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Rt. Hon Dominic Raab MP
Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice

By e mail

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Dear Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Justice

Re: The Prison Strategy White Paper – a lost opportunity to address racial disparity

We write to you as a group of voluntary sector organisations working in the criminal justice system, including members of the Ministry of Justice Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Board (RR3), greatly concerned about a significant omission to the government's Prison Strategy White Paper that will be detrimental to achieving its aims.

Public safety is of paramount importance and we welcome the White Paper's strong focus on reducing crime. Notably, it's long-term strategy to reform the prison estate and rehabilitate prisoners.

However, as the Paper sets out proposals for significant changes in the prison system for a decade to come, including positive steps to renovate outdated prison estates and better use technology, we are alarmed by its lack of focus on reducing racial disparity.

Both the over incarceration of, and disparity in outcomes for, racially minoritised people in the criminal justice system are counterproductive to the goal of improving public safety. Evidence tells us it has a direct tangible and intangible impact on rehabilitation and resettlement.

With an already increasing prison population, there has been a disproportionate increase in the number of racially minoritised people in the system. Racial disparity in the prison population has been continuously increasing over the last three decades. The Lammy Review was the most recent warning of the negative impact and implications of this overrepresentation. We are aware of significant activity within the Ministry of Justice to implement the recommendations of the Lammy Review but this has not resulted in significant changes in outcomes.

Instead, the number of racially minoritised people in prison has increased by 3% since the publication of the review. There is an urgent need for the strategic prioritisation and resourcing of activity to address this issue.

Yet the White Paper outlines its ambition for 'the biggest prison building programme' in a century, with no proposals for how existing racial disparity will be addressed or future inequalities prevented.

The lack of progress in these areas call into question the legitimacy of the justice system and undermine the trust in it amongst racially minoritised people. We can and should reform our prison system to address the existing racial

disparity, toward a system that is seen and felt as fair and just by everyone. This should be a key goal for any future prison strategy.

We welcome the establishment and work of the Race Action Programme within HMPPS but for it to be effective and have impact across the agency, in the areas that matter most, addressing race disparity needs to be signalled in any future prison strategy as a clear priority. There should be a specific focus on monitoring and improving outcomes for racially minoritised people at local and national level, as outlined in the Lammy Review recommendation 30 “HMPPS should develop performance indicators for prisons that aim for equality of outcome for BAME and White prisoners.”

Yours sincerely

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