



**POLICE & CRIME
COMMISSIONER**
for Leicester,
Leicestershire & Rutland

Your Communities - Your Commissioner

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Name: The Rt Hon. David Lammy MP
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Dear Deputy Prime Minister,

I write with sadness, disbelief and some anger at the news that the government of which you are a part is preparing to strip the British people of one of the oldest and most sacred rights our civilisation possesses: the right to be judged by a jury of our peers (with the exception of the most 'serious' offences). This is not just some administrative reform to cut the unacceptable delays in our courts. This is an act of vandalism against the moral architecture of our democracy.

There is something profoundly chilling about the idea that this Government believes it can improve justice by removing the public from it. Twelve good men and women replaced by one tired government is not a vision of progress, but a warning sign of a state that no longer trusts its own people. A weary administration choosing centralisation over participation, convenience over principle and political expediency over our ancient English liberties.

The right to be judged by a jury of one's peers has for centuries been a symbol of the balance between authority and liberty. Based on Clause 39 of Magna Carta, the right to jury trial ensures that no citizen stands alone before the full machinery of the state without the presence of ordinary people, equal in status, who can scrutinise the evidence and speak with a moral as well as a legal authority. A judge, however experienced and learned, cannot replace the democratic legitimacy that a jury brings to a verdict. At a time when concerns about the politicisation of certain judicial decisions are becoming more pronounced, it is entirely reasonable for the public to fear that removing juries will open the door to a justice system where perception of fairness is diminished and where two classes of defendants emerge.

A jury trial does more than determine guilt or innocence. It embodies our belief that justice is not an abstract technical exercise but a human one. The deliberation of twelve citizens allows disagreement, nuance and the occasional unpredictable outcome. That is not a flaw in the system but a sign that it is alive to the realities of human life. A judgement that is technically correct in law is not always one that society feels to be morally just. A judge is constrained by law and precedent and cannot provide the wider democratic legitimacy that a jury offers. If we remove the jury, we remove the public from their own justice system.

To claim that the backlog justifies this destruction is to stand logic on its head. The backlog was created by political choices: years of starving the courts of resources, sitting hours cut to the bone,



buildings allowed to crumble, and staff stretched beyond any reasonable limit. The jury system did not cause the backlog. The neglect of successive Governments did.

Only a few years ago you said plainly and proudly that jury trials are a fundamental part of our democratic settlement and that criminal trials without juries are a bad idea. You were right then. What has changed except political expediency? How can you now defend proposals that you once recognised as a direct threat to democratic justice? You have no mandate for this. No party stood before the public and asked for permission to hollow out the justice system at its core. Our ancient liberties do not belong to any administration to dispense with at the flick of an administrative pen.

It is an unbearably bitter irony that international courts fight to defend the rights of foreign offenders to avoid deportation, yet here at home the government shrugs indifferently at the abolition of trial by jury for British citizens. The contrast would be laughable if it were not so dark.

I write with force because the danger is real. This proposal is not a technical adjustment. It is a rupture. It is a void. It is the creation of a permanent void in the heart of our justice system in order to avoid fixing the temporary problems that truly caused the backlog. You are proposing to remove the people from their own justice system. You are proposing to turn a sacred public duty into a bureaucratic process. You are proposing to move the scales of justice behind closed doors and insist that we trust you.

No free people should accept this. No responsible minister should endorse it.

I urge you to abandon this reckless idea. Restore confidence by restoring capacity. Repair the courts that you and your predecessors allowed to decay. Invest in the people rather than silence them. But do not, under any circumstances, destroy the right of the British people to stand before their equals and have their fate decided by the nation's conscience.

Yours sincerely

Rupert Matthews
Police and Crime Commissioner for Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland