

11 September 2008

To The Justice Committee,

Sexual Offences (Scotland) Bill

Written Evidence at Stage 1

Introduction

Engender is a membership organisation working on an anti-sexist agenda in Scotland and Europe to increase women's power and influence and make visible the impact of sexism on women, men and society. We provide a wide range of information and support to individuals, organisations and institutions who seek to achieve equality and justice.

To its shame, Scotland has one of the lowest rape conviction rates in Europe, with figures suggesting that less than 3% of rapes recorded by the police result in a conviction.

Engender welcomes the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Bill and wholeheartedly supports the comments made by The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in their written evidence.

Engender shares the concerns of the EHRC with regard to definitions, consent and reasonable belief, sexual history and character evidence, sexual offences and older children, the role of the Gender Equality Duty and the wider challenges around public attitudes to rape.

Conclusion

Engender welcomes the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Bill and believes that this is an important step in improving legal responses to sexual offences in Scotland. However, changes within legal responses to rape must be matched by a commitment to challenge attitudes within Scottish society to women's behaviour and sexuality. Engender believes that it is absolutely essential to effect a fundamental shift in attitudes to women if we are to stand any chance of significantly improving the ability of our legal system to provide justice to women surviving rape and other sexual offences.

For further information please contact:

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