a collaborative approach between services to ensure that children and adults who have experienced ACEs are adequately supported with their health and social care needs.

We believe the Victims and Prisoners Bill presents a significant opportunity to enhance the treatment and support accessible for child victims of crime. However, amendments are required to ensure the availability of adequate services for children.

## 'Child House' model

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Currently, the fragmented support system for children and young people who are victims of child sexual abuse does not go far enough to adequately protect them. As drafted this Bill does not provide the required framework to provide children and young people with the support to navigate the criminal justice system.

The Child House model would allow for greater support to be given to young and child victims of crime, by establishing a child-centred approach in which the organisations involved in supporting the child (e.g., health, social care, police, charities) provide co-ordinated services in a single, child-friendly environment.

**The BMA supports Amendment 43 which promotes the establishment of Child Houses as part of the relevant authority's duty to collaborate in the exercise of victim support.**

## Duty to Commission support

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Support for young and child victims of crime currently falls under the discretion of local authorities. The BMA believes that there should be a statutory duty to commission sufficient and specific support for children and young people who are victims of crime.

### **Amendment NC13**

This amendment places a duty on the relevant authorities to commission sufficient and specific support for children and young people who are victims of crime, including abuse and exploitation.

The amendment then strengthens this by placing a duty on the Secretary of State to make a national statement on the current volume, need, provision and investment in support services for children who are victims of crimes including abuse and exploitation.

**The BMA support this amendment which will ensure a child centred approach ensuring local authorities have a duty to commission support, rather than just having to regard them in their commissioning plans. Furthermore, the duty on the Secretary of State to make a national statement will ensure full transparency in how the appropriate bodies are responding to the needs of children.**

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Lauren Taylor, Public Affairs Officer

E: [publicaffairs@bma.org.uk](mailto:publicaffairs@bma.org.uk)