

Victims and bereaved get more time to challenge lenient sentences

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Victims and bereaved families will get longer to challenge sentences they don't feel fit the crime they've suffered.

- Victims and families of most heinous crimes to get longer to challenge sentences
- Reforms mean no victim be left in the dark about right to challenge Crown Court sentences
- Move will help deliver justice for all victims and restore faith in the justice system as part of the Plan for Change

Victims and bereaved families will have longer than ever to challenge sentences they don't feel fit the crime they've suffered as the Government reforms the Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme (9 April 2026).

Listening to courageous campaigners such as Tracey Hanson and Katie Brett, who both lost loved ones to horrific murder, the Government has today confirmed victims and their bereaved families will have up to six months to ask for a sentence to be reconsidered - rather than being strictly limited to 28 days.

This important change is in recognition of the fact that, in the immediate aftermath of a heinous crime that has upended their lives, grieving families and traumatised victims cannot also be expected to engage with the justice system again in such a short period of time.

The Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme allows any member of the public to refer a sentence to the Attorney General and the Solicitor General - the Government's senior legal advisers - if they believe it is too lenient. They can then request the Court of Appeal reviews the sentence - a vital safeguard to help ensure sentences reflect the seriousness of the offence.

Ensuring that no one is left in the dark about their rights, the Government will also be introducing a legal duty in the Victims' Code to notify survivors of the existence of the Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme.

Deputy Prime Minister and Justice Secretary David Lammy said:

When someone's been through the ordeal of seeking justice and watched the person who hurt them or their loved one be sentenced, the last thing they should be worrying about is a ticking clock.

People need time to breathe, to talk to their families, to get advice. This change means they'll have more time to do this - and most importantly, get the justice they deserve."

The Victims and Courts Bill will also extend the time limit the Attorney General and Solicitor General have to review a sentence, allowing an additional 14 days if the case is submitted two weeks before the limit. This ensures sufficient time for each case to be reviewed thoroughly and for the most appropriate decision to be made.

This is the latest in the Government's Plan for Change to ensure fairer justice through the Victims and Courts Bill – using victims' voices as the driving force for change. The Bill also introduced stern sanctions for non-attendance at sentencing hearings in the Crown Court, making clear to cowardly criminals that facing justice will never be optional.

Minister for victims and tackling VAWG Alex Davies-Jones said:

When sentences aren't right, people deserve the chance to say so and have their reasoning heard.

I've heard from too many families who missed the deadline while they were still reeling from what happened in court – Tracey Hanson who lost her beloved son to murder wasn't even told about the scheme until it was too late.

Victims deserve to know that the Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme exists, and they shouldn't pay a price if they don't. That will no longer be the case. We're making sure the system works for victims, not against them.

Solicitor General Ellie Reeves KC MP said:

Victims deserve to know that the justice system is on their side. By giving victims and bereaved family members up to six months to challenge sentences when it is in the interests of justice, we are providing people the time and space they need to come forward.

These changes send a clear message: if a sentence doesn't fit the crime, there will be a proper opportunity to challenge it. This government is committed to a justice system that improves public confidence and puts victims first.

The Victims' Commissioner, Claire Waxman, said:

I am delighted that, after years of campaigning led by Tracey Hanson following the tragic death of her son Josh, and supported by bereaved families, the government has finally listened. I have long supported and worked closely with Tracey on her campaign since 2019, following the appalling injustice she experienced, and I hope this marks an important step towards greater parity between victims and offenders – particularly in securing fair and reasonable timeframes to receive information and request appeals.

The new duty to ensure victims are notified about the unduly lenient sentence scheme, alongside extending the rigid 28-day time limit, represents a significant and long overdue reform – ensuring families and victims are not only properly informed but also able to access the scheme even if they were previously unaware. I pay tribute to Tracey's determination in securing these changes to honour Josh. This is a testament to her campaign, and to the many families who stood alongside her to ensure their voices were heard.

Tracey Hanson said:

After seven years of relentless campaigning through the Josh Hanson Trust, this is a significant and long-awaited victory for victims' rights. Following our extensive advocacy, the Government has agreed to transformative amendments to the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme.

These changes represent a hard-fought victory in ensuring that families are no longer left in the dark or rushed through a traumatising process during the most painful moments of their lives. These reforms are a testament to Josh's memory and the passion and dedication of everyone who stood with the Josh Hanson Trust. We have moved forward, but the fight for full equality in the eyes of the law continues.

Katie Brett said:

Our lives were turned upside down when my 16 year old sister Sasha was murdered. Like all victims, we only had 28 days to appeal the sentence and we were not told until it was too late.

It's a relief that in Sasha's memory, victims and their families will have 6 months to challenge an unduly lenient sentence and the new legal duty to be notified means every family will know their rights to be able to do so. No family should ever be left in the dark like we were, every victim deserves support. We're grateful these steps are being taken to redress the balance that so often feels weighted against victims.

This comes alongside a whole host of measures the government has introduced to support victims and ensure they get the fast and fair justice they deserve. This includes:

- Strengthening the Victims' Code so every victim - including children - knows their rights
- Investing £550 million over the next three years in specialist victim and witness services
- Ensuring free access to transcripts of judges' sentencing remarks to better support victims going through the Crown Court.
- Modernising criminal courts by combining bold reforms, record investment and action to tackle inefficiencies across the system - so victims get the fast and fair justice they deserve.

Further information

- The two measures on the Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme will be tabled as amendments to the Victims and Courts Bill, which is currently progressing through Parliament in the usual way.
- The Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme allows anyone to ask the Law Officers (the Attorney General and Solicitor General) to refer a sentence in the public interest to the Court of Appeal for review if they believe it is unduly lenient.

- The Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme is an exceptional power. It includes all indictable-only offences (e.g. murder, manslaughter, rape, robbery) and certain triable-either way offences sentenced in the Crown Court, set out in an order made under section 36 of the CJA 1988 (e.g. threats to kill, stalking, most child sex offences).
- To be considered as “unduly lenient”, the sentence must be not just lenient but unduly so. This means it falls outside the range of sentences reasonably available to the judge, considering all relevant factors.
- Other members of the public will still have 28 days to refer a case under the scheme.
- A statutory duty to notify victims of the existence of the Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme will mean victims and bereaved families can easily find clear information about the Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme and their rights in the Victims’ Code.
- The time limit for requesting the Law Officers to review a case will be extended for victims and bereaved family members from 28 days to up to six months to challenge sentences where it is in the interests of justice to do so.
- The AGO will publish operational guidance setting out guidelines for what “in the interests of justice” means.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/victims-and-bereaved-get-more-time-to-challenge-lenient-sentences>