THE JURY ALLIANCE

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BROAD OPPOSITION TO JURY REFORMS CONTINUES WHILE GOVERNMENT TAKES LAST MINUTE STEPS TO SAVE BILL

Tomorrow afternoon from 3pm hundreds are expected at The Jury Alliance demonstration in Parliament Square to show their opposition to jury reforms in the Courts and Tribunals bill. The demonstration coincides with the final stage MPs debate and vote on the bill. [1]

The Jury Alliance are joined by legal professionals, Flora Page KC and Raj Chada, and the groups, Women of Colour, the Gypsy Travellers League and Defend Our Juries, illustrating the wide ranging opposition to the bill.

Despite the Government's last minute announcements that the most controversial parts of the bill have been withdrawn, such as the concept of routine Crown Court trials without juries, in its current form, the bill is still viewed by many as an attempt to erode trial by jury.

The Justice Secretary has claimed a necessary U-turn away from David Lammy's jury reforms but Alex Norris still maintains, like his predecessor, that reducing the number of jury trials is essential to reducing the backlog in the courts. However, since the government lifted restrictions on the number of 'sitting days' courts can operate, the backlog has been reduced in some areas outside the south east. [2]

Dr Clive Dolphin, a spokesperson for The Jury Alliance said:

"It's bizarre for there to be so many changes to the bill this late on. The changes indicate that the harmful jury reforms were rushed through by Lammy and Starmer and are now being hastily reworked by the new government.

"However, politicians are still not being honest with the public about the real fixes for the backlog crisis in the courts that removing juries won't fix. Since the number of days courts can sit has been increased there has been a reduction to the backlog, crucially, <u>with</u> juries still performing their vital role!"

Flora Page KC, Executive at the Criminal Bar Association, who resigned from the Legal Services Board over the bill earlier this year, said:

"***Curtailing trial by jury is an authoritarian policy relic from the previous Labour leadership, and it needs to be abandoned altogether. The current plans would still have life-changing effects on tens of thousands of victims and defendants, and undermine the rule of law. This is just vandalism."***

Richard Vogler, Professor of comparative criminal law and justice at the University of Sussex said:

"Juries are a vital component of legitimacy and fairness in criminal justice. They are also essential to the development and safeguarding of our democracy and

human rights. Their role has never been more important than today and we undermine it at our peril."

A spokesperson for Defend Our Juries said:

> ***"We welcome the decision to ditch David Lammy's total assault on jury trial. But The Government still plans to remove a defendant's right to trial by jury for either way offences such as criminal damage and public nuisance.***
>
> ***"That could mean that a trial such as that of the Colston 4, who toppled the statue of the slave-trader Edward Colston into Bristol Harbour, would no longer come before a jury. We know that such cases divide opinion. But who is better placed than local residents to determine the boundaries of democratic rights in such a case?"***

It is reported that the bill would shift 5,500 jury trials to the Magistrates Court each year. A move criticised by the Criminal Bar Association (CBA) who warn that; *"These are not minor offences. It includes serious and sensitive cases including assaults, sexual assaults, child abuse and grievous bodily harm. Our volunteer magistrates do an excellent job but they are completely unequipped to try complex, multi-day trials. It would be a car crash if they tried to do it, especially at this time."* The bill would also increase magistrates' sentencing powers from 12 months to 2 years and limit appeals from the Magistrates Court to the Crown Court. [3][4][5][6]

The bill also strips defendants of the right to select a jury trial in cases of 'either-way' offences, a vital legal safeguard that allows people who might otherwise be subject to judicial bias (such as people of colour, political activists, travellers as well as other groups who are marginalised) to be tried by a jury of their peers. Ironically, it was the seminal Lammy review (2017) which clearly stated that people of colour are subject to less racial bias in jury trials than with a judge or magistrates alone. The judiciary includes only 1.6% of black judges and has no black judges in any of the senior courts. [7][8][9][10]

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Notes for editors:

[1] The Jury Alliance opposes the increase in Magistrate's sentencing powers. This has been tried before and only resulted in excessive burden on the prison system.

The Jury Alliance believes defendants should retain the right to decide their type of trial in the following circumstances;

- Where the case involves complex issues
- Where the case involves human rights issues
- When the defendant might be subject to judicial bias
- Where the defendants is opposing the state, such as in protest cases

[2]
https://www.criminalbar.com/resources/news/criminal-bar-association-press-release-24-6-26/

[3] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crq5nd9dgz68o

[4]
https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/news/magistrates-sentencing-powers-scaled-back/5115396.article

[5]
https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/burnham-starmer-jury-trials-labour-b3060841.html?loginSuccessful=true

[6] Over 40% of appeals against a verdict in the Magistrates Court were successful in all quarters since 2016 bar two. And over 45% of appeals against sentences were successful in every quarter since 2016 (i). The charity Transform Justice has looked at what happens in Magistrates Courts under the name CourtWatch (ii). They found delayed hearings, poor preparation, broken technology, defendants that sometimes

didn’t understand what was going on and struggled to be heard, rushed hearings and variations in the way people are treated in the court system. (i) Table C11 https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fassets.publishing.service.gov.uk%2Fmedia%2F6943d254501cdd438f4cf59e%2Fccsq_accessible_publication_tables_2025Q3.ods&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK
(ii) https://www.transformjustice.org.uk/focus-areas/courtwatch/

[7] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lammy-review-final-report

[8] https://www.ethnicity.ac.uk/research/associated-projects/judiciary/

[9]
https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/news-focus/news-focus-bias-on-the-bench-judicial-diversity/5117880.article

[10] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/diversity-of-the-judiciary-2025-statistics