

Dear [REDACTED]

CPS training for Specialist Rape Prosecutors

Further to your correspondence concerning this issue, I have received a letter from Keir Starmer QC, Director of Public Prosecutions at the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), whose portfolio comprises this matter. I enclose a copy of his letter for your information.

As you will see from the reply, Mr Starmer explains that the accreditation of experienced prosecutors as specialist rape prosecutors is the responsibility of Chief Crown Prosecutors who are assisted by the rape coordinators in any given area. Together, they ensure that the specialist rape prosecutors meet the high specialist standards. Furthermore, the CPS does not rely exclusively upon web-based training for the potential specialist rape prosecutors. Rather, the web training is a supplement to the class room training which is based around a number of real-life case studies. Finally, he reassures me that the CPS and the police will continue to work on improving the quality of the investigation and prosecution of allegations of rape.

I hope this addresses your concerns. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any further questions or concerns.

Yours sincerely, *Ben Wise*
Stephen Williams

Stephen Williams MP

This seems to be a helpful reply. Let me know if you have further concerns.

Westminster Office:
House of Commons • London • SW1A 0AA
☎ 020 7219 8416 • 📠 020 7219 4802
✉ stephenwilliamsmp@parliament.uk

Constituency Office:
PO Box 2500 • Bristol • BS6 9AH
☎ 0117 942 3494 • 📠 0117 942 6925
✉ stephenwilliamsmp@parliament.uk

Keir Starmer QC
Director of Public Prosecutions

Our Ref: QC 209.08

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WESTMINSTER



CPS

Headquarters
50 Ludgate Hill
London
ECAM 7EX

Direct Line: 020 7796 8500
Facsimile: 020 7796 8680
Switchboard: 020 7796 8000

DX No: 300850 Ludgate EC4

Stephen Williams Esq MP
House of Commons
LONDON, SW1A 0AA

12 December 2008

Dear Mr Williams,

RE: [REDACTED]

Your letter of 19 October 2008, addressed to The Right Honourable Jack Straw MP, the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, on behalf of your constituent [REDACTED] has been passed to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for reply. As the Director of Public Prosecutions, I am the Head of the CPS. I have now received a report from Mr Mike Kennedy, the Chief Operating Officer for Business Development.

Despite enquiries, we have been unable to identify who previously had contact with [REDACTED]. I regret that [REDACTED] found the previous CPS response disappointing, and welcome this opportunity to respond personally to her concerns over training for specialist rape prosecutors.

Firstly, may I take this opportunity to reassure [REDACTED] that the CPS does not rely exclusively upon web-based training to raise the standard of our specialist rape prosecutors. I fully agree with [REDACTED] and regard as essential the need for prosecutors to be able to communicate sensitively and appropriately with women who have experienced rape, and to understand their experiences and reactions. For this reason the CPS has designed face-to-face classroom training that we are delivering to all our specialist rape prosecutors. This training includes input from an external speaker, the manager of a Sexual Assault Referral Centre or representative from another specialist support service, on the effects of rape - including rape trauma syndrome, and tackles important topics such as rape myths and stereotypes. The course, which is based around a number of real-life case studies, emphasises the need to focus upon and to support victims.

In addition, we have web-based training, known in the CPS as e-learning, on prosecuting rape cases. Like the classroom training, the e-learning course reminds prosecutors of the need to work closely with police colleagues to build strong cases. The course includes a series of 'challenge questions' and, upon completion, provides an assessment of the knowledge the prosecutor has gained.

The accreditation of experienced prosecutors as specialist rape prosecutors is the responsibility of each Chief Crown Prosecutor as part of their management function. Chief Crown Prosecutors determine the number of specialists their Area requires and they are responsible for ensuring the specialist rape prosecutors meet the high specialist standards and are suitably skilled to undertake this work. Chief Crown Prosecutors are assisted by regular reports made by their Area rape coordinators, who are the leading rape specialist in each Area, responsible for co-ordinating and overseeing the way these challenging cases are handled. The reports include detailed monitoring of casework decisions by individual prosecutors.

The CPS will continue to do all we can to improve rape prosecutions. I am confident that our new training represents a significant step in the right direction. The classroom training has attracted positive feedback from prosecutors who have specifically reported a heightened awareness and understanding of victims' experiences and needs. It is still too early to assess the impact of the e-learning which has only very recently 'gone live' but it is likely to be especially useful as pre-course preparation for the face-to-face classroom course.

I am pleased that [REDACTED] is encouraged by a number of positive changes in the prosecution of rape cases and the treatment of women who have experienced rape. The CPS and the police have separately and jointly focused considerable effort to improve the quality of the investigation and prosecution of allegations of rape. I appreciate her interest in the work the CPS is doing to improve both the quality of decision making and the handing of prosecutions in relation to rape cases.

Yours



KEIR STARMER QC