



Peter Dawson
Prison Reform Trust
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Dear Peter,

PAROLE BOARD - INDEPENDENCE

Thank you for your letter of 23 December 2020 to the Lord Chancellor regarding the independence of the Parole Board.

I would like to reassure you that the Lord Chancellor and I remain fully committed to the independence of the Parole Board. It is an overriding principle of the parole system that the decisions the Board makes about the release of prisoners are judicial in nature, and that ministers cannot and should not seek to interfere with or influence those decisions.

As you know, the Prisoners (Disclosure of Information about Victim) Act – otherwise known as Helen's Law – places into statute that the Parole Board must consider, as part of its risk assessment process, failure by offenders to disclose specific information regarding victims. We are confident this will mean that more families get the answers and closure they deserve. The legislation does not compel the Board to reach a particular conclusion, but requires the non-disclosure of information covered by the Act be taken into account in making its decision – ultimately applying the statutory test of whether the prisoner needs to continue to be detained for the protection of the public.

You refer as well to the Root and Branch Review of the parole system which was launched last year. Again, I would like to reassure you that the independence of the Parole Board is not at threat and we have no intention through this Review of undermining or encroaching on that important principle. The Review will, among other issues, explore whether changes to the powers, constitution and status of the Parole Board are necessary to strengthen that independence, and give greater public confidence in the decisions of the Board.

I am grateful for your response to our recent consultation on public parole hearings. I have asked my team to get in touch in relation to the wider Root and Branch Review, in order that they can discuss any wider concerns you have with the system that we should be considering through this process.

Yours sincerely

LUCY FRAZER QC MP