The Rt Hon Grant Schapps Secretary of State for Defence Ministry of Defence Main Building Whitehall, London, SW1A 2HB Leighann McCready, Anthony Beck & Emilli Beck



By email:

Parlibranch-treat-official@mod.gov.uk

5 October 2023

Dear Secretary of State

The late Gnr Jaysley Beck

You will by now have read the Service Inquiry report into the death of our daughter and sister, Jaysley Beck. Jaylsey was just 19 years old when she died in December 2021 after experiencing what the Army has accepted was serious and sustained sexual harassment from her line manager as well as an alleged sexual assault that appears to have been dealt with very badly. We noted and appreciated your kind words to the family during your press interviews yesterday. We hope that you will take this letter in the spirit with which it is offered, which is that it is born of a genuine desire to see something constructive and good come out of our daughter's death.

Since the loss of our daughter, we have had to learn a great many new things very quickly about the military. One of the issues we have been very concerned to understand more about is the way in which the Army handles serious complaints. You will appreciate that we are particularly concerned about this issue, because it appears that our daughter, while being overwhelmed by sexual harassment from her boss, did not formally report it or complain about it. We also note the Service Inquiry's finding that there were a number of other women in Larkhill Garrison who described being subjected to unacceptable sexual behaviours, which were at times described as "vile" and "degrading". None of those women reported those incidents either. That suggests there is something seriously wrong with the complaints system because the people who you would want to use it, are not.

We have learned that for every single year that her office has been in existence, the independent Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces has declared that the complaints system for service personnel is neither effective, efficient or fair. We also understand that problems with the complaints system was a consistent feature of the evidence that was presented to the House of Commons <u>Defence Committee Inquiry into Women in the Armed Forces</u> during 2021. Service women just do not think that the complaints system is capable of addressing the more sensitive, complex sexual harassment cases that they are more likely to need to bring, because they are women.

We also learned that in 2009, there had been a review conducted into unacceptable behaviours in the armed forces, led by Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Wigston. The Wigston

Review made a number of recommendations, one of which was that there should be created a new "Defence Authority" that would have responsibility for the investigation, handling and oversight of serious complaints, taking them away from the single services themselves. Then, in 2021, the Defence Committee Inquiry made exactly the same recommendation. Both recommendations were rejected. You will no doubt be told by your advisers that lots of changes have been made to the complaints system – this is true to some extent - but the bottom line is that the handling of these complaints remain inside the single services themselves and none of the existing or proposed reforms will change that. That lack of independence is a serious and fundamental flaw.

We may never know, had there been an independent and effective complaints body to whom she could have raised her concerns, whether this might have made a difference to our daughter. However, we can say that we think it might have done. Certainly, we believe the creation of a new body like that now would make a huge difference to the lives of many service women.

Now would be a really good time for you to make your mark on this issue. You are a new Defence Secretary. Making the decision now, to accept the recommendations of the Wigston and Defence Committee reviews would mark you out from your predecessors and would create a real legacy. It would enable you to show that you are serious about addressing the problems that our daughter's case has revealed and which is sadly so reminiscent of so many other cases. It would also allow us the small comfort of knowing that something positive and meaningful has come from our devastating loss.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Leighann McCready Anthony Beck Emilli Beck