



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

James Purnell MP
Minister for Creative Industries and Tourism
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London
SW1Y 5DH

28th April 2006
Your Ref: CMS 38883/DC

Dear James,

Further to your letter of 11th April regarding Early Day Motion 1782, television licences fees for women's refuges, I wish to add my comments to the BBC Charter Review White Paper, with regard to the current concessionary schemes for television licensing.

The issue of television licences for women's refuges was brought to my attention by the local refuge in my constituency. I was appalled to learn that enforcement officers were able to arrive unannounced at the refuge and threaten the women with court action unless they agreed to purchase a television licence. I appreciate that you have written to the Chairman of the BBC Governors about this and I look forward to receiving your reply. However, I was shocked to learn that hotels receive a generous concession from the licence which I believe is disproportionate when compared to women's refuges.

On further investigation and after talking to Refuge, the domestic violence charity, I learnt that most women who come to refuges often ask why they are not allowed to have a television in their personal rooms. They are usually told that they can bring a television, but they must buy their own television licence, as the cost of buying licences for each room proves to be very costly to the local authority or charity running the refuge. For example, the East Dunbartonshire refuge had to buy six licences, at a cost of £759. This figure will need to be paid out on an annual basis.

You cite in your letter that the cost of funding television licence concessions to different groups would run into many millions of pounds and that there is little consensus about which groups should receive a concession. To say that the matter is too complex for discussion means that nothing gets done, which is totally unacceptable. Therefore below are a list number of reasons why women's refuges should be included in the concessionary licensing scheme.

How much refuges would cost the government?

In 1975 the Home Affairs Select Committee recommended that there should be one refuge bed space per 10'000 population for women who are the victims of domestic violence. This total was renewed by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in its Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 225, introduced on 1 April 2005. In March Women's Aid recorded 3851 refuge bed spaces in England, Women's Aid Scotland in turn reported that there are approximately 470 in Scotland, and Women's Aid Wales reported that there were 233 refuge beds for women, totaling 4554 refuges places. If each of these unit had a television licence the total cost would be



£576'081.00. This figure is very low when compared to the many millions that it would cost government if a concession was granted to other groups.

The hidden subsidy for Government

By way of a comparison I asked all government departments how many televisions sets and licences each department has and uncovered some interesting information. Whilst some government departments hold one licence for each department building, others do not think that a licence is required at all under the special rules applied to government and parliamentary buildings. So far 12 government department and the House of Commons Commission have responded to the question. The total number of television sets is running at 2299, with 92 television licences held. If each television required a licence the total cost to government would be £290'823.50. This figure is an estimate as it does not include the remaining seven departments, yet to answer, which include Health, Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

In reality, the concession required by women's refuges is very small when compared to the other groups, such as pensioners under 75, who have lobbied for a similar concession. Adding this niche group of refuges into the current concession scheme similar to that enjoyed by the hotel industry for would make such a huge difference in many women and children's lives and would not cost the government millions of pounds.

Women in refuges are surely one of the most vulnerable groups in society and the government must undertake a review of the current concessions to include refuges. Adding refuges would reduce the financial cost to charities and local authorities, as well as helping vulnerable families who have fled a violent home and wish to make a life in a safe and comfortable environment.

I look forward to hearing from soon.

Yours sincerely

Jo Swinson MP

Department for Culture, Media and Sport		
DATE RECEIVED		5 JULY 2006
Minister	JAMES PURNELL	
Team	JON ZEEF	
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