



James Murray MP

Member of Parliament for Ealing North

Labour and Co-operative Party



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Dear Mark Taha

Thank you for getting in touch with me about trial by jury.

The Government inherited a justice system in crisis, with a record and rising open caseload of nearly 80,000 criminal cases currently waiting to be heard in the Crown Court. Some victims are waiting years for justice, which is completely unacceptable. Justice delayed is justice denied.

Following the recommendations of the independent criminal courts review, Ministers have set out bold plans for structural court reform, alongside investment and modernisation.

The reforms include: increasing magistrates' sentencing powers to 18 months to relieve Crown Court pressure; handing courts the power to decide where cases are heard; establishing new 'swift courts' for cases with a likely sentence of three years or less, heard by a judge alone; and judge-only trials for particularly technical and lengthy fraud and financial offences, to free up jurors.

I am glad that there will be guaranteed jury trials for the most serious and almost all indictable offences, including rape, murder, aggravated burglary, blackmail, people trafficking, grievous bodily harm, and the most serious drug offences.

I understand these changes will mean around a quarter of cases that would otherwise have to wait to be heard by a jury will be fast-tracked to go before a judge, freeing up jury trials for where they are most needed.

Whilst jury trial will remain an important feature of the criminal justice system following these reforms, I believe it is important to recognise there is no constitutional right to a jury trial. The vast majority of criminal trials in this country are conducted fairly, without a jury. 90% of all criminal cases are dealt with by magistrates, and only around 3% of all criminal trials are heard by a jury. Over half of these would still proceed to the Crown Court and get a jury trial. The remainder would stay in the magistrates' courts or would be allocated to the new 'swift courts'.

I fundamentally believe everyone must be guaranteed a fair trial, and timely justice is central to fairness. But the status quo is not working for victims, defendants, or anyone involved in the justice system. These reforms are bold, and it will take time to turn the tide on the rising backlog of cases, but in my view these measures are necessary to tackle the emergency in our courts, and ensure victims receive swifter justice.

The Government intends to lay the courts reform legislation before Parliament in the Spring and I will continue to follow developments closely. Thank you again for getting in touch with me about this, and please do not hesitate to get back in touch in the future.

Best wishes

Rt Hon James Murray
Member of Parliament for Ealing North