

Friday
20 October 2017

Volume 629
No. 37



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Friday 20 October 2017

House of Commons

Friday 20 October 2017

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means took the Chair as Deputy Speaker (Standing Order No. 3).

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): I beg to move, That the House sit in private.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 163), and negatived.

Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Bill

Second Reading

9.34 am

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I start from a simple premise. An assault on anyone is wrong, but an attack on any emergency worker—whether that is a police constable, a paramedic, an ambulance driver, an accident and emergency doctor or nurse, a fire officer, a prison officer, someone working in search and rescue, or someone working on a lifeboat—is an attack on us all. And when we are all attacked, we all stand firm together.

It is not just that many of these people show daily acts of bravery; they put their lives on the line. We know that here in Parliament, where PC Keith Palmer was murdered earlier this year. We owe him a phenomenal debt of gratitude. London knows it. A brave British Transport police officer was stabbed when he faced the London Bridge attackers with nothing but a baton earlier this year. That same day, a Met officer was also stabbed when he came to defend the public, despite being off duty. The whole country knows it, too, as we have seen horrific instances, week after week, of emergency staff who have been stabbed, strangled, bitten, repeatedly punched, kicked when down on the ground, and threatened with knives and acid. It is incomprehensible that people should attack our national heroes like this. It is amazing that those staff still go the extra mile on behalf of the British public. It is time that we did everything in our power to protect them.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): I was taken to hospital by ambulance last month, having fallen ill. It was a horrible experience, which was made much better by the ambulance staff, who showed such kindness and professionalism to me and my two-year-old son. I got talking to them in the ambulance and they told me that they faced abuse on a daily basis. I told them about this Bill, and they wanted to pass on their thanks to my hon. Friend. This legislation is long overdue.

Chris Bryant: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments. She makes her point extremely well. It is worth saying that the Bill is supported not only by the Royal College of Nursing and all the trade unions that

represent staff in these different lines of work, but by the Metropolitan police, the Police Federation and nearly every part of civil society. I hope we do not end up with a vote later today, but the lack of a vote will not show a lack of assent by this House. Indeed, I think it will show the unanimous assent of the House to change the law in this regard.

It is a depressing fact that the number of assaults on emergency workers has dramatically increased in recent years. The Home Office's own figures—these are frightening—suggest that there were 24,000 assaults on police officers in England and Wales in 2016-17. The Police Federation reckons that there is an unarmed assault on a police officer every four minutes, and that is even without including police community support officers. The Ministry of Justice says that there were 7,159 assaults on prison officers last year—up a third on the previous year.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): As my hon. Friend will know, not only have attacks on police officers risen by about 7% in the past seven years, but those attacks are on fewer police officers. We have lost 20,000 police officers, so there is now more chance of a police officer being attacked than there was seven years ago.

Chris Bryant: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why I pay enormous tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch), who, with the Police Federation, has led the charge on this issue and brought it to the House. I feel as if I am merely carrying the baton that she elegantly shaped.

Figures from NHS Protect are equally disturbing. There were 59,794 attacks on NHS staff in 2011-12. That is bad enough, but the figure increased to 70,555 by 2015-16. Yet the number of criminal sanctions for those assaults has actually fallen in that time, from 1,380 to 1,250. That is a lot of people who are not seeing justice.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that the cost to the NHS of these attacks is estimated to be £69 million a year?

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend is able to read my mind, because that was my next sentence.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the figure for assaults on NHS staff is probably much higher? I know from my experience of working in the NHS that a lot of staff did not report assaults, because they were not confident anything would be done.

Chris Bryant: That is part of the problem that we—and, for that matter, the whole criminal justice system—need to address: all too often, people simply do not feel at the end of the process that they have got justice. When people see those working alongside them not getting justice, with paltry sentences handed down, they of course decide, “I don't want to have to go through all the grief and the hassle of pressing charges.”

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con) *rose*—

Chris Bryant: I give way to my right hon. Friend.

Stephen Crabb: I am grateful to my hon. Friend—he is my hon. Friend too. Does he agree that there is a real sense of anger and frustration not just among police officers but among other emergency workers when they see people walking out of court with, effectively, a slap on the wrist?

Chris Bryant: If it were even a slap on the wrist, that would be nice, but sometimes the punishment is absolutely minimal. It is intrinsic to justice that it has to be seen to be done, and I will come on later to why I think my Bill will make a difference. I know there are people at the criminal Bar who—perhaps out of an excessive loyalty to other lawyers—dislike it whenever we introduce a new offence, but I hope the Bill will make a difference.

Incidentally, it is worth bearing in mind the fact that this year the Welsh ambulance service has listed 114 properties as housing potentially violent people, while another 320 were listed as potentially dangerous. That is this year; in January 2016, only 50 properties were flagged up. In other words, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of places where paramedics feel they are unable to go without police support. That is truly worrying for our society.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): It is important to emphasise, as the hon. Gentleman just did, that assaults on emergency workers are not solely an urban problem. Given the chronic reduction in police numbers, in particular, I hope this legislation will offer greater protection for officers in rural areas, who often respond to calls with insufficient back-up and bad communications.

Chris Bryant: The hon. Lady is absolutely right, and I can only praise her for being here today, when she could have been at the Plaid Cymru party conference. That is a phenomenal act of dedication.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): While my hon. Friend is on the subject of Wales and the frequency of attacks, may I mention a real story that was recently relayed to me by a woman married to a police officer? She told me:

“According to my children their father is the clumsiest dad ever, as we have had to tell them he ‘fell over a bin chasing someone’, ‘he walked into a Police cupboard door’, ‘he caught himself on a police car door’. I am tired of having to tell my children about how he sustained his injuries to stop them worrying.”

Does my hon. Friend agree that that is the reality of working life for many emergency workers?

Chris Bryant: It is the reality, but it should not be—that is the point we all want to make. Of course, this affects not only the individual concerned but other members of the family. In terms of the recruitment of police officers and emergency workers in the future, people often follow their parents into a profession, and if they feel that their parents have been badly treated, it is unlikely they will come forward for these jobs in the future.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab) *rose*—

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

Chris Bryant: I am sticking with Wales, and then I will come to my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin).

Albert Owen: I am grateful to my hon. Welsh Friend for allowing me to intervene. He has rightly mentioned police officers, health workers and others. In his introduction, he mentioned search and rescue and lifeboats, and I declare an interest as a vice-president of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. Many of these emergency workers are actually volunteers. They show us how to respect the sea; we must now show them respect.

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I have had various people email me and twitter me—or whatever the verb is. *[Interruption.]* Tweet to me. Anyway, they asked whether lifeboat staff will be included, and, of course, they are included. For that matter, the Mines Rescue Service in my constituency is as well, because search and rescue people are absolutely vital. My hon. Friend makes the very good point that many of these people are volunteers. We could, of course, argue that most emergency workers go the extra mile, and that extra mile often means, effectively, that they are working as volunteers. That is why we should stand by them.

Tracy Brabin *rose*—

Chris Bryant: I have been saving up my hon. Friend.

Tracy Brabin: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. He mentioned that violent crime is on the rise and that people in some properties are being flagged up as potentially violent to the police. I have been lobbied by constituents who are PCSOs and find themselves increasingly going into potentially violent situations with no handcuffs, pepper spray or any of that. Will they also be included in the Bill, so that they, too, will be protected?

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend raises a good point. I am not entirely sure that they would be. If that is the case, we will make sure in Committee, when I have taken a bit more legal advice, that they are included, because it would be bizarre in the extreme if they were not. PCSOs in my constituency are an absolutely vital part of the equation of community policing, and we should afford them exactly the same protection.

I should say that I have had an awful lot of conversations with Ministers over the last few weeks about the Bill, which has been a delight, and I am not entirely convinced that we yet have the definition of an emergency worker in the Bill right, because some people who work in the NHS who should be included would not be. I have talked to Ministers, and they are absolutely clear that we will put that right in Committee, so I hope both the elements I have mentioned can be put right in Committee.

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that those who look after us and keep us safe need protecting with the full force of the law, and that that is the protection his Bill will provide?

Chris Bryant: Absolutely, and the point is that it needs the full force of the law. All too often, the victims, who work in our emergency services, and who know this area of the law well, have felt that the full force of the law has not been used.

I have cited some statistics, but this is not just about statistics. Last year, Nurse Sharon Morris was attacked in a mental health unit, and it is worth saying that Unison, the trade union, has found that more than two in every five mental health workers have been attacked in the last year. The effect on Sharon's life was profound. She said:

"I'm not the same calm but confident woman I was. Personally, I'm feeling vulnerable, and I feel I'm not much use to my family as I am on edge whenever we are around people. I have nightmares and flashbacks. The worst part is seeing my assailant's face superimposed on my eldest son's face—they are physically similar—and I couldn't cope with him hugging me for many weeks. I was off sick for three months, and I'm now seeking redeployment away from patient areas; I get anxious around patients, so I'm currently just doing office work."

In fact, since she said those words, she has moved on to another area of work. That is one of the problems: these assaults are leading to a serious problem in the recruitment and retention of staff.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): I certainly hope the hon. Gentleman gets a Second Reading for his Bill, which should go through unopposed. I support the Bill, but there is so much that needs to be done on it. The example he has just given would not even be covered by it, so a lot of work needs to be done in Committee before it comes back to this Chamber.

Chris Bryant: There was a version of the Bill that did include this issue, but somehow or other, by some glitch of computers, it disappeared. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and that goes back to the point I made earlier. The issue is something we want to put right in Committee, and I hope the whole House will want to rectify it.

Members should just listen to what PC Adam Heslop of the British Transport police said. He had his nose broken when he was punched in the face. He had been in many situations where he feared physical assault, but he had never actually been punched. His assailant was given a curfew and ordered to pay court costs of £85 when convicted of actual bodily harm. PC Heslop said:

"I know better than to expect justice from the courts when it comes to police assaults. I think that's one of the reasons assaults are up."

That is the problem: if the victims do not feel that there has been justice or that justice has been seen to be done, it seems to the whole of society that people are getting away with these things—as if there is a law of lawlessness when it comes to attacking the police.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): I, too, support the Bill. Between April and September, Cheshire police recorded 277 assaults on police officers. That demonstrates vividly why the Bill is needed to strengthen the law in this area. This really is a problem locally.

Chris Bryant: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. As the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) said, this is not just about urban areas—it is about the whole of the country. In fact, the north-west ambulance service recently reported a 24% increase in assaults on ambulance workers in that region in the past year.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Chris Bryant: More Wales!

Chris Elmore: You can never get enough Wales, as I am sure my hon. Friend would agree. In recent years there has been an increase in assaults on first responders to ambulance calls who are treating patients at the side of the road and being attacked by somebody who was attacking the person they were treating. Are first responders included in the Bill, or will they need to be included in Committee?

Chris Bryant: The legal advice that I have had is that they would be included, but we need to make sure of that in Committee.

I think every single one of us will feel it is inconceivable—incomprehensible—that, when somebody comes to save a life, they can be physically attacked for doing so. How does that happen? There is a cry of outrage at the heart of this Bill. It is an attempt to give an extra tool to the prosecuting authorities to make sure that we can stem the tide of these assaults.

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend is not Welsh, but of course I give way.

Mike Hill: This is not just about people saving lives. Attacks on firefighters who are putting out fires occur time and again. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is equally bad and needs the right level of punishment?

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Two years ago I stood in utter amazement in Porth watching kids on the other side of the valley throwing bricks at fire officers who were trying to put a fire out on the mountain. Words fail me.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC) *rose*—

Chris Bryant: The hon. Gentleman is also Welsh. It is just as well that this Bill applies to England and Wales.

Ben Lake: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that just as importantly, this Bill would help to ensure that people are aware of the abuse that many of our emergency services suffer and make it clear that as a society we will not stand for it?

Chris Bryant: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I am glad that he is not at the Plaid Cymru conference either. I am sure he will get there later.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): My wife and I had cause to be extremely grateful to the fire service on Wednesday morning. We lost a dog that was staying with us—she had absconded over the fence. The efforts of the boys at Stockhill fire station in extracting Nike from between a hedge and a wall were greatly

[Alex Norris]

appreciated. Does my hon. Friend agree that glad though they will be to get my warm wishes on this very public stage, what they want from their legislators is an understanding in law that shows we understand what happens to them on a daily basis and will act on it?

Chris Bryant: Absolutely. It is worth saying that the reason I presented this Bill rather than any other is that I did a survey of my constituents and of the wider public, to which more than 40,000 people responded, giving them a choice of six different Bills, each of which I would have been very happy to present. Another Member is doing civil partnerships and somebody else is doing votes at 16 and so on, but this subject came top in my constituency and around the country. That means that we are also responding to the public, which is an important part of what we are sent here to do.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Bryant: What an utter delight!

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. At least the Rees bit of me is Welsh. I congratulate him on bringing forward this Bill, because he has managed to show that private Members' Bills on a Friday morning may cover serious topics that have the widespread support not only of the House but the country. It is very important for Parliament that we do sensible and proper things today rather than just hear people making statements.

Chris Bryant: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for saying that. Because we now have a two-year Session for this Parliament, private Members' Bill Fridays have been stretched out considerably. If this Bill gets its Second Reading today, as we all hope, it could easily get through Committee in the next few weeks. There is no reason why the Government could not give it Government time on a Thursday afternoon, for instance, rather than having to wait until the end of April for its remaining stages. We could then send it off to the House of Lords and it could be on the statute book by Easter rather than having to wait the whole year.

Ms Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): As a former nurse, I am really pleased to see the call for blood and saliva tests when people have been bitten or spat at, because I know how worrying it is for somebody to think that they might have HIV or hepatitis. Waiting times in A&E, plus the shortage of nurses to de-escalate situations because they are busy doing 101 other things, mean that there is nobody to deal with the rising tensions in hospital situations. That is partly why assaults are on the up. This group of people have suffered under the public sector pay cap, and at least this Bill is one way of recognising their commitment.

Chris Bryant: I agree with all the different points that my hon. Friend made in her mini-speech. Indeed, I am going to make some of them myself, particularly in relation to resourcing in mental health units. It is self-evidently more difficult to make sure that staff are secure and safe at work if they feel that they are under-staffed.

Some people will think that no action is necessary and say that a new offence will make no difference. But I believe that we cannot be bystanders. We cannot just hold emergency workers' coats while they are in danger. We cannot just issue warm words. Making something illegal will not necessarily stop it, of course, but I believe that legislation can play a role in tackling this scandal and clarifying the law, sending out as clear a message as possible that we—all of us—will not put up with this. If you attack an emergency worker you will face the consequences of your actions.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend makes a really important point. Quite a lot of this is normalised by society; there is an expectation that it is part of the job. This Bill sends a clear message that emergency services workers do not have to put up with this type of behaviour and abuse.

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; I agree with every word. Indeed, I am going to say it again myself later.

My Bill does three things. First, it introduces a new offence of common assault or battery against an emergency worker in the performance of their duties. As I am sure hon. Members know, there are similar offences on the statute book: common assault contrary to section 39 of the Criminal Justice Act 1998; and assault on a police constable, a prison officer or an immigration officer in execution of his duty under section 89(1) of the Police Act 1996, section 8 of the Prison Act 1952, and section 22 of the UK Borders Act 2007. There will be a test afterwards.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I am not Welsh, but the west midlands are not too far from the Welsh border. Home Office statistics show that in the west midlands alone there were just over 1,300 assaults recorded against police officers in 2016-17. I hope that the Bill gets its Second Reading and continues. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this debate, as well as dealing with assaults on emergency workers, should, and really will, send out a strong message to other public sector workers in areas such as refuse collection, who also face assault, that these attacks are absolutely not acceptable and will not be tolerated?

Chris Bryant: I would like to cut the number of assaults on anyone in society—that is the truth of the matter. The hon. Lady makes a good point about public sector workers.

Incidentally, I should make one comment before I continue. My hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Ms Lee) referred to HIV. It is true that people often fear HIV infection in these situations, but it is almost inconceivable that somebody would be infected with HIV by being spat at. I want to make that absolutely clear. I would be horrified if my Bill were somehow to be used to increase the stigma attached to such illnesses.

There is a problem with the existing offences. Common assault makes no distinction between a member of the public and an emergency worker, and the other offences apply only to police, prison and immigration officers, and not to all emergency workers. What is more, they are all summary offences triable only in the magistrates courts, with a maximum sentence of six months.

By contrast, the Bill's new offence will apply to all emergency workers. It will be an "either way" offence, triable in either a magistrates court or a Crown court, with a maximum sentence of 12 months, or a fine, or both. In essence, it will double the maximum sentence available for assault or battery of an emergency worker. It will give the Crown Prosecution Service an extra string to its bow and it will match the provisions already in place in Scotland.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): On that point, I am trying to understand the hon. Gentleman's reasoning for the sentence on indictment being exactly the same as the sentence on summary. Will that be teased out in Committee? What was his thinking on that?

Chris Bryant: My original suggestion was that it should be six months on a summary offence and 12 months on an indictable offence, but the Government decided that they would prefer it to be 12 months on either. Because I am in an emollient mood, I decided to go along with the Government. That may be a question for the Government, today or in Committee. There is an argument for holding the Committee stage on the Floor of the House on one of the days that might be empty over the next few weeks, given the legislative programme.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way so many times. He will be aware that the Attorney General can review unduly lenient sentencing for certain offences. I have called for that to be extended to offences against police officers, which the hon. Gentleman has referenced. Will he consider the possibility that, in Committee, the offences in the Bill could be wrapped into that extended power?

Chris Bryant: That is a good point, which had not occurred to me. The hon. Gentleman has made a good case for being on the Bill Committee, and that is up to me. The Bill Committee may be growing, however, so we may have to persuade the Government Whips; I have found that if one talks nicely to Government Whips, they are sometimes helpful. We might want to bring Committee or Report to the Floor of the House so that everyone can consider the proposals.

The second thing the Bill does is mirror, in clause 2, the provisions in part 12 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003. That Act made any offence aggravated when it was based on hostility to the victim's race, religion, sexual orientation, disability or transgender nature. That statutory definition of aggravated offences built on the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which stipulated that certain offences would attract longer sentences if they were racially or religiously motivated. So clause 2 of my Bill will put an assault perpetrated against an emergency worker on a legal par with a hate crime, and I think that that is the appropriate way to go. It means that the court must state, in open court, that the crime is so aggravated and must treat as an aggravating factor the fact that the offence was committed in such a way.

Clause 3 defines an emergency worker. Thanks to a glitch, I think the definition is not quite right, and we will want to improve it in Committee.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con) *rose*—

Chris Bryant: I thought that that might prompt the hon. Gentleman to intervene. Lo and behold, Zebedee appeared.

Jeremy Lefroy: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman thought that, but I am most grateful to him for giving way and for all the work that he has done on this incredibly important Bill. On a point of definition, we could consider in Committee the inclusion of minor injuries units as well as urgent treatment centres and emergency departments. Aside from the nature of the injuries treated at each one, the public do not see much difference between those three types of emergency unit.

Chris Bryant: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. I would prefer the inclusion of an additional subsection, which I think would meet his point. It would state that the Bill covered a person employed for the purpose of providing, or engaged to provide, healthcare services within the meaning of section 64 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012, subsection—I cannot read the little number. I agree that it is something that we need to address.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): I welcome the Bill and I will support it, given the opportunity. Does the hon. Gentleman consider that clause 3 includes jailers—people who look after defendants in court while they are waiting for trials and so on? If not, perhaps some thought should be given to that. The cells at court can be volatile places and the people who work in that environment might be at risk.

Chris Bryant: That is another matter for us to tease out, of course. Clause 3(1)(e) is clear in referring to "a person (other than a prison officer) employed or engaged to carry out functions in a custodial institution".

I think that that would cover such people, but—

Victoria Atkins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Bryant: I have no choice.

Victoria Atkins: I jumped to clause 3(3), which defines a custodial institution, and I do not read that as including cells at court. This might be a matter for the Committee.

Chris Bryant: I feel as though we are already in Committee. The hon. Lady makes a good point. Once a barrister, always a barrister; I am not sure whether she is being paid by the word or by the intervention. [*Interruption.*] Sorry; there had to be one anti-lawyer comment today.

The third thing that the Bill does is make provision for the taking of samples when an assailant has spat at an emergency worker. It makes it an offence punishable by a fine of up to £500 for an assailant unreasonably to refuse to give an intimate sample, such as a blood sample. That matters, because so many officers and emergency workers have been spat at and lived in anxiety for months about whether they had contracted a communicable disease.

I want to be very careful about how people refer to HIV in particular, but I have had one example of a police officer—I met him yesterday—who was spat at, with the saliva entering his eye and mouth. The assailant

[Chris Bryant]

refused to give a sample, and the police officer had a false positive test for hepatitis B, which created enormous anxiety. His wife and children had to be tested as well. I just do not think that that situation is appropriate, and I hope the Bill will help to change it.

Some have argued that the Bill is unnecessary because the sentencing guidelines already deal with the matter. In particular, they say that the guidelines on assault occasioning bodily harm—section 47 offences from the Offences Against the Person Act 1861—state that the court should consider the fact that the offence was “committed against those working in the public sector or providing a service to the public”

an aggravating factor. I believe that that is drawn far too widely in the guidelines, and I want to throw a cordon sanitaire specifically around our emergency workers.

The sentencing guidelines also make it clear, as they have to by law, that there are two categories of aggravating factor: statutory, such as previous convictions and offences committed while on bail, which have been mandated by Parliament in statute law; and a non-exhaustive list of other factors, including location, timing, an attempt to conceal evidence and 14 other factors. The point is that the fact that the assault leading to bodily harm was on an emergency worker is not a statutory aggravating factor, and my Bill would make it just such a factor.

Those who argue that that is unnecessary are arguing against the very concept of statutory aggravating factors, including hate crimes. I believe that the country now widely accepts the proposition that such factors should exist. Moreover, the victims of hate crimes say that the very fact that the court has to state that the homophobic or racial element of the offence is an aggravating factor gives them a sense that justice is being done. Part of the fury that 999 workers feel is caused by the fact that that element is never stated in open court, but now it will be.

Paragraph 4.12(c) of “The Code for Crown Prosecutors” states:

“A prosecution is also more likely if the offence has been committed against a victim who was at the time a person serving the public.”

That, too, is written in the widest possible terms, and I am trying to enhance the protection specifically for emergency workers, because they put themselves in harm’s way on a daily basis.

Every single one of us knows that merely introducing a new offence will not put a sudden end to such assaults, and there is much else that we need to do to protect our emergency workers. This comes to a point that was made earlier: one reason many prosecutions are not brought is that the perpetrator is a vulnerable patient suffering from a condition that makes them violent. The health worker, who wants only the best for their patient, is understandably reluctant to press for a prosecution. A hospital might be so keen to keep out of the news that it will be reluctant to summon the police.

The truth is that if a mental health unit or an accident and emergency unit is under-staffed, it is far more difficult to maintain order and secure the safety of staff and patients. It should be a fundamental duty of any organisation that employs people in such circumstances to make sure its staff are safe. Someone who rocks up at A&E drunk or high and is told that they will have to wait for several hours is, of course, more likely to get

aggressive and violent than someone who is seen swiftly. I do not say that to excuse anyone—of course I do not; violence against medical staff is morally offensive and medically counterproductive, and we should adopt a zero-tolerance attitude towards it—but health bodies need to put the safety of their staff at the top of their list of priorities, and the Government must give the NHS the resources it needs.

I am not going to make many partisan points, but it is incomprehensible to me why the Government are going to cancel NHS Protect, which provides the statistics on this—without such statistics, we would not have been able to have this debate—and will rely only on staff surveys to get such statistics in the future.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): My hon. Friend makes an excellent point about NHS resources. When I visited my accident and emergency department at West Middlesex University Hospital, I found that it is spending £2 million a year on additional mental health staff in the main part of the hospital, because there is not adequate capacity in the mental health services to enable people with acute mental health problems to be directed straight to the appropriate mental health services. The hospital has to spend a lot of money to protect the other patients and the staff in the accident and emergency department because so many people are very vulnerable when people with such problems come in and pose a risk. It has had to set aside separate rooms, but even then there is not enough capacity.

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend makes a good point. This is a debate for another day, but my feeling is that this country wants a Swedish standard of NHS on American levels of taxation, and in the end I just do not think that works. The Unison survey I mentioned earlier said that 87% of mental health staff felt that the lack of staff was the major contributory factor in attacks, and 50% felt that over-reliance on agency staff was a problem because those staff do not know the patients well enough to ensure safety and deal with them appropriately. If the Bill is to have the desired effect, it is self-evident that the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and prisons will need adequate resources.

I again pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax. I was more delighted by her re-election than by the fact that I was myself re-elected at the general election. She has done a wonderful job of work, and we have worked closely together on this campaign. There are others I want to thank. This is going to sound like the Oscars now, but I am not going to thank Harvey Weinstein. I want to thank the Police Federation and all the trades unions—particularly the GMB, Unite and Unison, which have worked long and hard on this—as well as the Royal College of Nursing, the British Medical Association and the National AIDS Trust, which provided some important advice at the last minute.

I do not often say something like this, but many Conservative colleagues have helped me to get as tough a Bill as possible out of the Government parliamentary counsel. In particular, I am enormously grateful to the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb), whom I think of as a friend. He was quite helpful when I broke my leg playing rugby—at Twickenham, incidentally—so I have to say that. I really never thought I would say this sentence, but I would like to thank the

hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), because he has lent considerable support to making sure that we are all singing from the same hymn sheet.

Finally, I thank the Minister. I have had a few tussles with some Ministers over the legislation. It is only right and proper when we are considering a new offence under which people may be sent to prison for a considerable period to have a barney about how precisely we draft that legislation. I am grateful to the Minister on the Front Bench and his colleagues. I very much hope that the Bill will have unanimous support. I hope, too, that the public who are watching will not think it an anti-climax if there is no vote. That simply means that the view of the House is unanimous: we will not put up with assaults on emergency workers.

10.14 am

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I intend to speak briefly because I know that many other colleagues want to speak. I am grateful to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me so early in the debate.

I congratulate my good friend the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant). He is a friend—sometimes, a critical friend—and we have worked well together on numerous issues over the years. It has been particularly good to see the very careful way in which he has sought to garner cross-party support for the Bill. I have been impressed by how he has worked with Ministers to try to refine some of its details. I hope that the Bill will enjoy a successful Second Reading and that we can move forward and work out some of the details in Committee.

I was pleased that the hon. Gentleman asked me to be one of the sponsors of the Bill. I am of course delighted to be in the House today to stand with emergency workers from my constituency of Preseli Pembrokeshire, and from all across the UK, and join in sending what I hope will be a strong signal from the House about how we value them, the esteem in which we hold them and what we intend to do to improve their working lives. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch). I do not know her well, but she did much of the groundwork for where we are today and a lot of the credit goes to her for the work she has previously done.

The Bill now has Government support. I know from my meetings with the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service and with Justice Ministers that they genuinely desire a serious, useful and practical piece of legislation to put on the statute book to ensure better legal protections for emergency workers. I am impressed by the spirit with which they have responded to the private Member's Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Rhondda. There is widespread support right across the House for the aims of the Bill and the measures in it.

In researching the aspects of the Bill with which I am less familiar, I have tried to speak to local officers during the past few weeks. I was impressed by the response I received from officers in my constituency and right across the Dyfed-Powys police force area, as well as by representatives of the local branch of the Police Federation. This time last Friday, I was in a meeting with local members of the Police Federation and a number of police officers to talk specifically about the Bill and other matters affecting them, and I was genuinely moved by some of the experiences they shared with me.

Officers do of course train and prepare for potential attacks and assaults. In some ways, that is part of their career and they expect it to happen at some point. The Dyfed-Powys police force area has some of the lowest crime rates anywhere in the country—it is a truly wonderful place to live: we do not have high levels of crime—but what struck me when talking to these officers was the sheer frequency with which assaults occur even in such a police force area.

It is true that all the offences the officers described are already covered in legislation—under the current statute book, it is not considered okay for attacks to happen on emergency workers—but I am nevertheless totally persuaded by the case they made last week, and by the case the hon. Gentleman has made, that our framework of legislation is too weak in this respect. I therefore very much support the Bill's aim to strengthen the legislation on assaults on emergency workers.

Such assaults often occur when an officer seeks to apprehend a suspect. In one incident in my area, when police officers sought to arrest a man wanted for questioning about a domestic assault, the man drove at them in a tractor. He went on to attack one of them with a long-handled sickle—a sword, basically. He killed the police dog that was with the officer, and the officer narrowly missed being seriously injured. No one should think for a moment that such an incident does not leave a serious and deep mark on all the officers present at the scene.

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making a very valid point about how brutal and shocking such attacks can be. I want to draw attention to one involving staff from the South East Coast Ambulance Service. While they were on duty and trying to deal with a road traffic incident, they were charged at by a driver in a car. They were attacked before they could get out of the ambulance, and had to deal with someone who might injure them before they could deal with the incident itself. Does he agree that most of our constituents do not fully appreciate the risks our emergency workers have to take?

Stephen Crabb: I agree with my hon. Friend. The vast majority of incidents never appear in newspapers and never get talked about in the media. They are hidden and affect just the officers and their families. At a time when so much good work is going on in the field of mental health and policing, we should also recognise the physical, psychological and emotional impact that an assault can have on an officer and their family. It is all too easy to forget that emergency workers are human beings too: they are mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, friends and loved ones.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): My right hon. Friend mentioned an unfortunate skirmish in his constituency in which a police dog was attacked and killed. Does he agree that it would be pertinent for the Bill to incorporate a response to attacks on animals that work in the police force and other emergency services, so that the law could deal equally with such perpetrators?

Stephen Crabb: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but I will resist the temptation to draw this debate into a discussion about the detail. We will have time in Committee to sort that out. Let us stick to the broad principles today.

[*Stephen Crabb*]

One officer with whom I spoke told me that she had recently had her nose broken on duty and that her daughter is now afraid every time her mummy puts on her police uniform—she is afraid to see her mum go to work. The impact extends far beyond the individual officer. The psychological fallout can be exacerbated when the perpetrator is seen to walk away with what seems like a slap on the wrist. If only it were a slap on the wrist; as the hon. Member for Rhondda has said, all too often it is nothing at all.

Antoinette Sandbach: In 2015-16, there were 668 attacks on NHS staff in the Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, none of which were reported for criminal sanction.

Stephen Crabb: Those are shocking figures. There is a real sense of anger, certainly among the police officers with whom I spoke and other emergency workers, when they have suffered an attack and see those responsible walking away from court with no punishment at all. That is a factor in people deciding to quit these really important occupations in our society.

Another female officer in my police force area shared an incident with me. She was punched in the face, causing her lip to bleed. The suspect was known to be infected with hepatitis C and had a cut on their hand as well. That immediately put the officer in significant danger, as there was a possibility that her own blood could be contaminated. The officer was, of course, required to have blood tests and was prescribed antibiotics to try to prevent an infection. After two weeks' leave, the officer returned to duty. However, she will not receive her blood test results for another eight weeks and feels that her life has in effect been put on hold. It was particularly galling for this female officer to hear that the suspect, who was convicted, received a prison sentence of only five weeks, which means that they will be out of prison weeks before the officer gets her blood test results.

The fact is that far too many of our police and emergency workers believe that their experiences of assault are not treated seriously enough by the judiciary and that laughable sentences are given to their attackers. Therefore, I welcome the tougher approach that the Bill provides.

Of course, it is not just the police who face assaults. Even more incomprehensible, in some ways, is the sheer frequency of attacks on paramedics, firefighters, nurses and prison officers—people who put their own lives and safety at risk for others—when they are trying to perform their duties.

In addition to the figures shared by the hon. Member for Rhondda, figures that I saw earlier this year indicated that attacks on firefighters had trebled across Wales. South Wales fire and rescue service reported 31 incidents between April 2016 and March 2017, up from just 12 in the previous year. It said that its crews had been subjected to verbal assault and physical abuse, including having bricks thrown at them.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for citing the figures from Wales. The Scottish fire and rescue service also collates the figures, but the House of Commons

Library briefing for this debate has no national figures because they are not officially collected. Does he agree that that omission from public data should be addressed?

Stephen Crabb: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The devolved Administrations have their own systems for collecting data, but that should not be a barrier to ensuring a proper UK-wide picture of what is going on across the whole country.

If we are serious about taking a zero-tolerance approach to mindless attacks on frontline workers, let us ensure that we have a framework of law that reflects that, not only for the police but for firefighters, paramedics, nurses and prison officers. There have been calls for the scope of the Bill to be widened to include workers in other health and care settings. As I have said, that is a matter for discussion in Committee. The important priority today is to ensure that this Bill passes its Second Reading with the strongest possible support from across the House.

Before I finish, I wish to address one more aspect, which is the proposed powers to take blood samples and non-intimate samples such as saliva. When I began my research, I confess that I did not appreciate the significance of this issue in the context of assaults on emergency workers. One of the officers I met last week described an assault when she went to assist a woman at a domestic incident. The woman turned aggressively on the police officer and attacked her, causing several injuries including significant bleeding when she dug her long fingernails into her hand. The attacker then shouted at the officer that she was carrying a blood disease. For the past five months, that officer has been living with stress and anxiety over what she may or may not have been infected with. No samples have been taken from the attacker to check whether or not she was lying, so the officer has faced the long process of being tested herself. She told me how she has been afraid of just how much physical contact she should give her own children, for fear of passing something on. The right to take samples from suspects will rapidly accelerate the process of determining a potential contraction and will give a confident assurance to those emergency workers affected that we are here to help them through the situation.

There is plenty of detail to be worked out in the Bill, but this morning gives us the opportunity to show our strongest possible support for its Second Reading. It is a chance to signal the extent of our respect and support for our emergency workers. This is not just about signalling, however. I am sceptical of proposed legislation that is just declaratory or that contains just rhetoric; the important point about this Bill is that it is practical and useful, and its measures will make a real difference to the working lives of some of the most important people in our society.

10.26 am

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): I am delighted to speak on Second Reading. First, I must pay tribute to my honourable friend—in the truest sense of those words—the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who has taken on this campaign, pushing it forward with his trademark tenacity, attention to detail, pragmatism and, of course, humour, which have allowed us to get to where we are. I know that I channel the voices of frontline emergency service workers all over the country when I thank him for the leadership he has demonstrated with this Bill.

For those who are not familiar with how the “Protect the Protectors” campaign started—which surely cannot be that many people now, given that I am genuinely losing my voice from having told the story so many times this week alone—it began last summer when I took the opportunity to join West Yorkshire police in my constituency for a Friday evening late shift, shadowing a single-crewed response officer responding to 999 calls.

It was not long into my time with PC Craig Gallant that the on-board automatic number plate recognition system flagged up that a car we had just passed should be stopped in order to speak to the driver about drugs offences. When the blue lights were put on, the driver initially sped away, but after a short chase, he eventually came to a stop. PC Gallant got out of the police car to speak to the driver, asking him to get out of his vehicle, but the driver, who had passengers in his car, refused to do so. It was a warm summer’s evening in an area of Halifax where, unfortunately, deprivation has fed a variety of social challenges, and those out on the streets took an almost instant and tribal dislike to the lone officer in their community.

While PC Gallant persevered with the driver, passers-by and passing vehicles began to take an interest, and a small and increasingly agitated crowd began to gather. The situation very quickly escalated when further vehicles pulled up at speed. The occupants of those cars got out to confront the officer, while the passengers of the first vehicle sought to escape by getting into one of those that had just arrived. Now facing a hostile crowd, with those engaged in criminal activity seeking to create havoc to facilitate a getaway, and some residents, disappointingly but probably unknowingly, assisting them by joining the threatening gang that had gathered, PC Gallant locked me in the police car for my own safety and was forced to draw his baton to protect himself while instructing the crowd to move back. Locked in the police car, I was equipped with nothing more than a fluorescent observer jacket. I did not know if PC Gallant had called for back-up and I did not know how to use the car radio to make contact with the control room. I cannot stress to colleagues enough the sense of powerlessness: the fear that I might have to sit in that police car and watch him take a beating, or worse. I decided that calling 999 directly was the fastest way to make contact with the control room. I cannot convey either just how it felt, having asked for the police, to be told repeatedly by an automated message, “Please hold the line.”

What was probably only seconds felt like an eternity while I watched the scene unfold. Having finally been connected, I relayed the situation to the control room. To say I was relieved when reinforcements arrived is something of an understatement. After the passengers from the first car had managed to escape, despite PC Gallant’s best efforts, their quick getaway and the arrival of further officers meant that the situation was defused fairly quickly. Astonishingly, no injuries were sustained on that occasion. It is fair to say that PC Gallant remained much calmer than I did throughout the ordeal, but I saw for myself just how quickly situations can become dangerous and just how vulnerable officers are when they are out on their own.

Those who attended the photo drop-in on Wednesday—I thank all those who did—will have had the opportunity to meet PC Gallant, who, after the incident, simply got

on with the rest of his shift and shook it off, having not been assaulted on that occasion at least, unlike on so many others.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and it is good to see her having a glass of water. I met PC Gallant the other morning. She has given us a powerful and shocking report of the incident she witnessed. Does she agree that our constituents would be shocked to find out how many attacks take place? For instance, the Police Federation survey estimates there were nearly 21,000 attacks on police officers just in Gwent in 2015-16.

Holly Lynch: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. This is what we are seeing increasingly. It is both the frequency and the severity of these incidents. If we do not take this opportunity to act and address them, they will become more normalised and we absolutely do not want that to happen.

Having shared that experience with colleagues during an Adjournment debate last October, I then found myself inundated with what can only be described as horror stories from not only the police, but emergency service workers from all over the country who had been subjected to assaults that seem to be increasing in both frequency and severity. What thoroughly depresses 999 and NHS workers is that sentences handed down to offenders for assaulting them often fail to reflect the seriousness of the crime, or, more crucially, to serve as a deterrent. Many described feeling like they had suffered an injustice twice: first at the hands of the offender and then again in court when sentences were unduly lenient.

We make the laws in here, but we ask the police to uphold and enforce them out there. To assault an emergency service worker is to show a complete disregard for law and order, for our shared values, and for democracy itself. That must be reflected in sentencing, particularly for repeat offenders. Because of the separation between lawmakers and the Sentencing Council, we have sought to explore all the ways we could toughen legislation in the Bill to protect those on the front line.

In previous speeches I have made on this subject, I told Parliament about how, just days before my shift, PC Vicky Tompkins had responded to a call in my district. On arriving, she was head-butted by an offender, knocking her to the floor. The assault snapped one of her teeth and dislodged another, causing other fractures to her mouth and face. She had to have temporary filling work and a splint put in her mouth. There is a video of PC Tompkins recounting the incident on the Police Federation’s website, which is incredibly difficult to watch. The offender was released and went on to assault another police officer not long after.

I was proud to see PC Tompkins receive an award at the district awards in June this year, following the role she played in saving the life of a suicidal young woman who was holding on to the outside of a multi-storey car park by her fingertips. Since then, however, PC Tompkins has joined the increasing number of those who have handed in their resignation and taken the decision to leave policing. I take this opportunity to thank her for her service and to let her know that her experience has fed into this campaign, which I hope will make a significant difference in protecting those who continue to serve and those who will serve.

Victoria Atkins: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, who has fought a magnificent campaign over the past 12 months. We worked together when I was a Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Home Office. I commend her for seeing this legislation through with the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant). The scenes she describes are upsetting and just plain wrong. Does she agree that investing in body-worn cameras for police officers will help them to secure convictions, and, I hope, higher sentences, and perhaps save them from the arduous task of having to give evidence in court and be cross-examined to explain what happened? The videos will show what happened to them and I hope that will increase convictions in these circumstances.

Holly Lynch: I am really grateful for the hon. Lady's intervention. I thank her for her support. We had an open dialogue when she was in her previous role, which was incredibly helpful. She is absolutely right that body-worn video has given frontline officers in particular the assurance that, should they be confronted in that way, there will be an evidence base that will help to secure prosecutions in court, which is what we all want.

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): On that point, in a recent conversation with police officers in Bury St Edmunds, they said how beneficial body-worn videos are. Is there scope in the Bill for their use in other circumstances, for example for those who work in ambulances and so on who also go into very aggressive situations? They could help them, too.

Holly Lynch: Again, I am grateful for that considered and thoughtful intervention. There are lots of issues surrounding the challenge we are trying to address. Legislation and sentencing is one element, and, as legislators, that is our brief, but there are all sorts of conversations about personal protective equipment. Are our frontline emergency service workers carrying everything that would be helpful in those circumstances? The hon. Lady is right that we can look in Committee at where there is scope to incorporate that, but some of those conversations will need to happen beyond this legislative process.

The second aspect of the Bill aims to deal with the hideous act of spitting at emergency service workers. As well as being horrible, spitting blood and saliva at another human being can pose a very real risk of transmitting a range of infectious diseases, some with life-changing or even lethal consequences. At an event organised by Rob Marris, the former Member for Wolverhampton South West, I met PC Mike Bruce and PC Alan O'Shea of West Midlands police, who were also able to join us for the drop-in on Wednesday; my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda recounted one of those conversations earlier. Both officers had blood spat in their faces while trying to arrest a violent offender. They both had to undergo antiviral treatments to reduce their risk of contracting communicable diseases and they faced a six-month wait to find out whether the treatment had been successful.

During that time, PC O'Shea's brother was undergoing treatment for cancer. Because it was deemed by professionals that the risk of passing on an infection was too high should he have contracted a disease, he was advised not to see his brother throughout that intervening period. He was also advised not to see his parents, because they

were in such regular contact with his brother. PC Bruce had a false positive result for hepatitis B, and, for six months until conclusive test results came through and following further tests within his family, he was understandably reluctant to be close to his wife or children, fearing for their wellbeing. Victim impact statements provided by both officers outlining their experiences, failed to secure a custodial sentence for the prolific offender. Conversely, it only empowered him further. He left court knowing that he had a much greater impact on their lives than he had initially thought and showed absolutely no remorse. At the moment, as we have already heard, if an emergency service worker is spat at, they can take a blood sample from an individual only if that person gives their permission. Needless to say that in the case of PC O'Shea and PC Bruce, the offender was not in a helpful mood, so they were subjected to antiviral treatments and a six-month wait.

The Bill would protect not just police officers, but all blue light emergency responders, as well as healthcare professionals, those engaged in search and rescue work, and prison officers.

David Morris: I have read in the newspapers—in truth, I do not know if this is correct—that when people have an AIDS test or something similar, their insurance is reviewed. Could we put in the Bill, during the Committee stage, special provision for emergency workers so they are not penalised in this way by certain insurance companies?

Holly Lynch: That had not been brought to my attention until now, and I will certainly look into it. This too may be a conversation that we need to have outside the context of the Bill, but we will undoubtedly explore all the opportunities during its passage.

A report published in December by Yorkshire ambulance service revealed that staff faced “violence and aggression” on a weekly basis. There was a 50% increase in the number of reported incidents of verbal and physical attacks on staff, with 606 incidents reported in 2015-16. Richard Bentley, a paramedic in Leeds who was also with us on Wednesday, told the BBC that he had faced three serious assaults in five years. He had been bitten, head-butted, and threatened with a knife. Members of West Yorkshire fire and rescue service have also reported being subject to assaults. On bonfire night, the service received 1,043 calls, with crews attending 265 incidents. It was disgraceful that, faced with such pressures on the busiest night of the year, firefighters in West Yorkshire were subject to 19 attacks overnight.

The Bill would also cover assaults on prison officers. Over the past 15 years, there has been a steady but dramatic increase in the number of reported incidents of prison officers being spat at or bitten. We should bear in mind that anyone can spit. People do not need to go to the trouble of acquiring or fashioning an offensive weapon in order to inflict life-changing consequences on another person; they can simply use their own bodily fluids. Regardless of whether the spitter has a communicable disease, the inability to determine that at the time of the incident leaves emergency service workers with no choice other than to undergo antiviral treatments and face an agonising six-month wait. When I checked with the Prison Officers Association, it confirmed that a prison officer would be expected to be at work

during the intervening time, and—unlike those in the other services—might be asked to return to his or her duties on the same wing, to face the spitter every day of that agonising period.

When I was growing up, my mum was a nurse and my dad was a police sergeant. When she was working in A&E, someone tried to kick my mum in the stomach while she was pregnant with me. My dad received a bravery award following an incident when he came home absolutely black and blue after a violent offender had resisted arrest. I am pleased to say that he succeeded in making that arrest.

This is not a new issue, but in my time as an MP I have seen that the threats facing our emergency service workers are more prevalent than ever. If we do not take this opportunity to act, we shall be letting down some of the bravest in our society and those on whom we all rely the most. I am very pleased that the Government recognise that fact, and that we are, I understand, working together to deliver changes that would go some way towards giving our emergency service workers the protection that they need in order to do their jobs and keep our communities safe.

10.42 am

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): I, too, support the Bill. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) and the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who rightly made the point that an assault on an emergency worker is not just a simple case of disrespect, but undermines the very fabric of our society. That places such assaults in a category all their own.

The hon. Gentleman also said that lawyers had a part to play, and I hope that, as a lawyer myself, I shall have some sort of contribution to make. During the 20 years or so in which I practised before coming to this place, my experience was that courts generally treated assaults on frontline and emergency workers in a context of aggravation, and that tougher sentences tended to be imposed. Notwithstanding that, it is right for us to put those protections in statute and reassure emergency workers in particular, when they go out to serve us and deal with the public, that we, as a Parliament, a country and a society, are behind them through legal means.

While, as I have said, I fully support the Bill, I hope that the hon. Member for Rhondda will forgive me if I draw the House's attention to some of my concerns about it. I genuinely want it to complete its passage through both Houses and become law, but I do feel that it needs an awful lot of work. I have a great deal of sympathy for the hon. Gentleman, because I have presented a private Member's Bill myself, and I know that it is almost impossible for such a Bill to reach this stage in a perfect state, so this is not a criticism. However, it is important for us to get it right now if it is to succeed.

I have to say that when I read the Bill's long title I winced, because it referred to emergency workers acting in the execution of their duty, whereas the body of the Bill refers to "the exercise of functions". It is unclear which of those terms will apply to any legislation. If I understand the procedure correctly, the long title cannot be altered at this stage. I hope that that does not hamstring the hon. Gentleman, and I certainly hope that the Bill will not be constrained by incidents in which workers are simply carrying out the execution of

their duty. I have witnessed too many occasions on which people charged with assaulting police officers during the execution of their duty have been able to walk because of a technicality—a breach of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, for instance—which means that those officers have not, at that precise moment, been acting in the execution of their duty.

Chris Bryant: The hon. Gentleman has made a very fair point. One of the reasons for the difference between (a) and (b) is the fact that the long title was drawn up before the Bill had been written; it was agreed, effectively, on First Reading, and has now been agreed on Second Reading. During the intervening period, a great many people made representations to me about the problem of securing convictions under the tighter definition to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. It is not necessary to change the long title, because it is the main body of the Bill that carries the weight.

Gareth Johnson: I certainly hope that that is the case. What is positive about this is the fact that there is a cross-party consensus, and the Government are supporting the Bill. I think that an awful lot of work needs to be done by Government lawyers, and I hope that some of the lawyers in the Ministry of Justice will work closely with the hon. Gentleman to ensure that we have a workable Bill at the end of the process.

I also think that the Bill has problems with the definition of an emergency worker. The hon. Gentleman said he accepted that it did not cover all the medical workers that he wanted it to cover. The overwhelming majority of NHS workers would not be covered as things stand. It has been mentioned that people working in minor injury units will not be covered by the Bill in its present form, and that needs to change. A receptionist working in A&E would be covered, but a nurse working on a ward in a minor or other injuries unit would not. That is an anomaly that must be ironed out, and I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman has acknowledged that.

Chris Bryant: We are, in a way, having a Committee stage now. Let me explain how that issue arose. I discussed an original version of the Bill with the very lawyers at the Ministry of Justice whom the hon. Gentleman urged me to talk to. An element was taken out, because we felt that ambulance workers would not be covered, and in the process we lost other workers in the NHS. I have spoken to the Justice Secretary, and he made it clear that we would put that right in Committee.

Gareth Johnson: I am very reassured by that. It is excellent news.

It is also important, given that courts generally treat assaults on frontline workers as aggravated offences, for the Bill not to say to the courts, "This is Parliament telling you when you should and should not find an aggravated offence". The danger is that someone who slipped out of the remit of the Bill could end up with a lesser sentence as a consequence. The courts need to understand that this legislation would be in addition to, not a replacement for, the current law. If they do not do so, people who would currently be treated harshly may not be in the future, because Parliament, by implication, has not included them in the body of the legislation.

[Gareth Johnson]

Requiring emergency workers to be actively carrying out their functions also creates some problems. For example, a paramedic who was simply standing outside a hospital and was assaulted would not be covered by the Bill. I am sure that that is not the hon. Gentleman's intention, and what I have said is not meant in any way to be a criticism, but I want the Bill to succeed.

The hon. Gentleman has rightly tried to include people who are off duty. As we know, emergency workers, especially police officers, often step in when they are off duty because they want to help someone out in particular circumstances, and it is absolutely right for them to be covered by the Bill. My fear is that the Bill is drawn too widely, because it simply covers any action that, if done while on duty, would constitute working, so it could even cover driving down a road. However, in a road rage situation, the court must—not can, but must—treat that as an aggravating factor, so that needs to be looked at.

The Bill also covers a number of offences under the Offences Against the Person Act 1861, but it does not refer to the Public Order Act 1986. The hon. Members for Halifax and for Rhondda both mentioned situations in which emergency workers were threatened with a knife. That will not be covered under the Bill, and it needs to be. It is not an assault; it is an affray and comes under the Public Order Act as threatening behaviour. Therefore, the courts would not treat it as an aggravating factor under this Bill.

I appreciate that some of these matters can be ironed out in Committee, and I reiterate that I fully support the principles behind the Bill. I pay tribute to the hon. Members for Rhondda and for Halifax and all those who have assisted with the Bill. It is vital that we get it into statute and working correctly, but it has some serious problems that have not been addressed. I will try to rattle through some of the brief points I want to make, because I am in no way trying to cause problems for the hon. Member for Rhondda in getting the Bill through Second Reading.

I want to highlight the hon. Gentleman's definition of "emergency worker", which for some reason does not cover customs officers, who can often put themselves in an emergency situation where they perhaps need the protection that the legislation would give to other emergency workers.

I am pleased that the Bill covers intimate and non-intimate samples. As we know, there have been many instances of police officers and other emergency workers being assaulted and having their lives placed in limbo. I shall never forget a case at City of London magistrates court where a police officer was in tears in the witness box because he had been bitten by somebody and he had just got married but, because tests were still being carried out on him, he was unable to consummate his marriage. He was unable to live a normal family life and he was in tears as a consequence.

The House appreciates that when an assault takes place on an emergency worker, it is not just the individual emergency worker who is affected; very often it is the family members as well. That is why this legislation is vital and it is right to ensure appropriate penalties for failing to give non-intimate samples. We do not want to end up making it better for someone with an infectious

disease to refuse to give a sample because they would only get fined under this Bill, whereas if they gave a sample, that would be an aggravating factor and they would go to prison. That, too, needs to be sorted out.

In conclusion, I hope the Bill gets its Second Reading and is not opposed by anybody in this House. It would be a valuable contribution to the criminal justice system. It would give reassurance to emergency workers, who deserve it. It is a Bill worthy of the valiant emergency workers we have in this country.

10.53 am

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): It is a great privilege to speak in this important debate. I want to place on record my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) for all her campaigning and the detail in which she spoke this morning on issues such as spitting and why this change in the law is important for those issues.

I also thank my Welsh hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) for his fantastic speech and campaigning on this issue. We should remember that his constituents—the people of the Rhondda—voted for him to choose this as his private Member's Bill. I think that would have been the case in many of our communities, because most people, up and down the length and breadth of this land, are fed up to the back teeth with emergency services workers—the police, A&E staff, prison officers, firefighters or whatever—going to work and just doing their job, yet being treated with such disrespect, being assaulted and their lives being put in danger. That is not right and it should not be allowed. The law is not in the right place at present in this country, and it is absolutely right that my hon. Friend is bringing forward this Bill. I hope it will be supported unanimously and carried through, so that, finally, our country will have better laws on this issue.

When I mentioned to my constituents that I was one of the large number of cross-party co-sponsors whom my hon. Friend had brought together to support the Bill, I asked whether the emergency workers among them had anything they wanted to contribute to this debate. Among the contributions I received was an account from a police officer of why he wants the Bill to be passed. He wrote:

"I was the first to arrive and witnessed a man (a martial arts instructor) assaulting a female and telling her that she was going to die. This man was charged with attempted murder of the female in relation to this assault so I'm sure you can imagine the gravity of the assault taking place before me. The lady was being manually choked on the floor and punched to the face in an attempt to kill her. She was struggling to breathe and could not survive much longer.

I used my limited equipment of captor spray and baton in an attempt to physically hurt the man sufficiently for him to stop trying to kill the lady as my verbal commands fell on deaf ears. Eventually he dropped her like a rag doll allowing her to run for safety.

He then turned to me, adopted a fighting stance and said these words: 'Now you are going to die'.

The man then began to punch me to the head countless times. As I stated, this man was a martial arts instructor and he was in a rage. I defended myself and fought back as best I could until a colleague arrived and we overpowered the assailant.

The man continued to make threats, stating that he would have killed the female victim had I not arrived and killed me had my colleague not arrived at the scene.

Whilst he was charged with attempted murder he pleaded guilty to threats to kill (in relation to me) assault upon the female and possession of an offensive weapon (in relation to a knife that he took with him to commit the assault). He received six years and four months imprisonment and nothing in relation to assaulting me.

At the time the Judge stated that the actions of my colleague and me prevented the man from killing the woman.”

This account shows what an outrageous position we currently have with the law in this country and it is high time that we changed it. I wholly support the attempt by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda to do so.

10.58 am

Mrs Kemi Badenoch (Saffron Walden) (Con): I welcome this Bill and I am very happy to support the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on this cross-party issue.

The nature of crime is changing. It is becoming more violent and more aggressive. Even as we see crime numbers fall, add the threat of terrorism, coupled with the sheer number of incidents involving mental health issues, and I can understand why police officers in my constituency feel besieged. My constituency is large, at about 400 square miles. That adds challenges, not just because of the size and scale of policing in our community, but because of the sense of isolation. Thirteen officers in Essex are assaulted every week. There were 666 reported cases between April 2016 and March 2017, but the real figure is far higher, because many cases go unreported. Police officers in my constituency tell me that they are scared and do not feel that the public understand or even care. This Bill sends a message that we do.

Earlier this month, officers in Saffron Walden responded to calls of road workers being threatened with a weapon. They pursued the suspect through difficult terrain. The man, heavily under the influence of drink and drugs, was eventually stopped, only to attack officers with a hammer. Officers present sustained injuries and, if not for their training and professionalism, could have been fatally injured. I am incredibly proud of Chief Inspector Carrington’s team, who put their own wellbeing at risk to keep us all safe.

I am also pleased with the Bill’s provisions for collecting samples from those offenders who spit at our emergency service workers. Spitting is a repulsive act and, when I was a London Assembly member, I worked extensively with the Met police on addressing the issue. I heard story after story of people who were worried about their health, not knowing what would happen as they waited for scary test results. Authorities that wish to use spit guards to protect their officers should be allowed to do so.

Emergency service workers are our first and last resort. These men and women dedicate their lives to us. They run towards danger as we run away. Police officers, in particular, are not typical employees. They accept no employment rights, which means they cannot go on strike. They have to rely on this place to ensure that they are provided with the support they deserve, which is why I support the Bill.

11.1 am

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): My contribution to this important debate will be brief.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), as others have, on introducing this Bill and on his work to raise awareness of it. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) on her work in last year’s ten-minute rule Bill and her wider “Protect the Protectors” campaign.

We all know that our emergency service workers put themselves in harm’s way every single day. They have no idea what they will face when they turn up for work. They take whatever comes, and they deal with it professionally in the true sense of public service. Our emergency service workers work hard to keep our communities safe and to look after people when they are ill or in danger. Those hugely important tasks are the bedrock of any society, and they do it on our behalf. They therefore deserve our full support and whatever protection we can provide.

Last year I took part in the police service parliamentary scheme, which gave me a small glimpse of the commitment and dedication of police officers, and of the pressure and difficult circumstances they have to deal with on a daily basis. On the scheme I spent some time with special constables. My dad was a special constable with South Wales police when I was young. He was seriously attacked in that role, and it is important that we remember the role of special constables and remember that they are an essential part of the police family. We must also remember that, ultimately, they are volunteers.

Jim Fitzpatrick: The police service parliamentary scheme is run by Sir Neil Thorne, and I was on the pilot scheme back in 1998. There is also now a fire service parliamentary scheme. I am sure that, like me, my hon. Friend would commend the schemes to all colleagues so that they can get a better understanding of how the police and fire services work. I am grateful that he has mentioned the police service parliamentary scheme, which will raise awareness of it among colleagues.

Gerald Jones: The police service, fire service and armed forces parliamentary schemes give parliamentarians a small but important glimpse of those services at the grassroots and of the daily pressures they deal with on our behalf.

Attacking a police officer is already an offence but, as things currently stand, the legislation is not effective and sentences are not fit for purpose. No specific protection exists for workers in the health service. We know from the Police Federation of England and Wales that the rate of attacks on police officers is unacceptably high—one every 15 seconds according to the latest estimates.

A third of my constituency is within the Gwent police force area, and its records show that 103 police officers have been assaulted since 2015, an average of one a week, 24 of which were assaults on detention staff in custody suites. The larger part of my constituency lies in the South Wales police area, and there, on average, nine officers are assaulted in any given week. Assaults often mean that officers are absent from their duties, which means that police resources are further depleted at a time when police numbers are significantly down owing to cuts.

The actual figures might be much higher, as there is evidence to suggest that officers report only the most serious cases, while the rest go unreported. That is replicated across our emergency services, as we have heard this morning.

[Gerald Jones]

We also know from figures released by South Wales fire and rescue service in June that there has been a 158% increase in the number of attacks against its crews in the past 12 months. Fire crews have been subjected to verbal and physical abuse and have had objects such as bricks and fireworks thrown at them as they respond to incidents, which is clearly unacceptable. Figures released in December 2016 show that NHS staff in Wales have been physically attacked more than 18,000 times over the last five years.

The evidence is there. Society supports our emergency services and the Bill, as highlighted by the survey of my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda. Parliament must act and send the strongest possible message that attacks on people working on behalf of the public will not be tolerated. One of the most effective ways to do that is to create a new aggravated offence of assaulting an emergency service worker and to make it an offence for a person who has spat at or bitten an officer not to supply an appropriate sample.

I fully support the Bill and urge others to do likewise. There seems to be a sense of unity across the House on this issue, which is entirely appropriate and very welcome.

11.6 am

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): I am extremely pleased to speak in this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on introducing the Bill. His speech was very good, and it was lovely to listen to him. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) on working with her colleagues over the past 12 months to highlight the issue.

It is great that a Bill has finally been introduced to address the desperate calls to deal with assaults on our emergency workers. I will cover three important points: matching the punishment to the crime; ensuring that NHS emergency workers are protected; and having the ability to take bodily samples where there is a risk of disease transmission.

First, it is high time that we started protecting our protectors and ensuring that the weight of punishment was in balance with the weight of the crime. At the moment, the penalty for assaulting a frontline worker is far too low, and the aggressor can get away with just a fine, whether it be for spitting, biting or punching a public servant. There have been many examples of such assaults resulting in victims having periods out of work, yet the perpetrators get off scot-free.

I am blessed in Rochester to have some amazing police community support officers.

Chris Bryant: I have been to Rochester.

Kelly Tolhurst: The hon. Gentleman has been to my constituency many times. I am keen to see what happens to the definition of “emergency worker.”

Jo Churchill: When we tease out that definition in Committee, I will offer up lone workers such as general practitioners who go out on call on their own. The definition should encompass the broader point. As my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden

(Mrs Badenoch) said, those of us who represent large rural constituencies, including the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), know that people are often going into unknown situations on their own.

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. I was just going on to say that in Rochester I am blessed to have some amazing PCSOs. These individuals go well above and beyond their job description in how they deal with the community. One particular officer, who is part of the community and often works on her own, was attacked this year after going to help somebody. She was supported and assisted by a member of the public who was outraged at what they were seeing. PCSOs do a massive job, so it is important that they are highlighted in the definition.

We have talked about officers having to have time off work, but we must consider the mental impact on an individual who experiences any kind of abuse and physical attack. It affects them but they never quite know how it will do so. It was sad to hear the hon. Member for Halifax mention that she has had contact with policewomen over the past 12 months who are now leaving the profession—that is devastating.

Clearly, we do not currently have the legal framework to ensure that there is proper sentencing, so I am pleased that clause 2 will introduce a new aggravating factor of a more serious degree of harm than usual. That is essential, as the aggressor is hurting not only the public sector worker—our emergency frontline worker—whom he or she has abused but the entire sector. When a police officer is forced to take leave following a violent incident, that force is left short-staffed, which can have a direct impact on the entire area, particularly in rural areas, as we have heard. The same can be true in any public sector, and I find this wholly unacceptable. Why should UK taxpayers have to receive a lower quality of service purely as a direct consequence of an individual’s reckless actions against another member of our community? Put simply, we cannot allow our public services to be weakened by the callous actions of individuals who are indifferent to the negative impact their behaviour has on the rest of our community. If we ensure that the presiding judge takes the wider impact into consideration and we increase the maximum sentencing time, I am positive that offenders will be less likely to assault a frontline worker.

Secondly, it is imperative that all public sector workers on the frontline are protected. The amount of physical and verbal abuse that I have seen spewed at A&E staff and other emergency workers is disgraceful, and we need to protect them. I wish to recount one quick story. Prior to being elected, I had a serious operation and I was in an A&E unit for a number of hours waiting for a life-threatening complication to be treated. I was completely out of it because of the pain, but I recall the abuse and aggression from the individual in the next cubicle while I was suffering. It was appalling, and it is terrible that we have to have police officers standing in our A&E departments—that is an outrage in itself. It is therefore great to be having this debate, but I just wanted to mention that.

Given that Scotland modified its emergency workers legislation to include healthcare workers nine years ago, I am pleased that we are now taking steps to follow suit, which is why I support the hon. Member for Rhondda

wholeheartedly in his Bill. Many will agree that as our emergency services are already under pressure, this withdrawal of staff from active duty and, thus, a reduction in the service, is intolerable.

My third point relates to clause 4, which introduces new provisions for taking bodily samples from those suspected of assaulting an emergency worker. It is simply wrong that an emergency worker would have to go out of his or her way to ensure that they have not been infected with a disease after being assaulted. Working on the frontline may increase the risk of the transmission of an infectious disease, so our greatest concern should be to protect those who are tirelessly protecting us. By agreeing to this clause, we can save our emergency workers from that extra hassle and the mental stress and hell of having to go for weeks not knowing what has happened, as other hon. Members have mentioned. The taking of a non-intimate sample can save the victim considerable time and stress, by providing a definite result in the first instance. I very much welcome that.

I fully support the Bill, deeming it necessary legislation, particularly at the present time. While crime rates continue to increase, serious assaults on prison staff have trebled since 2013, and last year there were 24,000 assaults on police officers in England and Wales. In the short term, that has a direct impact on the frontline staff, who already have to deal with a plethora of challenges and situations. In the long run, not having these powers is not sustainable. I agree with the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service that we have to send the strong message that assaulting any kind of emergency worker will not be tolerated in any form. This Bill goes a long way towards doing that.

In closing, I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in this process, and I am extremely pleased to be here to support the hon. Member for Rhondda today.

11.16 am

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to make this brief contribution and pleased to follow the hon. Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst), who made a positive contribution and added her own story to some of the moving and horrific stories that we have heard and which have been experienced by emergency service workers across the country.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on choosing this subject for his private Member's Bill. He correctly and generously added his acknowledgement of the work that my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) has done in getting the Bill to where it is today. Curiously, and ironically, one of the most significant legislative achievements of parliamentarians is to win the private Members' ballot. Clearly, that requires consummate skill, and perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda can share how he did it with the rest of us, who have been struggling for 20 years and been unable to achieve it.

Chris Bryant: I had always wanted No. 18, as it was my number at primary school, and the first year I got that number, I won.

Jim Fitzpatrick: Well, there we are—that is the secret. I was going to poke some fun at my hon. Friend and say that his constituents must be proud of him, but of

course having heard that he canvassed his constituents I am sure that they are actually very proud to see him introducing the Bill today.

I should declare that which a number of colleagues know: I was a member of London fire brigade for 23 years before being elected to this place. During my 13 years as an operational firefighter, the great anomaly was that on 364 days of the year there were always those, young and old, who wanted to come into the station to see the fire engines, but on 5 November we were not always that popular. In my day, there were many fewer organised bonfires and firework displays, and sometimes they needed fire attention and dousing for public protection. In the approach to fireworks season, whether Diwali, which is on now, or Guy Fawkes night, I hope we have a safe period for all celebrating. We have heard too often of fireworks being used as weapons against police, fire and ambulance workers.

I am grateful to the House of Commons Library, the Fire Brigades Union and London fire brigade for their briefings on this debate. The House of Commons Library briefing says, "Prime Minister Nick Hurd"—[*Interruption.*] Sorry, I meant to say Policing Minister, although some of us see the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd) as a future Prime Minister—and the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah) has also been mentioned as a prospective future Prime Minister. The House of Commons Library briefing cites the Policing Minister as saying that

"the Government supports the spirit and principle of the Bill, but that 'there will be detail to work through'."

Of course that is great news for the whole House, where we have heard positive speeches from Members on both sides indicating that the Bill will pass Second Reading. The briefing goes on to list the number of assaults and attacks, saying that the Home Office estimated that there were 24,000 assaults on police officers in 2016-17 and that the latest bulletin from the Ministry of Justice on safety in prisons in England and Wales says that there were more than 7,000 assaults on prison staff.

On the subject of NHS staff, NHS Protect—which my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda mentioned as being under threat—states that, according to the figures it has collected, more than 70,000 staff were affected in 2015-16.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): I was in Moorfields hospital the other day, having had an eye haemorrhage, and as I sat there during the afternoon, three instances came up on the screen of someone being assaulted in one of the cubicles. I think that numbers such as those are grossly under-reported. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Jim Fitzpatrick: My hon. Friend quotes from personal experience, and we have heard anecdotes in other contributions in the Chamber this morning that officers and hospital staff are reluctant to report incidents other than the most serious. Clearly, there seem to be barriers preventing all the assaults that appear to be taking place from being put on record. My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, and I am sure that the Minister will want to comment on it. I am also grateful to her because she gives me the opportunity to mention West Ham. Just as an aside, we need three points against Brighton this evening.

[*Jim Fitzpatrick*]

In an intervention on the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb), I mentioned that there were no data on attacks against firefighters. Dr Paul Hampton from the Fire Brigades Union has written to me:

“You probably know that data on attacks on firefighters is not published by the Home Office for England (figures are published in Scotland by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service).”

The right hon. Gentleman indicated that there are figures for Wales, and other hon. Members have made that same point. Dr Hampton continues:

“So I think you can make the points about the lack of central government monitoring and under-reporting in the debate.”

That supports the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown), and I would be grateful if the Minister commented in his winding-up speech on the absence of data on firefighter assaults in England.

Matt Wrack, general secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, made this point:

“It is never acceptable for anyone to go to work and have to put up with verbal abuse or physical assault. Yet that is what fire crews are now facing on a daily basis in some areas of the United Kingdom.”

That was written 10 years ago, and sadly it is still true today.

Fiona Onasanya (Peterborough) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the stark reality is that members of the public might think that it is par for the course that this sort of thing happens to people who do these jobs? Does he also agree that the Bill will use the full force of the law to show that we unanimously disagree that the people who protect us should have to go through that?

Jim Fitzpatrick: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, which has also been made by a number of colleagues, not least my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda. The emergency services face enough difficulties and threats to their wellbeing because of the nature of the job they do, and they are therefore entitled to whatever additional protection we can give them. I fully agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Fiona Onasanya) on that point.

I want to conclude on a more positive note by making a comment on prevention rather than on dealing with perpetrators after an assault. Ms Helen Newton from the London fire brigade has supplied me with a note about one of its successful initiatives, called LIFE:

“The Local Intervention Fire Education (LIFE) course is a week-long youth intervention programme. It is a programme targeted at young people aged 14-17 who: are at risk of or involved in anti-social behaviour, gangs or other criminal activity; have poor attendance at their educational provision or have been excluded; display challenging behaviour; or are NEET (not in education, employment or training). Starting in Tower Hamlets in 2002”—

it was actually in Shadwell, in my constituency—

“the LIFE project was an innovative approach to engaging with the local community in response to repeated call-out to an estate for youth-related deliberate fire setting and the firefighters being attacked during their response. Running the LIFE courses with firefighters and the local young people helped break down the barriers, develop a respect for the emergency services and educate them about the valuable job they do for their community. Over

the course of a week, the young people work alongside the London Fire Brigade to develop skills they can transfer to improve their relationships at home and support their education and future careers. It is a disciplined programme, packed with challenging practical activities which include climbing ladders, working with the breathing apparatus, hoses and casualty rescue techniques. These are interspersed with classroom sessions which teach the young people about social responsibility by learning how their behaviours impact their community, families and themselves. Working alongside the Brigade’s firefighters, they are role modelled positive behaviours and learn to respect uniformed authority figures.

Young people on LIFE may have encountered negative experiences with authority figures such as the police and their teachers, and they view the Fire Brigade in the same light. A positive and supportive rapport is developed with each young person, who then in return develops a respect for the officer they work with and the job they do for the community. Every young person has their progress evaluated by an operational trainer, enabling them to improve their key skills and build a bond of trust. These evaluations form part of a detailed portfolio containing certificates earned through the week, demonstrating a commitment to developing skills such as punctuality, conduct, politeness and effort. The portfolio is presented at a passing-out ceremony at which candidates demonstrate the skills that they have learnt during the week. They are given an individual appraisal by their trainer, and the opportunity to speak about their experiences on the course. Referral agencies, parents and partners attend the pass-out to be presented with their AQA accreditation and portfolio of achievement.”

I have attended many of these pass-out parades. They are hugely impressive events for the trainers, the youngsters and their families, as well as those who sponsor the courses: the police, the City of London, Tower Hamlets pupil referral and others.

I naturally support the Bill, as everyone who has spoken this morning does. I welcome the Government’s support, which is absolutely key for any private Member’s Bill to get on to the statute book. I also hope that the Government will continue to resource initiatives to prevent young people in particular from attacking our emergency service workers.

Finally, I again congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Rhondda and for Halifax. I particularly thank my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda for choosing this subject for his Bill. Emergency workers across the country have reason to be grateful to him and his colleagues.

11.27 am

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), who brings an awful lot of professional experience to the debate, given his career in the fire service. I was particularly interested to hear what he had to say. It would also be remiss of me not to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who is undoubtedly a canny parliamentarian. He has introduced his Bill with great skill. In my experience, he has always been happy-go-lucky, so I am not at all surprised that he was successful in the ballot. In bringing forward his Bill, he has made sure that he gets the maximum bang for his buck. We have to get the Bill on the statute book.

The hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) has also contributed a lot to the debate and championed this work in the House. For her, and for me, there is a personal dimension to all this. Both my parents were police officers. My dad did 30 years’ service and my mum was a frontline officer until she had me, at which point she gave that up and went to work on the

administrative side of the police service. I cannot imagine how I would have felt, when I was growing up, if my mum or dad had come home and told me that they had been assaulted at work. I cannot imagine the sense of anger, upset, bemusement and concern that I would have felt if we had had that discussion at the dinner table on an evening while I was growing up.

Lyn Brown: When I was shadow policing Minister, a police officer told me that he used to go home and talk to his children about being very clumsy, because he did not want them to know about the attacks that he had suffered at work.

Tom Purslove: It is just horrendous that anybody should feel that they have to go home after work and try to cover up what has happened so that their children will not be concerned about what mummy or daddy does at work every day.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): In September 2016, an officer with Devon and Cornwall police was involved in a fracas in Cornwall while arresting two males. One of the males, who was already handcuffed, spat blood and saliva into her face. She attended hospital, where her eyes were washed and blood tests were carried out—the blood testing continued for three months. In the meantime, she was worried every time she went home and kissed her grandchildren and husband. Does my hon. Friend agree that this is completely unacceptable and that we should give all power to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) in supporting the Bill?

Tom Purslove: I could not have put it better myself. We all share the sentiment of “all power to the hon. Gentleman’s elbow” in making sure we get this on the statute book.

It is through the prism of my personal perspective that I look at this issue, but I do not want to detain the House for long because we must get the Bill through Second Reading today. We all support the provisions that underpin it. I want briefly to raise one gap in the law, however, that I hope the hon. Gentleman will consider in Committee. For me, that loophole was brought to the fore in a constituency context by the appalling treatment of a well-respected and dedicated police officer in Corby by the name of Candice Liverpool.

A few years ago, Candice received a report of a domestic dispute at a local address, and she attended the incident with colleagues. The male perpetrator had not committed any criminal offences, and on the attendance of officers he calmed down and the matter was resolved. At that point, he chose to become quite obnoxious to Candice. He did not raise his voice and remained calm, but he was extremely offensive on the basis of her colour. He used extremely derogatory and offensive language and appeared to enjoy her obvious discomfort and that of her colleagues, who were powerless to do anything.

Had the individual behaved in such a manner in a public place, he could have been arrested and dealt with under offences in sections 4 and 5 of the Public Order Act 1986, but that law applies only when the activity takes place in a public place or can be seen or heard from a public place. Because the offensive behaviour took place in a dwelling and could not be seen or heard

by anybody outside the property, no offence was committed. In my opinion, that is wrong. I contend that any public employee, while lawfully on any premises, including private dwellings, as a result of their public service or role, should be protected in the law from racist or sexist abuse. To my mind, verbal assault is as unacceptable as physical assault. I hope the hon. Gentleman will consider that important point in Committee. There is clearly a gap in the law that could be filled.

I would also like the issue of the two-month commencement period to be addressed in Committee. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need to get through this as quickly as possible, and if time could be made available I would welcome that, but I wonder whether there is any scope to reduce that two-month commencement period so that progress can be made as quickly as possible.

Chris Bryant: The original version of the Bill suggested that Ministers should have to lay an order for the commencement of the Bill to happen, but I was keen that that should not be part of the Bill, and I thought that two months was pretty much the shortest period we could allow for the prosecuting authorities and others to get everything out there. I take the hon. Gentleman’s point, but we would be better off speeding up the processes in Parliament than the process after.

Tom Purslove: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that clarification, which addresses my point. We should consider anything that can be done to speed this up.

Like colleagues across the House, I pay tribute to emergency service workers in my constituency for what they do day in, day out on behalf of our communities. I cannot fathom how anybody could think it appropriate to verbally or physically assault somebody who is doing their job and trying to help them. As Members of the House, we are incredibly privileged to be able to see the work of our emergency services at close hand. That is an opportunity that not many members of the public ever get. We get a unique bird’s eye view of what is happening in our communities.

A few months ago, I went out on a “nightsafe” operation with local police officers in Corby. It was an eye-opening experience to see at first hand what they have to put up with—the volatile situations officers can find themselves in within a split second of a call coming in, the risks they face on a daily basis in fulfilling their duties. One of the big upshots of the Bill, apart from doing the right thing, is that the debate, not just in the House but out there in the country, will ensure much greater understanding among members of the public about what is going on.

The hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse mentioned the House of Commons Library figures, but I think they bear repeating: 24,000 assaults on police officers in 2016-17; 7,159 assaults on prison officers in 2016-17; 70,555 assaults on NHS staff in 2015-16. Those are eye-watering figures that I do not think anybody in the country would have comprehended before we started a proper debate on this issue.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), the promoter of the Bill, and in pointing

[Jeremy Quin]

out the debt we owe to our emergency services. The police officers my hon. Friend spent time with on the streets of Corby will be acutely aware, as are mine in Horsham, of the pressures on our justice system. Will he join me in welcoming the fact that the Bill allows provision for offences to be prosecuted through both the magistrates courts and the Crown courts to ensure that we get swift as well as proper justice?

Tom Pursglove: I absolutely share that sentiment. The Bill has done a public service in itself by bringing this concerning problem to the fore: it is a national outrage that people out there in the country should be aware of, and this debate has certainly generated that awareness, which I welcome. This issue shows the House at its best. All too often people see the House in a bickering and adversarial context that they find disconcerting, unacceptable and distasteful. Our emergency service workers are the best of British and do so much for our communities. Let us make the law the very best it can be and back them to the hilt.

11.36 am

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove) and to listen to his experiences as the child of two police officers. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on introducing this timely and important Bill and my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) on her hard work to bring it forward.

More action is necessary to protect emergency workers such as healthcare staff, police officers and firefighters from violence and aggression. They perform a vital public service, putting our safety before their own, and we must do all we can to protect them. Earlier this year, PC Jack Denton from Bedfordshire police had to have staples in his head after he was struck by a blunt object. He was called to assist armed police who had handcuffed a suspected car thief who ran away. PC Denton chased him to a house and then felt a massive thud. Bleeding and weak, he fell to the floor. He had been hit by a candlestick most likely thrown from the top window. Fortunately, PC Denton recovered from his injuries, but instances like this are far too common.

We all owe a huge debt of gratitude to frontline public workers placed in dangerous situations on a daily basis. Jim Mallen, chairman of Bedfordshire Police Federation, told me:

“Police Officers do not go to work to be verbally or physically abused. Too many officers return to their families every day having been assaulted – not only having to deal with the physical effects but battling the often long term mental impacts.”

Mike Hill: I understand the issues around capacity, but does my hon. Friend agree that mental health workers, by the nature of their jobs, are often at risk of assault, that such attacks need to be recorded and dealt with properly, and that adequate support needs to be provided to workers subjected to such assaults?

Mohammad Yasin: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is a very important point. Mental health workers do an important job and should be protected, like many other key workers in our country.

Just yesterday, Jim Mallen wrote to six more officers who had been injured on duty. Their injuries were from their being driven into, elbowed in the face, bitten and kicked. He believes that the emergency services are becoming the punch-bags of society and that the time has come to punish those who see fit to assault those on the frontline. I agree with him: it is time to protect those who daily protect us.

As MPs, we all know the dangers of violent and aggressive behaviour. I am grateful for the steps the House has taken to increase security in all our constituency offices so that all MPs and their staff can feel safe at work. We now owe it to all our frontline emergency workers to do all we can to make their workplaces as safe as possible.

11.40 am

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin). I thank him for that insight into the dangers faced by so many emergency workers. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) is right to say that an assault on anyone is serious, and that an attack on an emergency worker is an attack on us all. The debate has highlighted the distinct lack of deterrence in the system, especially when it comes to sentencing. It is almost as if some of the most violent in our society are treated with excessive gentleness, whether in respect of attacks on emergency workers or more broadly.

Clause 3 deals with the definition of an emergency worker. I appreciate why the hon. Member for Rhondda desires a cordon sanitaire around emergency workers, but I wish to put on record the circumstances in which social workers often work. I was contacted by a constituent of mine from Blackrod. She was assaulted several times before she retired from her job as a social worker and manager of a children’s services team. Social services staff often work alone and, although they are required to keep colleagues informed of their whereabouts for safety reasons, they often do not have the back-up of colleagues immediately on hand. Social workers deal with people with a variety of issues, including mental health, and drug and alcohol problems. In such an environment, people’s behaviour can be erratic and change rapidly.

Violence against social workers is commonly regarded as “just part of the job”, with nine out of 10 social workers suffering abuse, assaults and threats. According to Community Care, councils recorded more than 45,000 incidents against social care workers in the past three years. The Bill is a step in the right direction to protect emergency workers—to protect our protectors—and I hope it can be a step in the right direction for social services to follow in future.

11.42 am

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) for introducing the Bill. I agree with the hon. Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) about the importance of deterrence. I am sure we all find it hard to comprehend how anyone could wish to harm the emergency workers, such as paramedics or firefighters, who have rushed to help them. It is precisely because emergency workers attend events that are outside the norm and deal with people who are particularly unlikely to be able to behave

rationally—for reasons of pain, confusion, fear, drink, drugs or just plain anger—that they put themselves at increased risk of assault.

First responders on the streets of Ipswich have been assaulted both verbally and physically by those whom they have come to help, as well as by bystanders. In the past, firefighters in Ipswich have asked me to do what I can to raise this issue. Medical staff at Ipswich hospital have been subjected to sufficient attacks for the police to have had to open an outreach police station in the hospital to deal with the trouble. It is clear that the attacks are happening; the question is how we can stop them.

If the public perceive a strong likelihood of prosecution and a stiff penalty, potential assailants, however drunk or angry they might be, will be that much less likely to launch an attack in the first place. The experience in Scotland has shown that to be the case. The existing penalties for the assault of an emergency worker are inadequate, but more importantly, the public do not perceive that assault on an emergency worker is a crime particularly likely to be prosecuted and carry a heavy sentence.

All assaults are wrong—of course they are—but it is particularly important to ensure that our emergency services can carry out their duties without being assaulted. Emergency workers are individually far more likely to be assaulted than the rest of us. They put themselves into situations in which more assaults are likely to occur. If they are assaulted, the consequences are likely to be graver, too. We all saw the fires burning out of control during the 2011 riots in Croydon and other places, where the firefighters who had been sent to deal with those blazes were subjected to sustained attack. If we do not adequately protect our emergency workers, can it be any surprise if we find it difficult to recruit the emergency workers we need?

If we can build a clear public perception that assaulting an emergency worker—any emergency worker—is a particularly heinous crime that carries a strong likelihood of prosecution and a heavy penalty, I believe that even when people are confused, angry, drunk or under the influence of drugs, they will be that much more likely not to launch an assault in the first place.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): The hon. Gentleman talks of building a public perception in support of emergency workers. We have heard today about emergency workers being hassled by the public. We need to build a public perception that when an emergency worker is doing his or her duty, the public equally have a duty to protect that emergency worker, not to attack them. That would be a very good thing.

Sandy Martin: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. That is precisely the point that I wish to convey, so I thank him for clarifying that.

However aggressive or uncontrolled someone's behaviour might be, taboos are a powerful block on people's actions. We need to make assaults on emergency workers a taboo in England and Wales. I believe the Bill will be an important step in making that happen.

11.47 am

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ipswich (Sandy Martin). I entirely agree that we need to make assaults on emergency

workers a taboo. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) for her work and to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) for choosing to introduce this Bill after coming top of the private Member's Bill ballot. This is a real example of how working together, across party lines, can make a huge difference to people's lives.

There is no question but that an attack on an emergency worker is an atrocious crime. Two police officers from Cheshire constabulary had apprehended a suspect and were driving along the motorway at 70 mph, when that suspect attacked them inside the car. One officer was receiving treatment for injuries six months after the incident. I am glad that the individual involved in that case was sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment, reflecting the severity of the injuries received by those Cheshire police officers. I am also glad that clause 3 would extend the statutory aggravated offence not just to police officers, but to all emergency workers. All emergency service workers engage in vital work on behalf of us all. Not only do they deserve the utmost respect, but they should be able to work without fear of attack. Legislating for tougher sentences is absolutely right and I wholeheartedly support the Bill.

As Members of Parliament, we have a duty to do what we can to protect our constituents, and a responsibility to uphold law and order. Those working in the public services relevant to this Bill selflessly work to achieve those aims and we owe enormous gratitude for their unrelenting efforts. This legislation will go some way in sending a strong message about how much we value emergency workers in our communities and it will adequately punish the perpetrators of assaults against them. To that end, I ask the hon. Member for Rhondda to consider, in Committee, extending the sentencing period for the more serious offences—which would be indictable and go to the Crown court—from 12 months to 24 months, so that there is a distinction between assaults that fall at the lower end of the scale and the more serious assaults that may inevitably end up in the Crown court.

Cheshire police headquarters are based in my constituency, and I have always prioritised working closely with the police to ensure that our streets become safer. Total recorded crime in Cheshire has been falling in recent years and Cheshire police deserve a great deal of credit for that. Any attack on a police officer is a flagrant disregard for what they do for the public. One figure that has not been falling is the number of attacks on police officers. Between April and September this year—a period of just three months—Cheshire constabulary recorded 277 assaults on constables. The headquarters of Cheshire fire and rescue service are also based in my constituency. It is through working with those on the frontline that we gain an understanding of the relentless demands of the job.

The Bill provides even greater reassurance—if it were needed—of our admiration for the work of our emergency workers, and of our continuing support and protection. While preparing for this debate, I was shocked to read the figures for East Cheshire NHS Trust, where there were 124 assaults on staff between 2015 and 2016, 44 of which required medical treatment. There were 668 attacks on staff of the Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. The most shocking thing about that statistic is that, despite staff reporting 668 assaults to

[Antoinette Sandbach]

the trust, not a single person was criminally sanctioned. This information is publically available; the data are collected by the NHS and published. I urge hon. Members to look at their own NHS trusts because, as a result of my preparation for the debate, I am going to go to my local NHS trust and say, “Why are you not encouraging your staff to contact the police to ensure that action is taken against people who subject them to assaults and violence? It is not good enough.”

I am pleased that the Government are supporting this private Member’s Bill. It will not only provide greater protections for emergency workers, who give so much to society, but mean that the force of the law is greater against those jeopardising the invaluable work of our police officers, paramedics, prison officers, firefighters, nurses, doctors and other public servants. I thank the hon. Member for Rhondda for the work he has put into the Bill and I am pleased to support it. I hope that other hon. Members will check the figures for their NHS trusts. We must ensure that the protections we are trying to get into law are actually acted upon, and that the CPS and local police take action to prosecute those who assault our emergency service workers.

11.54 am

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate and to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach). Let me start, as so many right hon. and hon. Members have—*[Interruption.]* I have only said three words, and the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) is asking me to speed up. I mean, I was just clearing my throat, and I was just about to congratulate him on bringing in the Bill—

Chris Bryant: Don’t bother.

Simon Hoare: Oh, he does not want me to. In that case, it is a great pleasure not to congratulate him on bringing in the Bill. To please him, as a fellow Welshman—that was obviously one of his key criteria for Members taking part in the debate—I will be as quick as I can.

It is important to remember, for the benefit of those the Bill seeks to protect, that there are protections in the law today. I just wanted to make sure that was on the record, because I would hate those who often work in vulnerable and dangerous circumstances to think this was the first time lawmakers had thought about this. As the hon. Gentleman said in his opening remarks, there is legislation already, but the Bill rightly seeks to identify a cohort of people whom we want to recognise for the work they do and for whom we want to provide additional protection.

In supporting the Bill, let me say that I think quite a few things will be teased out in Committee—if the hon. Gentleman is looking for recruits for the Committee, I would be very happy to serve on it. If it is not too late, we may need to think about the title of the Bill, because there are people we would want to be covered by clause 3, on the meaning of “emergency worker”, who would perhaps not be described as emergency workers.

Chris Bryant: I have inadvertently misled the House. Earlier, I suggested that I could not change the long title, but I could change it in Committee.

Incidentally, I was trying to say earlier that hon. Members do not have to keep on saying thank you to me and my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch).

Holly Lynch: Steady on.

Simon Hoare: Inadvertently, the hon. Gentleman—in his usual humble, don’t look at me, I’m pretending not to be here sort of way—has drawn attention to the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch). I know from talking to my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins) and to my right hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis), when he was the Policing Minister, about the important work the hon. Lady has done on this proposal, and she deserves the thanks of the House.

It is great that the hon. Gentleman has confirmed that the long title can be changed. I just wonder whether it should refer to assaults on “public service workers”. There are a number of categories of people I do not think anybody would seek to demur from including. This is not a full list, but they might include social workers, as several Members have mentioned; psychiatric nurses, particularly when they are on an interaction; those who work for Border Force; people involved with public transport; and our local authority staff. We talk about ambulances, but I am not quite sure whether those who volunteer for St John Ambulance would be covered.

Chris Bryant *indicated assent.*

Simon Hoare: The hon. Gentleman nods, and I note that, as does the Minister.

I am also tempted to include traffic wardens, who are not always the sort of people we cheer for, but they do good work enforcing parking regulations, and they often suffer a huge amount of abuse from people who are caught.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) made me think about our armed forces. We have all read of instances when people in uniform in our constituencies have come under attack from those who do not hold our military personnel in high regard.

I am particularly pleased to see prison officers included in clause 3(1)(d). I have Guys Marsh prison in my constituency, and my hon. Friend the Minister has visited it with me. He and I heard first hand from some of the prison officers there of the day in, day out degrading behaviour they have to suffer at the hands of some prisoners. It would be good if, as a result of the Bill becoming an Act, which I very much hope it will, those who perpetrate entirely unnecessary attacks on our prison officers could have their tariffs increased somehow.

I close as I opened, by congratulating the hon. Members for Rhondda and for Halifax. I agree that it is a shame that the House will not divide today, because we need to make sure that the people in the country who are interested in this issue know that the Bill has the full, wholehearted and full-throated support of both sides of the House.

11.59 am

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): I rise to make three points in welcoming this Bill and seeing, I hope, the House at its best in coming together on something that we all clearly agree on.

On Friday night, three police officers were injured breaking up a brawl in Boston, one of them seriously. Subsequent comments on Facebook included, “The only thing I’m disappointed in is that the other two coppers didn’t get knocked down as well.” While there were more responsible people saying, for example, “Police officers are willing to help anybody and that’s why they put on their uniform”, that underlines why such legislation is necessary. We tell ourselves in this place that everyone is on the side of our public servants, but frankly that is not always the case. I pay tribute to Constables Mike Redfern, Michael Rooke and Dan Lewis, who were injured on Friday night in the course of their duties. This legislation is clearly vital.

Much has been said about the definition of an emergency worker, and it will surprise nobody that I would like to chip in a couple of extra suggestions. I agree with a lot of what has been said about social workers. I would add—not simply because my mum was a nurse and I am married to a doctor—that our general practitioners are often at their most vulnerable when they are alone in a room with a patient who may be seeking emergency treatment with an on-the-day appointment. I urge the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and the Minister to consider whether workers in the NHS more broadly, who are often also providing emergency care, should be considered in this. I think, having declared my interest, that particular consideration should be given to GPs, because they are often particularly vulnerable.

It is extremely good news to see the inclusion of prison officers such as those serving at North Sea Camp prison in my constituency, and the RNLI, which does hugely valuable work on a voluntary basis. In Lincolnshire we are lucky to have an RNLI that thrives and does exceptional work. Apart from having to deal with prank calls, they often find that the people who benefit from their work, in sometimes extraordinary circumstances, do not always appreciate it as much as they should.

Holly Lynch: The hon. Gentleman is making an incredibly powerful speech. He makes a very valid point about the RNLI. I recently visited the RNLI at the Tower on the Thames and saw the unique circumstances that it faces. Predominantly, people end up in the Thames because they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or because they have attempted to self-harm or commit suicide, and the RNLI meets a great deal of resistance from the people it seeks to assist. I am really pleased that we have been able to incorporate protections for it within the Bill.

Matt Warman: I absolutely agree. It is a testament to the thought that has already gone into this Bill that we are not asking whether we should add the RNLI. However, the hon. Member for Rhondda was right to say that while we might wish to protect every public servant in one go, there is a risk that the Bill becomes a sort of spine on which we hang a huge number of professions. We do not want a whole load of unintended consequences when, as I think we all agree, this is a very good Bill for us all to support. The more we can do that, the better a place we will end up in.

I welcome this Bill hugely. I very much hope that it can be refined in Committee. I put in a special word for my wife, specifically, and for GPs in general.

12.3 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I congratulate—not thank, because he does not want me to do that—the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) for all the work that they do here.

As we have heard, there is currently protection within the law for anybody who is the victim of assault, and protection in the enhanced sentencing regime guidelines for anybody who is carrying out the work of public service, so why do we need to change the law? The NHS England statistics on assaults tell us why. In 2011-12, there were 59,744 assaults on workers in the NHS in England, and that figure rose to 70,555 in 2016. Quite clearly, the law is not working.

Without wanting to take up too much time, I will refer to some of the feedback I have received from the A&E department in the area of east Sussex that I represent. Here are a few examples from just one doctor:

“Held in a room with a patient threatening me with scissors. Punched in the face on my first emergency department job. One of my juniors got held up against the wall by a bloke who called her a slut and spat in her face. Recently threatened by a bloke I was stuck in a room with whilst pregnant. Sure I could think of more.”

There are many similar examples.

That takes me to the point that I would really like the hon. Member for Rhondda to think about in Committee. How much consideration has been given to the question of how many of the 70,555 offences against NHS staff would be covered by the draft legislation? Would they all be covered because they are all within the sphere of emergency services? Do they all count as emergency workers, or are the vast proportion of them outside that sphere, because they work in other wards and non-emergency settings? If they are outside it, I ask the hon. Gentleman whether it would be worth widening the scope of the Bill to extend the protection to non-emergency services so that it covers not just emergency workers, but those who do other, related, healthcare work. If the Bill covers all those who need protection, I will absolutely welcome it.

I recognise that there is a danger of extending the scope so much that it covers practically all public sector workers. We could well end up with additional enhancements for everyone bar lawyers and estate agents—God forbid—in which case we would have lost sight of the original drift. I ask for the Bill to cover hospitals, and to ensure that the NHS is a safe place, because the situation has got out of control, as the figures show. Those who work in the NHS deserve our protection, but the number of assaults on NHS workers show that something has gone wrong. I would like the NHS as a whole to be given this special protection to send a strong message that such assaults will not be tolerated. We must do everything that is necessary to show people that the NHS is a profession in which they will be safe and in which we want them to work.

I would be delighted to work with the hon. Gentleman on the Bill. I absolutely support it, and I look forward to the possibility that the definitions will be widened in Committee to give this protection to even more people.

12.7 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I am delighted to support this Bill, not only because the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and I are rarely on the same

[Fiona Bruce]

side of something that is discussed in this place, but because a few months ago the all-party group on alcohol harm, which I chair, published “The Frontline Battle: An Inquiry into the Impact of Alcohol on Emergency Services”. It is a catalogue of attacks on police, fire, ambulance and hospital staff.

Throughout our inquiry, we heard countless first-hand accounts of the physical and emotional challenges for emergency service personnel of responding day in, day out, to alcohol-fuelled incidents. It is completely unacceptable that every 13 seconds a police officer is assaulted in the line of duty. It is unacceptable that medical staff have TVs thrown at them, or that an A&E consultant is kicked in the face. Assaults on people who work in these crucial areas should not be without consequence. We heard about police officers who were assaulted while breaking up drunken street fights, pumping the stomach of a young person and tackling house fires caused or exacerbated by alcohol-induced forgetfulness. We heard about our frontline emergency service staff being attacked day in and day out.

What really interested me was that the report received nationwide press coverage. It was covered not only by several national newspapers, but by breakfast TV. However much as we in this House may like to think that all-party groups are important—I am sure they are to all of us—it is very rare for them to receive such national coverage. That is a reflection of the public concern about this issue.

We also learned how much such behaviour—attacks on emergency personnel, fuelled by the fact that people have drunk excess alcohol—has a significant impact on the morale and the health and wellbeing of those in our emergency services. We were shocked to hear how emergency services personnel were depressed, with some of them leaving the services simply because they could not tolerate any further assaults on such a scale.

One police force told us its staff survey showed that “90 per cent of police officers expect to be assaulted on a Friday or Saturday night when they police during the night time economy”. I was really shocked by an account involving female police officers going into licensed premises while policing the night-time economy:

“There is one thing that is specific to female officers and that is sexual assault. I can take my team through a licensed premise, and by the time I take them out the other end, they will have been felt up several times.”

That is completely unacceptable.

Frontline officers are in the firing line. Some 86% of police officers surveyed in the north-east told us they have been assaulted by people who had been drinking, and 21% of them had been assaulted six or more times during their service. Over 52% of ambulance service staff whom we heard from had suffered sexual assaults or harassment while on duty. One submission to our inquiry showed the devastating impact that assaults can have:

“Assaults can affect workers both physically and mentally: some frontline emergency staff have moved on to work in other fields. Others are forced into early retirement as a result of stress, or medically discharged.”

A hospital trust has recorded that in one year just three of its patients were responsible for more than 100 assaults on staff each. The Bill is necessary to

protect the protectors. As I have said, making this an aggravated offence will stop patients such as those three each being able, time and again, to assault more than 100 staff members in one hospital without facing a penalty for such behaviour. There has to be a deterrent, and the Bill sends the message that this behaviour is not acceptable and will no longer be tolerated.

12.13 pm

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): I have been told that congratulations are not necessary, so I will move swiftly on to say that I join everyone in the Chamber in saying that we should protect our protectors. Emergency workers deserve the respect of all of us as they do all they can to keep us safe. I am here today to support the Bill, and I add my voice to those of all Members in sending the very strong message that attacks on emergency workers are unacceptable and will not be tolerated, and that the full weight of the law will be applied to those who attack emergency workers to make them pay for their crime.

The Bill will provide the police and the courts with the powers they need to deal effectively with those who use violence against hard-working emergency workers. I have again been surprised to hear so many horrific stories today about the violence meted out to people who are just going about their work to protect and serve us. I want to take a moment to thank emergency workers in East Sussex, and especially in my constituency of Wealden, whether they work in the fire, ambulance or police services, or in one of my community hospitals in Crowborough and Uckfield. They should not have to go about their work under the threat of violence.

The crucial changes in the Bill send a clear message that attacks on emergency workers will not be tolerated. We must guarantee that our emergency workers, especially those on the frontline who are responding to life and death situations, and those upholding the law have the full protection of the law when carrying out their duties. Attacking a person serving the public is already an aggravating factor in sentencing guidelines, but the Bill will put on a statutory basis a specific requirement to consider an assault on an emergency worker as an aggravated offence.

I hope that the Bill will give victims of this crime the confidence to come forward, and that it will deter those who are violent towards public service and emergency workers. I hope it will help in the recruitment and retention of staff, given that we are trying to get more people into such jobs in the first place. I also hope that it will stop those members of the public who think it is okay to go out and attack an emergency worker, feeling that they will not be dealt with in any way whatsoever.

I welcome in particular the clauses proposing powers to take blood and saliva samples from people who have spat at or bitten emergency workers and exposed them to risk of infection. We have heard how traumatic that can be, not only for the individual victims but for their families.

I want to talk briefly about a case that took place in East Sussex. It has a couple of distressing aspects: the perpetrator was just 18 years old and she did damage to not just one but two police officers. The police officers were called out to an incident at a home and tried to control this young woman, who was in a fight with her mother. As she was restrained on the ground, the young

girl—she was just 18—cleared her throat and spat in a PC's face. Unfortunately, the violence continued and both police officers were attacked.

The Sussex Police Federation called that attack “disgusting”, and Matt Webb, chairman of the federation, said:

“We hear about these attacks on officers in Sussex weekly, if not daily, just for doing their job—which is absolutely unacceptable.

Spitting at officers is a particularly vile act and that is why we are grateful to Sussex Police for being one of the first forces to issue spit-guards to officers to place over the heads of suspects if they had been spitting, to prevent them committing any further offences.”

In another incident, a female police officer was attacked with a hammer. I am concerned at the tone being set by some perpetrators, who think it is okay to attack our public service workers.

In conclusion, I support the Bill and am grateful for the opportunity to thank emergency workers across the country, especially those in my constituency. This Bill and today's debate send a clear message that violence against emergency workers is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

12.16 pm

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): If the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) will not accept our congratulations or thanks, let us then acknowledge his work and that of the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch), as well as that of previous Administrations who have worked on this particular topic and of those responsible for taking this Bill through the House. It was interesting to hear how the hon. Gentleman conducted his own ballot to find which topic the public supported most for a private Member's Bill.

The Bill and today's contributions send a clear signal from this House that certain attitudes towards and attacks on emergency workers will not be tolerated. Emergency workers are among the most respected people in this country. They should be able to do their job in the knowledge that if anyone assaults them while they carry out their duties, the persecutor will be punished. My own sister is a nurse, although not in the emergency sector, and I would not wish to think that she was doing her job without adequate protections and safeguards.

I have done some research on emergency workers and frontline staff in the west midlands and my own constituency. In the west midlands in 2016-17, there were 1,312 recorded assaults against officers. That is the second largest number of attacks, by police force area, with only the Metropolitan police recording a higher number. Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust recorded 175 assaults in 2015-16, which equates to 3.5% of staff being attacked. We have to remember that behind every police officer, fire officer and nurse who is assaulted, there is a partner, husband, wife or family. As we have heard, they are equally affected.

I will turn briefly to the Bill's specifics—I must get my teeth in today and keep my pieces of paper in the right order. This is the disadvantage in having one's speech curtailed.

There has been a lot of debate about clause 3 and the definition of “emergency workers”, and I mentioned earlier an assault on a constituent of mine who is a refuse collector. We need to look very closely at that definition. For example, are members of the armed forces

under Operation Temperer covered under the Bill? I am not quite sure, so I ask the Minister to confirm that in his winding-up speech.

Mike Hill: I hope the definition will include the civil nuclear police, too.

Wendy Morton: The hon. Gentleman highlights the need to look at the specifics of the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) highlighted the need to look beyond emergency workers in accident and emergency. We have heard about minor injuries units, but what about nurses on wards? Could they be included in the Bill?

It is very important for the Bill to undergo line-by-line scrutiny in Committee so we can get it right. We have an excellent opportunity not just to send the right message, but to protect the people who need our protection most. What we have heard today, and what we have seen in our own constituencies, is absolutely not to be tolerated. That message must go out loud and clear, and be backed up by legislation that works to protect our frontline services.

12.21 pm

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): I am not going to thank the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) but I am going to pay tribute to him, and to the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch), who has worked so very hard on this issue.

I was not planning to speak—that may have been to the relief of everyone in the Chamber—but I have been moved to do so by the examples given, and the strength of feeling displayed, by Members right across the House. This is one of those wonderful occasions in this place when we do the right thing and come together to make real change that will help real people in our constituencies who make such a difference to our lives.

I would like to pay tribute to Lincolnshire police, who this summer, in the largest ever slavery case, managed to secure the convictions of eight people from the same family who had enslaved vulnerable people and treated them despicably—very violently. The police managed to secure not only convictions, but sentences totalling 80 years. The police showed great bravery, which they show on a daily basis, walking into caravans and houses. I hope the Bill will go some way to supporting that bravery.

My constituency is very rural, which means that often when there is a medical emergency it is not paramedics who come to people's assistance but volunteer first responders, in particular volunteers for LIVES, which is based in Horncastle. I am delighted that clause 3(2) covers not just paramedics who are formally employed by the NHS, but volunteer first responders who help the NHS. I join colleagues who have set out food for thought on issues such as a maximum sentence for conviction on indictment in saying that the Bill Committee needs to examine such issues. I too would happily sit on the Committee, if the hon. Member for Rhondda needs further help.

I will finish with the words of a constituent who works for Lincolnshire police. He puts it far better than I can:

“We deserve to be able to go home to our families and not be injured or worse.”

12.23 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Just as for other sons and daughters of emergency service workers, the Bill has a particular resonance for me. In the nearly 30 years that my father served with West Midlands police, he suffered various injuries. Some resulted from accidents in the line of work, but too many were the result of physical assaults: being hit around the head with a stool in a central Birmingham bar, being pulled off a police motorbike and hooligans trying to pull him off a police horse during a football riot. There were too many other incidents that he saw first-hand, such as the Handsworth riots. He saw rioters assaulting the paramedics, ambulance workers and firefighters who were trying to save lives and put out fires right in the middle of the riot zone.

Sadly, as we all know—as I certainly know, not only from the patrols on which I have joined my local police, but from the emails that I have received from serving emergency workers—such assaults happen far too regularly. The emergency workers at whom the Bill is aimed choose to wear their uniforms. They dedicate their careers to putting other people first, and we must ensure that the Bill puts them first. It is precisely because we need the Bill to succeed in its aim of ensuring that these particularly appalling crimes attract suitably strong punishments that we must also ensure that the perpetrators are charged effectively.

Adam Aston, a Dudley Labour councillor, has served as a paramedic for 13 years. He tells me that he has been assaulted twice during that time, and that on neither occasion did the Crown Prosecution Service choose to press charges. If the Bill is to be effective, we must ensure that this is not simply another offence for which the Crown Prosecution Service will not prosecute.

I hope that the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and the Minister will work together on both prosecuting and sentencing guidelines. Our public sector workers regularly put themselves between us and danger, and we, as legislators, must ensure that we put the law firmly on their side.

12.26 pm

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) is a particularly shy and retiring type, and I am sorry to do this to him, but I must congratulate him and thank him for the work that he has done. He made a powerful and compelling case for the Bill. I also thank and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch), who laid all the groundwork for the campaign, and who did so much work to help the Bill to reach this stage. I thank the Police Federation for its work as well.

This has been possibly one of the most successful campaigns in parliamentary history. It was launched only in February this year, and now the Bill is being given its Second Reading. I thank Unison, the GMB, Unite and the Prison Officers Association, which have been working closely with my Justice colleagues. Most of all, however, I thank our brave emergency service workers, who, when the worst happens, put themselves in harm's way to protect us all.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): Speaking as a former Unison officer who represented those emergency workers on the frontline and, all too often, responded to reports

about assaults on them, I am pleased that the debate is taking place. Does my hon. Friend agree that while the Bill is long overdue, the broad support for it on both sides of the House is extremely welcome?

Louise Haigh: I could not agree more.

This year has placed unprecedented demands on our emergency services, but, despite all the undeniable pressures that they are under because of a range of issues—with which I shall deal shortly—they have stepped up without fail, and we have seen them at their very best. Keith Palmer paid the ultimate price when defending us in this very building while we ran for safety. Wayne Marques, equipped only with a baton, ran headlong at the terrorists who attacked us on London Bridge. Countless paramedics, A&E staff, nurses and firefighters saved lives and acted with unmatched bravery and compassion in response to Grenfell and Manchester. Sadly, this has been a year in which we have asked too much of our emergency service workers too often. It is not too much to ask of us that we protect them in law, and allow them to do the job that they desperately want to do: the job of protecting and serving our communities, for which we are so grateful.

Everything that we have heard this morning has made clear why the Bill is necessary. We have heard the harrowing, emotional stories of officers, nurses and paramedics who have been subjected to the most vile and unprovoked abuse, and the effect that it has had on them physically, mentally and emotionally. We have heard about the personal experience of Members who have served as emergency workers themselves, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), and others whose families have served: the hon. Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove), my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones), the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) and the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman)—and a compelling case has just been made by the hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood).

If I may, I would like to add an experience from my constituency. Last year, PC Lisa Bates went to a routine call of domestic violence and, on attending the property, found a man who was in a psychotic state. He attacked her with an axe; she fell down two flights of stairs, grappling with him; he chopped off several of her fingers. She is still recovering at home, and I am sure the House will join me in wishing her a full recovery.

What no police officer, nurse, firefighter or paramedic should ever expect—what should never be normalised for them—is being assaulted in the line of duty. That is what the Bill seeks to challenge: the attitude, which sadly exists across the criminal justice system, that being punched or kicked is somehow to be expected and accepted. Well, it is not. The tougher sentences in the Bill will send a message from the House today: as MPs, we will never accept that people should be assaulted while they are doing their job and we will do everything in our power to protect them.

As we have heard, an assault on a police officer takes place as frequently as every 13 seconds, there were 70,000 assaults on NHS staff last year and fire crews are attacked 10 times every week on average. These figures are shockingly huge and they are growing year on year, as is the disgusting practice of spitting at

emergency workers. Interestingly, I have been spat at as a politician, but I was never spat at in my time as a serving police officer. I therefore appreciate, and I know the House does, why clause 4 is vital for workers whose lives have been made a living hell waiting for test results after being spat at. The clause will lessen the trauma of that wait and provide them with assurances as quickly as possible that they have not contracted any communicable diseases. The stories that my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax told about the affected officers and the impact on their families were truly shocking, and I know they moved the House. I had the privilege earlier this week of meeting those officers, who are back at work, serving their communities. They are a credit to their force.

It has been fantastic to see such cross-party support for the Bill today, from all parties across the House. I add my thanks to the sponsors and to the Government for allowing the Bill to pass through to Committee. I reiterate the call that my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda made for the Committee stage to take place on the Floor of the House, given that there have been so many enthusiastic volunteers today to take part in Committee.

Emergency workers will be watching the debate with interest and will be heartened to hear so many voices speaking up for them, as I know they can feel neglected and taken for granted. However, I would not be doing my job if I did not also use this opportunity to highlight the other pressures they are under and some of the reasons assaults have increased so significantly in recent years. The NHS, as we know, is under unbelievable pressure and is struggling to cope with limited resources. Waiting times for A&E are up and hospitals are failing to meet their targets. Ambulance services across the country are simply unable to meet the demand they face and prison officers are near breaking point, in prisons that are not fit for purpose, while all of them continue to face pay cuts, on top of the thousands that have been taken off their salaries over the last seven years.

Our police are facing unprecedented demand from rising crime, as yesterday's figures revealed: rising violent crime, a terrorist threat that is now relentless, soaring numbers of 999 and 101 calls, and unsustainable demand thanks to cuts to services elsewhere. The Metropolitan police receive a call related to mental health every five minutes. In 2012, West Yorkshire police were looking for 118 missing persons a week. That figure is now 450. The police are now constantly being asked to attend to vulnerable people when they are not the appropriate agency to do so.

Among all this, we have lost 20,000 officers and 30,000 police staff. Neighbourhood policing has been decimated, and just yesterday Norfolk police force announced that it was abolishing every single one of its PCSOs. Single crewing is the norm, PCSOs are being asked to go to jobs that are appropriate only for PCs, long-term sickness and mental health issues are through the roof, and morale is at rock bottom. The only way to fix these issues is to resource the police and all our public services properly. We can never truly protect them unless they have the capacity and the support to deal with the many and varied situations that their job throws at them.

If we are to do everything we can to protect those workers, I would beg the Justice Minister to take this away from the debate. We are so grateful to the Government

for their support for the Bill. We look forward to improving it together even more in Committee and to its speedy implementation, but we are also desperate for more resource in the Budget next month. Without it, I genuinely fear that our emergency services will not survive as we know them.

I know that we will return to this debate and that neither I nor my colleagues in Health or Justice, or the many champions from the Back Benches, will let the issue drop. In closing, I therefore reiterate my congratulations to my hon. Friends the Members for Rhondda and for Halifax and my thanks to the Government, to all the supporters and, again, to all our emergency service workers. Every day that they put on their uniforms, they risk their lives to protect ours. These people do not act without fear; they act in spite of it. That is why we call them heroes.

12.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah): The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) is in typically bashful mood, but I still congratulate him on coming top of the private Member's Bill ballot and on using that coveted position to introduce a Bill on such an important topic. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) on her tireless work in championing the "Protect the Protectors" campaign. The public voted in an online poll to support this Bill, and it is therefore important that we deliver it.

As the son of a midwife, I know of the commitment and hard work shown every day by people working in the public sector. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove), I know how it feels to grow up knowing that a parent could be attacked in the line of work, doing something they care about and to which they are committed.

Every day, emergency workers across the country show remarkable courage simply in carrying out their duties. They save lives, protect communities and uphold the law. We owe each and every one of them a debt of gratitude, and they deserve the full protection of the law. Introducing tougher sentences for such despicable attacks on emergency workers sends the clearest possible message that this cowardly behaviour will not be tolerated. That is why the Government support the Bill.

Michael Tomlinson: I know my hon. Friend has looked at the issue carefully, and he heard my intervention on the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant). Sentences seem to be the same for summary offences as for indictable offences, so will he consider whether it is necessary to increase sentences for indictable offences?

Mr Gyimah: My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point, as did my hon. Friends the Members for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) and for Horsham (Jeremy Quin) and the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick). We will work through the detail in Committee, but the Bill deserves its Second Reading today.

I am humbled by the stories of bravery we have heard today. This year our emergency services have faced the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower, as well as horrific terrorist attacks. The murder of Police Constable Keith Palmer, outside this very building, is a shocking and tragic reminder to us all of how much our emergency workers do to protect us.

[Mr Gyimah]

We must not forget that, as well as responding to major incidents, our frontline emergency workers—be they police or prison officers, firefighters, paramedics or other health workers—deal with challenging and unpredictable situations as part of their everyday working lives.

I was asked whether civil nuclear constabulary and Army personnel working in Operation Temperer will be covered by the Bill, and the answer is yes. They are engaged to provide services for police purposes, so the Bill will apply to them.

Although public attention often focuses on paramedics being abused by drunks in city centres, or on heroic police officers tackling violent criminals, behind prison walls our governors and frontline prison officers work daily with some of society's most dangerous and troubled individuals. I have seen at first hand the courage shown by those committed men and women as they protect society. As with all emergency workers responding to critical situations, prison staff must be able to carry out their duties without fear of assault. They carry out their duties with incredible calmness and professionalism. I often pay tribute to them in this House, and I do so again today. I am pleased that the Bill will apply to them, too.

For some time now, the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice have been working together, building an evidence base on what is happening on the ground and looking at what more we can do to protect our emergency workers. For the past two years, the Home Office has published provisional statistics on assaults on police officers, and sadly, as has been mentioned, they show that the numbers are increasing. In 2016-17, there were an estimated 24,000 assaults on police officers, which is a 7% increase on the 2015-16 figure. Assaults on prison officers also rose by a third last year and, in the acute hospital and ambulance sectors, physical assaults on staff, where no medical factors are involved, have risen by more than 34% since 2009-10. So the Government could not be clearer: this high number of assaults will not be tolerated, and those who are violent towards our emergency workers must face the full force of the law.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab), who has responsibility for courts and justice, and the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service have met the hon. Member for Rhondda several times since July to discuss the contents of this important Bill, and Government officials have assisted in its drafting. We are pleased that we have been able to work collaboratively with him on a Bill that will help to provide the police and courts with the powers they need to punish those who use violence against our emergency workers.

The hon. Gentleman has given an overview of the Bill's provisions, but I want briefly to mention its specifics. Before doing so, I must stress that, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) made clear, we are not starting from a position where there is no protection for emergency workers or for public sector workers as a whole. Judges can already impose tough sentences for those attacking public sector workers and our courts, rightly, already consider an offence directed against those serving the public as more serious. What this Bill does is focus on supplementing those existing

provisions with additional safeguards for emergency workers facing violence, often on a daily basis, simply as a result of carrying out their duties.

Clause 1 creates, in effect, a new form of common assault where the assault is on an emergency worker. An offence committed in these circumstances will have, on indictment, a maximum penalty of 12 months' imprisonment, which is double the current maximum penalty. That will give the courts the power to sentence in a way that reflects the seriousness of the assault. I have to stress though, for those who may think even this new penalty is not sufficient, that we are talking here about common assault, the lowest level of assault, which may not involve any injury and can include as little as a single push. If the assault is more serious, it is likely to become actual bodily harm or grievous bodily harm, and those offences already have a five-year maximum penalty. So we are focused here on the lower-level offences, and the maximum penalty has to reflect that.

Clause 2 deals with other more serious assaults: those not covered by the new aggravated version of common assault. For those offences, actual bodily harm, grievous bodily harm or even manslaughter, the Bill places a duty on the court to consider such an assault committed against an emergency worker as an aggravating factor in sentencing—that means to consider it as more serious, meriting an increased sentence within the maximum for the offence. The Bill also requires the court to make a finding that the offence was aggravated and to state this in open court. This puts on a statutory basis what we already see in sentencing guidelines. It is, however, a clear and unequivocal requirement on the court to take these offences seriously and to make clear to all concerned that it has done so.

I want briefly to mention the application of the Bill to emergency workers. The Bill, as the hon. Gentleman has said and as its title make clear, is about emergency workers and assaults on them while they are trying to carry out their daily duties. The Bill focuses on providing increased protection for emergency workers. These are people who have routinely to deal with difficult people and difficult situations simply as part of their job. That job exposes them to a degree of risk, and it is only right that we are seeking to strengthen their protection under the law. As we debate the Bill, we must keep our central objective—ensuring that emergency workers can carry out those critically important duties—firmly in mind.

It is important that we retain a focus on emergency workers, but this does not mean that the Government think other assaults are not serious. Our courts already consider the context for offences, and specifically when offences are committed against those serving the public. The current sentencing guidelines used by the courts make it clear that if any offence is

“committed against those working in the public sector or providing a service to the public”,

that should be considered as a factor increasing seriousness, indicating the need for a higher sentence within the maximum penalty. I welcome the work that the Sentencing Council has done and continues to do to make that consideration explicit in sentencing guidelines.

The third provision in the Bill relates to the testing of those who assault emergency workers. During the Committee stage of the Prisons and Courts Bill in the last Parliament, the hon. Member for Halifax raised

this important matter. I said at the time that the Government were interested in looking at the issue but had to address some important practical and legal questions. I am happy to say that this Bill provides an opportunity to return to that commitment.

Unfortunately, those emergency workers who are bitten or spat at have to deal not only with the initial disgust and pain; in some cases, there might also be a concern that they have contracted a serious infectious disease. This can cause great distress and worry to the individuals and their families. It is simply not fair that the onus is currently on the emergency worker to have their own blood tested and to then potentially undergo further tests to help medical practitioners to assess whether they will develop a disease.

We therefore support the creation of a specific power for police officers to request blood and saliva samples from offenders in these cases. This will ensure that emergency workers are provided with better information regarding the likelihood that they have caught a disease. It will therefore reduce the number of occasions on which emergency workers themselves have to be tested and subsequently take medicines and endure periods of uncertainty about whether they have a disease. A blood sample will be taken only with consent. However, we agree that creating an offence of refusing to provide a blood sample for this purpose without good reason will help to ensure that offenders comply with these requests.

We want to continue to work with the hon. Member for Rhondda and with the police and other emergency services to ensure that the Bill's proposals are both practical and affordable. I thank the Police Federation for the work that it has done in this context. We also want to work with our Welsh counterparts as the Bill progresses through Parliament, to ensure that this legislation works effectively in Wales.

Let me conclude by again thanking the hon. Member for Rhondda—he does not get thanks from me very often, so he should accept it on this occasion—for ensuring that this first Friday sitting considering private Members' Bills has been so well spent. This is not a party political issue; it is an issue that affects us all. We have heard constituency cases from across the House today reflecting that fact. That is why I am pleased that we are working together to protect these key public servants. Introducing tougher sentences for despicable attacks on emergency workers sends the clearest possible message that those attacks will not be tolerated. I commend the many staff associations that have worked hard to push the issues in the Bill to the fore. We look forward to debating the provisions further as the Bill progresses through the House.

12.48 pm

Chris Bryant: With the leave of the House, I should like to respond to the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) and I have received so many congratulations, thanks and tributes today that I feel as though we are now married. This is made even more confusing by the fact that her partner is also called Chris. It would be quite surprising—[*Interruption.*] All right, calm down! It has been good that nobody has tried to talk the Bill out today or tried to keep the debate going for unnecessary purposes. Every Member who has spoken has done so either because they wanted to pay tribute to the emergency workers in their own

constituency, because they had particular stories that they wanted to tell or because they had identified issues that they felt the Bill still needed to address.

I have a short list of the issues that I think we will need to address in Committee. One is the definition of emergency workers, which has been referred to by several people. There is a question of whether we should extend it to include other NHS workers, PCSOs and custody officers, for example. I am keen, however, not to extend it so far that we do not throw a cordon sanitaire, as it were, around our emergency workers specifically.

Secondly, as the hon. Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) said, we will need to consider the reference in clause 1 to

“in the exercise of functions as such a worker”.

We will need to make sure that that does not become a loophole or a “get out” clause for those who attack or assault our emergency workers.

The third area to consider is the list of offences that can be aggravated. Members might think it a slightly odd list. There is a rationale for it, but we should perhaps consider other offences, such as those under the Public Order Act, which several hon. Members have referred to. As I have said to several people, I am keen not to make the issue of spitting and biting one that adds stigma in particular to those with HIV. If that were to be an outcome of the Bill, I would not want it on the statute book. I am keen to get that right, so we might need to amend that clause. In addition, as I understand it, the Government have signified that a money resolution, and consequently clause 7, will not be necessary, so we will have to remove that clause in Committee.

I want to tell one brief story. A bit like my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax, a few years ago I was caught up in an incident. It was around the time that the foxhunting legislation was going through Parliament. I had taken quite a strong stance in favour of the legislation, and my house had been attacked many times and all sorts of horrible things scrawled over it—I was quite well known for my position on the legislation. I was going to a fundraising event in Cardiff—my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) was there as well—and as I arrived, there was a large number of foxhunting activists outside the hotel where it was happening. They saw me from a distance and started chasing me, shouting all sorts of obscenities at me. They clearly wanted to—well, I do not think they wanted to have a conversation, let's put it that way.

I am very grateful to the police, who bundled me into the back of a van and locked the doors. You could not see inside the van from outside and the people chasing me disappeared for a while. Unfortunately, the police forgot they put me in the van. [*Laughter.*] About two hours later, I managed to get through to 999 to be released from the police van, by which time I was in terrible need of a toilet. [*Laughter.*] There is a serious point to this story. We then decided to get me into the event through the back door. We created a phalanx of police officers—in front, to the side and behind—with riot shields to get me into the hotel. Incidentally, my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East was no use at all—she was not answering her phone.

Anyway, the police were trying to get me in, and one of the police officers was of Chinese background. Suddenly, the demonstrators saw us trying to get in through the

[Chris Bryant]

back and started throwing stones, bricks and all sorts of things at us. At one point, they started shouting at the police officer I referred to, calling her—not my words—a “Chinky pig” and punching her. I am grateful to the police for getting me in, but what struck me when I was thinking about this last night was that although it was an aggravating factor that the attack on her was racially motivated, it was not an aggravating factor—it would have been had our Bill been law—that she was a police officer. That is all I want to do in the Bill—to put hate crimes and hatred of and assaults on our emergency workers on the same footing.

I am enormously grateful to everybody here today. I know how difficult it is when there are competing constituency events, especially for those from far-flung constituencies, particularly in Wales. I am also grateful for the Minister’s offer to progress the Bill as fast as possible. There are means, if the Government choose to adopt them, to get the Bill on the statute book by Easter next year. Let us see if we cannot do that together.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time; to stand committed to a Public Bill Committee (Standing Order No. 63).

Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Bill

Second Reading

12.55 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Losing a child is the most harrowing experience that could ever happen to any parent. As a father of four myself, I know personally that it is every mother and father’s worst fear, and one that never goes away. I am conscious that many Members present have personal experience of this subject. I am grateful for their incredible courage in highlighting the issue, for all their work in Parliament to help others in similar circumstances, and for their participation in today’s debate. We had a general debate on baby loss during Baby Loss Awareness Week last week, and I am pleased that we have time to debate this important and sensitive issue again today, so soon after such an important week in the calendar.

I particularly thank my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince)—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”]—for so successfully bringing this issue to the fore with his private Member’s Bill in the previous Session, which served as the catalyst for the progress we have made in reaching this point. I thank the all-party groups that have been involved, particularly the one on baby loss. I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) and for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) for all their work.

I also thank the all-party group for children who need palliative care, and charities such as Child Bereavement UK, Bliss, Together for Short Lives and Jack’s Rainbow, and all the other charitable organisations that do important work on this issue, not only to champion bereaved parents but to raise awareness. Of course, I thank the parents themselves, including from my constituency Annika and James Dowson, who first drew my attention to how baby loss is managed in many hospitals and how so much more could be done to help with the initial stages of grief and loss.

I am delighted that this is one of those issues for which there is cross-party support. Such consensus is right and important, and I hope it enables us to make positive progress with the Bill. I have been working closely with the excellent Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Margot James), with her Department and officials, and with my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, to create a Bill that is fair and beneficial to those who will need to rely on it. I am grateful for the Government’s support.

The successful passage of the Bill will ensure that we are able to put in place a new provision and level of protection so that those who find themselves in this awful situation in future know that, at a minimum, they will be entitled to time off work to grieve, without their suffering any detriment. We know that there are some brilliant, supportive and flexible employers out there, and I commend them for the support that they provide to their employees when these circumstances occur. But we also know that some employers operate at the other end of the spectrum, and it is those employers we need to consider when putting this legislation in place.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for taking forward the excellent work begun by my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) in the previous Session. He rightly says that most employers would grant leave under such terrible circumstances, were it asked for. Is not the point of the Bill that no parent should, in almost unimaginably horrible and difficult circumstances, have to make such a request and fear what the answer might be?

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Of course, most employers do the right thing, working with the people affected so that they get whatever support and time off they need, and maintaining their levels of pay through that period of time.

During our consultations on the Bill, our excellent parliamentary digital engagement team facilitated a Facebook debate, in which I took part. Some charities and the campaign organisation, 38 Degrees, also provided us with a number of examples of employers and line managers who offered inappropriate levels of support. For instance, a parent told us that their employer—an NHS body—offered them only five days' leave following the sudden passing of their youngest daughter, with any additional time having to be taken as annual leave. Brendan from Newcastle told us that he did not get any paid leave and was sacked nine months later. Gillian from Milton Keynes did not receive the appropriate support when she lost her daughter 13 years ago. She told us that the measures proposed in the Bill would have meant that she and her partner could have grieved together, and provided help and support for their other children.

No employee should even have to think about being at work when they desperately need some time away to grieve for a lost child. Yet according to a Rainbow Trust survey, around 9% of parents said that their employer was not at all supportive. I ask those employers to consider their position. What is the point of having a parent in the workplace who has had no time off to grieve? What effect do those employers think it has on the bereaved parents' attitude to their workplace and, indeed, on other people in the workplace? I strongly recommend that all employers and managers read the excellent ACAS guidelines on bereavement, which clearly detail best practice for financial and emotional support.

I will now set out the detail of the Bill. The Bill will provide two weeks' leave for all employees who lose a child below the age of 18. This will be a day-one right. Those key points are established on the face of the Bill, which deliberately leaves some other details to regulations. This leave will be protected and a person should suffer no form of detriment in the event that they find themselves having to take the leave. Crucially, the Bill will give parents an important choice, allowing them to make a decision on what is best for their needs, when they might otherwise be reliant on the good will of their employer.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I am very, very happy to say that it has never happened to me, and I grieve for all those to whom it has happened. I have heard of other cases where young men and women have been killed, and sometimes the parents do not want to stop working. They do not have to stop working if they feel that continuing may be better in helping them to get over the loss.

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The key to the Bill is that it retains that flexibility. There should be a discussion and negotiation, and the employer should provide the employee with support in order to help that person to decide what is best for them. It may be that the leave is taken later, rather than straightaway. People have different needs when dealing with their loss, as they do so in different ways and at different times.

The Bill also deals with paid leave. Leave will be paid, as a minimum, at the statutory rate—currently £140.98 a week or 90% of average weekly earnings where that is lower—for those who have fulfilled the qualifying period of 26 weeks' service with the same employer the week before the date of their child's passing away.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) and for Colchester (Will Quince) on all their work on the Bill. I wish it well. I have just one question. Will these rights also cover adoptive parents?

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend makes a good point. We have left some details out of the Bill to allow more time for consultation on topics just like that one. Clearly the legislation cannot just be about biological parents. Adoptive parents should get the same benefits that the Bill provides. There are other such circumstances to discuss, so we want the maximum possible opportunity for consultation and submission of evidence, and for debate on these matters so that we ensure that we get the Bill right.

Leave will be paid at the statutory rate for those who fulfil the qualifying period of 26 weeks' service the week before the child's passing away. The Bill allows the rate to be set in regulations so that it can be uprated regularly in the normal way, but that is the level at which I envisage the rate will be set. That mirrors existing family leave and pay provisions, such as paternity leave, shared parental leave, adoption leave, and maternity leave after the first six weeks. That strikes a fair balance between the rights of the employee and a workable framework for the employer, but it is clearly the minimum we would expect the employer to provide.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) talked about flexibility, and that is my next point. It is widely recognised that grief affects people in different ways and at different times, and that there are no set rules for how and when to grieve. A level of flexibility over when to take this leave will allow an employee to take it at a time that best suits them, within a fixed period following the bereavement.

Hon. Members will have different opinions about how long that period should be, and there is clearly a balance to be struck between the individual needs of a bereaved employee and the employer's need for a level of certainty around absences from work so that they can manage those effectively. With that in mind, the Bill provides for the window to be set in regulations, with a minimum of eight weeks within which these two weeks of leave must be taken.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for his kind and generous words. I know we had a conversation about this in drafting the Bill, and

[Will Quince]

I welcome the 56 days, but we know that fathers, in particular, often bottle up grief and can have issues further down the line, so I would ask that we consider extending the period to six months. I appreciate the concerns about employers, but that would give parents flexibility.

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and there are so many different circumstances—in certain circumstances, a funeral may be delayed. We need to consider that issue, and I am keen to hear views on it.

Eligibility is another area we need to have a debate on. In terms of my current thinking on who is considered to be a parent, the Government and I did quite a lot of consultation over the summer. It was apparent early on that the issue of who is a parent is key to ensuring the right people are reached and to the success of the Bill.

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): Along with answering the question of who is a parent, will my hon. Friend please tell me whether the Bill will address the issue of who is an employee, in view of the Taylor report? Those who work on zero-hours contracts, those who are self-employed and others will need that same space for grieving, as my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) pointed out in his very powerful article in *The Times*. Not everybody is in the same situation. Was that considered as well?

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend makes two good points in one—that self-employed people are treated differently in relation to various aspects of maternity and paternity leave, and that the Taylor review is considering some of these issues. We should consider this issue in the framework of the Taylor review. We should see what recommendations come from that review and then perhaps look to change these provisions if there is consensus on that.

An obvious starting point on eligibility is for the provision to apply to the biological parents of the child who has passed away. However, it is unrealistic to suggest that all family units look exactly the same; that is too simplistic an approach. As a society, we have clearly moved on from mum, dad and 2.4 children. Children now live in many different situations, with caring responsibilities divided up in different ways, depending on different life circumstances. A child could have a number of parental figures in their life, all of whom are equally attached to them and, therefore, potentially equally devastated if they pass away.

I will not be so bold as to say that pinning down a wider definition of “parent” is easy. I do not expect we will do that today or even during the passage of the Bill. We need to take considered opinion on the issue and to allow further debate on it. Therefore, in the Bill’s later stages, I propose that we take time for consideration and the submission of evidence, that we debate this point widely, and that we bring forward the necessary regulations, as provided for in the Bill, once that consideration has been undertaken.

First, we need to ensure that we put in place a clear framework so that everyone clearly understands whether the entitlement to leave applies under these circumstances.

That will take a little more time. I am very conscious that many different issues can and will form part of the overall debate during the Bill’s passage. We are likely to hear about the desire for parity between the self-employed and the employed, and questions about what other measures can be put in place to support parents at such a devastating time. These issues, and no doubt many more, will form the basis for a wider debate about what can and should be done in this area.

I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House share my desire to ensure that the Bill succeeds and makes quick progress. As we all know, a certain fragility accompanies the private Member’s Bill process. I would like to navigate that as best and as quickly as I can, with the help and support of Members across the House. Collectively, we have the opportunity to effect real change. It is our duty to ensure that those who will need to rely on this provision are able to do so at the earliest opportunity.

1.11 pm

Ms Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): I lost my daughter a few years ago; she was an adult. You never get over it—you just get used to it and live with it. I was employed by United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust and I had a phased return to work. They were just marvellous—I can never thank them enough. It makes such a difference, having that chance to grieve.

I completely support this Bill, and I am really grateful that everybody else seems to be supporting it, but I have a few things I want to ask. First, there is a worry that people on zero-hours contracts might not meet the number of hours required to get the statutory benefits. I wonder if we might give some thought to having an average of the past 12 months’ earnings, particularly if the person has had time off to care for a sick child. Secondly, perhaps the age criteria with regard to the loss of a disabled child ought to be raised to recognise the lifelong responsibility of somebody who cares for a disabled child.

Thirdly, I met somebody from Bliss yesterday, who said that people on universal credit ought to be able to have some sort of entitlement, because if they lose a child, they need time to grieve as well. I am told that the way things are at the moment, they can be sanctioned. They can go to appeal and probably win, but the problem is losing the money in the first place. We have had the whole universal credit debate, so perhaps we could give some thought to that aspect.

Finally, on the time off that people take, my union, Unison, is suggesting that they have a week as a block and are then allowed to take odd days. You never know when you are going to have something come up like a funeral or a day when the grief just hits you, and you need a day off then.

1.12 pm

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): What an honour it is to follow the hon. Member for Lincoln (Ms Lee).

We are an example of employees, as it were. You are not our employer, Madam Deputy Speaker, but you are somebody with authority over us making adjustments to cope with grieving parents. We have very kindly been called at the beginning of this debate, because that really does help.

It is an enormous pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake). I am very pleased to have worked with my hon. Friends the Members for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) and for Colchester (Will Quince), and the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), over the past couple of years on coping with the loss of a child and on how we can change the law, as well as change the conversation in society as a whole. It is therefore an enormous pleasure to speak as a co-sponsor of this Bill. I will not detain the House any more than I absolutely have to because we want to get on with it and get it passed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester did a lot of the spadework last year with his ten-minute rule Bill. I am sorry that that did not progress, but very pleased that the Government have had the opportunity to make a manifesto commitment to bring about this area of change. To me, as a former Government lawyer, the most exciting word in the Bill is “pay”. It is great that the Government is going to put its money where its mouth is and really support bereaved parents and their employers to cope when something very tragic happens. This Bill is long overdue. Historically, it has been down to the employer to decide how bereaved parents are treated. Although I have had excellent and supportive care from my employer, I know that that is not the case for everyone. I was sorry to hear of the examples that my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton raised.

Grief can, to a certain extent, be managed. That is something that I was told by my consultant soon after I gave birth, and at the time I thought it was a ridiculous idea that anyone could ever put grief into a box and raise the lid only when it suited them. However, the similarity of experience among those who are bereaved is quite astounding. Grief is something that can be managed, and life can go on after something dreadful. It is so important that politicians and the Government put in place the legal mechanisms to enable that to happen as easily as possible.

In the early days, bereaved parents may well, depending on the circumstances, be suffering from some form of post-traumatic stress disorder—they will certainly be suffering from shock—and they might need to tell and retell their story. They will have to deal with funerals and administration. They might have to deal with the police, inquests and all sorts of ghastly and unpleasant registration that no one thinks about before it happens to them.

It is particularly good that the grief of fathers is recognised in the Bill, because they have traditionally been overlooked. We know the very sad statistics about the high incidence of marital breakdown following a tragedy. Anything we can do to assist families to stay together must be done.

In the all-party group on baby loss we have worked very hard on the bereavement care pathway, and I am thrilled that we have brought the Government along with us. I think that counselling is a very valuable part of the recovery from a tragedy such as this, and anything we can do to build that into employment practice is worth doing. I was very lucky; I had a very supportive employer in the civil service. I had a job I loved, and I had sympathetic and imaginative colleagues. My own experience of grief certainly made me a better manager when the time came for me to help the people I worked with to manage their own tragic situations.

I do think that there is a role for good bereavement practice at work. I found it very helpful to know who knew what had happened, so one thing I introduced as a manager was to get everybody to sign a card that was given to the bereaved person as they returned to work, so that it was obvious that everybody knew what had happened and everybody acknowledged the extent of the tragedy. That enabled us all to move on and to have conversations, if appropriate—or not, if appropriate.

There are many things that employers can do to ease the burden, and I think the ACAS policies are a great place to start. It is important to recognise that members of staff will need extra support, possibly for many years. Anniversaries are difficult, although I think we often build them up in advance to be worse than they are on the day; they do not turn out to be quite as bad as we think they will be. We can all imagine scenarios that may be particularly difficult for those who have lost a child, including future pregnancies and the illness of other children in the family. A hospital visit of any kind can be very stressful for somebody who has been traumatised in hospital. I call on employers to do everything they can to try to imagine what it is like.

This is, however, a happy day for us. I offer many congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton, and to all of us who are supporting this Bill, I say, “Thank you.”

1.19 pm

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), and I agree with her that this is a happy day. In fact, I would go so far as to say that it is a great day. I think I speak for everyone in this House when I say that we went into politics because we wanted to make a difference, whether it is to one person, one family, hundreds of people or thousands of people up and down the country. That is exactly why we do this job, and why we love it so much. Today is one of those days when I know we are making a difference. This will make a difference to the thousands of parents every year in this country who go through the personal tragedy of losing a child. As Members of Parliament, we have a duty and to some extent an obligation, where we can, to use our own personal experiences—good and bad—to improve the lot of others: to make sure that as few as possible people go through the sad experience, but also to make sure that those who do will have the best possible bereavement care and support available.

Thankfully, child loss in this country is as rare as it is tragic, but even so about 5,000 children die every year, and the parents need help and support. We would like to think that they got such support from their employers. Both my wife and I were very lucky to have employers who were excellent. They could not have done more, and we did take two weeks’ leave. As my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) rightly said, the vast majority of employers are brilliant. They act with compassion, care, kindness and sympathy. Sadly, however, some do not.

Since starting to research this issue nearly two years ago, shortly after entering this place, my inbox has, sadly, been full of cases of people who have been treated horrendously. In fact, only this morning, after I appeared on “Good Morning Britain”, somebody sent me an email saying they were told they had to take a day’s holiday to attend their child’s funeral. That is

[Will Quince]

totally unacceptable. We should not be debating this issue or having to debate it; it should be a matter of course that employers act with compassion, kindness and respect for the tragedy that has occurred to the parents, but, sadly, it is not. That is why the Bill is so important.

Two years ago, I started the research that led to my ten-minute rule Bill, and I must admit I was gutted when we did not manage to get it through during the last Parliament. I remember that when I wrote to the Minister, who is in her place on the Front Bench, I did not expect the response I received, which was, “Come and speak to me, because I think we should have a conversation.” We had a conversation, and she and the Secretary of State could not have been more supportive or helpful. Hon. Members can imagine my pride and delight when I saw that this was a key policy in the Conservative party manifesto. That was the case not just for our party, but for the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats, so we have cross-party consensus on the issue.

I must now turn to my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton, because without him we would not be here today. Yes, he came top among Conservative Members in the private Members’ Bill ballot, but I know that he will have received hundreds of emails from individuals, charities and organisations all across the country, almost begging him to take on their cause or campaign and their Bill. When I picked up the phone to him, however, he did not hesitate in saying yes, and I cannot thank him enough. Anybody who has gone through the experience of child loss will want to make sure that their child’s life, however short, meant something—that a difference was made because of it—and you have enabled that, so I am forever indebted to you. Thank you, Kevin.

This Bill is going to make a difference. For the families concerned, it will give them certainty. They will not have to ask that awkward question about time off when they go into work having suffered such a tragedy. It will make a difference to so many people. Before I get too emotional, I would just like to say, “Please support this Bill”.

1.23 pm

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): I have been in the position of losing my son, and I must thank my employer at the time, my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones). I have to say that his support was exemplary, which was very lucky for me, because I know the absolutely devastating effect this has on the family.

The Bill has cross-party support. I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), who no doubt ensured that this was in her party’s manifesto, just as my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) ensured that it was in our party’s manifesto. This is one of those issues on which we cannot quite believe that such protection has not previously been put in place.

I am really proud that it is this Conservative Government who have not only introduced a world-class bereavement care pathway, which was launched just two weeks ago and will help deliver support for parents who suffer the loss of a child—that is an amazing development and the

11 pilots were launched last Monday—but who are now putting in place additional protection for parents, which is also amazing. When my hon. Friends the Members for Colchester and for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West and I all sat down to set up the all-party group, that was our vision—to put in place good bereavement support for families across this country. As my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester has said, this is a great day that will change the lives of many parents.

The medical research is clear that, unfortunately, parents do suffer post-traumatic stress disorder. That is being looked into and it is very clear that it can be a consequence of losing a child. A statutory right to protection is therefore incredibly important. I was horrified by the examples given by my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) of the lack of compassion and, indeed, common sense shown by some employers.

I thank the Minister for being willing to take the issue forward, and my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton for picking it for his Bill. We know that if we deal with grief appropriately early on and allow that support to be in place, it will have long-term benefits for society and minimise the knock-on cost. My doctor—I have spoken about this before—wanted to prescribe me antidepressants, but, as I said to him, “I’m not depressed; I’ve lost a child”, which is something completely different in terms of the grief.

The action taken by this Bill, working hand in hand with the bereavement care pathway, will set a standard that I hope, as I said in the baby loss awareness debate, will be rolled out so that employers will have to take note of all bereavement and consider how they can support staff through different types of bereavement. I tell the Minister that this is an absolutely critical step. I am very proud that this Government are delivering on bereavement care for families, effectively from the moment that they suffer their loss, and putting in place the support that parents need at a time that is so incredibly and utterly devastating. It will make a huge difference to many parents.

1.28 pm

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): It is an honour to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), who made a passionate speech. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) on promoting the Bill, and my hon. Friends the Members for Colchester (Will Quince) and for Banbury (Victoria Prentis). I also acknowledge the passionate speech given by the hon. Member for Lincoln (Ms Lee). I thank everyone for their contributions. It is amazing how much work can be done by Back-Bench MPs.

The Bill follows on from the debate last week—I cannot always remember when debates took place, because they all merge into one—on the bereavement care pathway. A huge amount of work has been done by a group of newish or young MPs who have been in Parliament for only a few years. It is amazing how much work can be done in a short period.

I support the Bill and am proud that it was among our party’s manifesto commitments. The manifesto stated:

“We will ensure all families who lose a baby are given the bereavement support they need, including a new entitlement for child bereavement leave.”

I am not the only Member of Parliament who will have attended a surgery quite early on in their career and had to try to support and manage a bereaved parent who might have been dealing not only with the loss of their child, but with other issues such as housing and healthcare, and who was nervous about talking to their employer. It was difficult for me to give the best possible advice in my first few cases, so I am really pleased that the Bill will help those people.

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): I concur with my hon. Friend about the understanding that Members gain from people visiting their surgeries. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) for promoting the Bill.

I am lucky enough to represent a constituency with two amazing charities, Abigail's Footsteps and Making Miracles, and our area will be part of the bereavement care pathway trial. It is a credit to my constituents and others around the country who, despite having experienced such desperate suffering, have provided the drive, working with Members here, to bring us to where we are today. I congratulate them and I hope my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani) agrees.

Ms Ghani: I completely agree. My hon. Friend has been a strong advocate for her constituency and a champion of her local charities. I have a great birthing centre in my constituency, the Crowborough birthing unit. The midwives do fantastic work, which I would also like to acknowledge.

I am keen to support the Bill because members of my family are involved in employment that is a little unstable and it can be tricky to take time off. One member of my family is involved in shift work: it is not easy to take time off, because it changes the pattern within the factory. I hope the Bill would provide them with support if they ever found themselves in that situation again. Another member of my family who lost a child was in the teaching profession. Taking time off was seen as not the right thing to do. I hope the Bill will bring common sense and compassion to employers, as well as support to such families.

Parents in my constituency must feel properly supported by their employer when they go through the deeply distressing ordeal of losing a child. Losing a child must cause grief beyond words. It is right that employees are able to feel comfortable taking time off to grieve without being nervous of having that conversation or nervous about losing pay. It is only right that parents with a child over six months old have the same protection in law as those who lose a child under six months old. There is no set limit on how many days may be taken off as leave and the definition of a reasonable time remains vague. The Bill will provide certainty and a little bit of a buffer—a bit of space of time, with a bit of pay—to parents who are grieving.

Most employers are excellent and act with compassion and kindness, but we should not leave it to chance or to the most articulate parents who have lost a child to have that conversation. I am therefore pleased to support the Bill, and that the UK Government are leading the way in supporting parents who need time away from their work to grieve for their lost child. I am proud of my colleagues who have been able to do so much work in such a short time. The Bill will provide some support to my constituents who lose a child.

1.32 pm

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani) and I congratulate the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) on introducing the Bill.

The death of a child is something that no parent should have to face. The intense grief they experience is something I can only imagine and I hope I never have to go through it. Sixty families across Bedfordshire lost a child in 2015-16. One would have hoped that all those families were given the space to grieve, but in some cases employers were strict and time to grieve was not granted to families. This important Bill would put on a statutory footing the right to a clear space to grieve without the worry of lost earnings. I am therefore pleased to lend my support to it, and I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for letting me speak at short notice.

1.33 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I, too, rise to support the Bill. I pay tribute to all Members who have spoken so powerfully about their individual loss. I realise that they do so with great bravery—nothing could be more persuasive. The presence of the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) on the Opposition Front Bench also shows the importance of the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) will be well aware from conversations we have had that my family do not tend to support Bills that originate from those on the Conservative Benches, but they will be proud that I am able to co-sponsor this Bill because my sister lost her son just a few years ago. She was fortunate in the sense that she was already on maternity leave because of the birth of my niece, but when I discussed with her whether she would have benefited from the Bill, her take was, interestingly, “I assume that I would have had that right in any event.” She worked for the NHS, but, as my hon. Friend has pointed out, that may well not be the case in organisations including the NHS.

The most powerful aspect of the Bill is that no parent would have to go through the stressful rigmarole of almost trying to negotiate, or trying to find out whether those terms apply, because the terms will be there from the start. When I managed people in a department, and had to deal with circumstances such as these, it was not entirely clear what the department's policy was. As anyone who has been a manager in a big company with a human resources department will know, HR departments must have policies that are absolutely clear. Discretion is not often afforded, because otherwise, where would it end up? I therefore consider it essential for this right to be baked in, so that it sets a benchmark for even better standards.

I am thinking particularly about pay. We have discussed the statutory elements of pay, but, as we know, most companies will probably not go through the rigmarole of amending the pay, and I imagine that many employees in this position will end up on full pay as a result.

I do not wish to take up any further time. I am hugely supportive of the Bill and am hugely grateful to the Members who have shared their experiences and to my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton. I hope very much that the Bill represents an advance in legislation that everyone out there, regardless of party political persuasion, will support today.

1.36 pm

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I support the Bill and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) on it. It is worth our remembering how successful he has been with private Members' Bills. Last year, I believe, he succeeded in introducing "Claudia's law". I should like to think that this very special Bill is in extremely safe hands, and I note the support that it has been given so far today by Members on both sides of the House. I sincerely wish it well, and hope that it proceeds through both Houses as quickly as possible.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince), who is not in the Chamber at the moment. I know how hard he—and other Members—has worked to raise awareness of this sensitive issue. When I think back to my first days as a Member of Parliament, I recall an Adjournment debate about baby loss that took place late one summer's evening. I was not in the Chamber, but I read the report of the debate in *Hansard*, and I know that it was very emotive and very well received. Perhaps some of the work that has led to today's debate stems from it. As has already been mentioned, there was also a ten-minute rule Bill on the subject last year.

I am pleased to note that the Government were listening, as was evident from our manifesto—and I must acknowledge that the issue was included in the Labour manifesto as well. This is also an indication that it is possible to sit on the Back Benches and, if I may borrow a phrase from my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, make a difference. Perhaps I am being presumptuous, because the Bill has not yet made it to Royal Assent, but I am sure we are all pretty certain that it stands a very good chance of doing so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst) spoke of visits to her surgeries. I recall a visit to one of my first surgeries by a father who had tragically lost twins. That was a difficult case for me to deal with, as I had never come across such a situation before. There is sometimes a harsh reality check when Members of Parliament start to understand the breadth of the topics that people raise in the privacy of surgeries as they relate their personal experiences.

I followed the work of the all-party parliamentary group on baby loss because of that constituent in particular. I have been pleased to hear about Baby Loss Awareness Week, debates in this place and the work of the APPG. I also welcome news of the bereavement care pathway, which I hope and sincerely believe will soon start to make a difference to some of those parents.

The other thing that today has shown is that, although we so often have heated debates in this place and are clearly divided in our opinions, there are occasions when Parliament comes together. Today's debate must surely be an example of Parliament at its best, following on, as it does, from the earlier debate on emergency workers.

I want to close with a couple of words about the Bill. I raised the point about adoptive parents because I was genuinely uncertain whether they would be covered, so I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton could give some clarity about that.

Clearly, a lot of work has gone into getting the Bill to this stage. There will be a lot more consultation and work to ensure we get it right, so that it helps those

whom we want it to help. It will go a long way to addressing a lot of the vagaries and uncertainties that exist. It is now time that we provided some clarity on those vagaries and uncertainties, which exist for the parents, but also sometimes for employers. I speak from a small business background. Often, people are so focused on running their business that when these situations arise that they have never come across—it never happened in our business—some guidelines and, now, this legislation would be a tremendous boost.

I welcome today's debate, I welcome the Bill and I wish it every success.

1.41 pm

Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) for introducing this Bill. He is a man of great integrity and when he takes on a cause, he follows it through. Those who support the Bill—all of us in this place—are grateful for that.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) and for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) and to the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), who, although she is not in the House today, has spoken very movingly on this issue. All those colleagues spoke movingly and with great dignity and courage in this place. In so doing, they have helped to move forward an issue of great importance.

It would be remiss of me not to highlight the hugely important work of my hon. Friend—indeed, my friend—the Member for Colchester (Will Quince). He has been hugely successful, and not only in securing the commitment in my party's manifesto. The Opposition are united with us in their commitment on this issue, as are other parties. He has highlighted the issue tirelessly in the House and he has taken the campaign to the country and persuaded the country of its importance, and he has done so with great personal courage and dignity. We in this House and his electors in Colchester are lucky to have him.

As many hon. Members have said, the circumstances that this Bill addresses must be every person's worst nightmare. We have heard, rightly, that many employers do a fantastic and compassionate job in such circumstances—we should pay tribute to them—but we have also heard, sadly, that there are some who do not. We heard an example this morning, I think from my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, that to my mind was inexcusable. There will be others who, probably unintentionally and through no ill intent, place a burden on people in this situation. This Bill seeks to help to build the sort of society and the sort of compassionate approach that we all wish to see. It provides time and space for bereaved parents not only to make the tragic and necessary arrangements but to grieve and to try to begin coming to terms with what has happened.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton said, the Bill provides a degree of flexibility and choice for parents. As my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) suggested, parents can choose not to take the two weeks' leave immediately but to split it into parts if necessary, depending on the circumstances and whether it works for them.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) said, the Bill provides one less thing for parents to worry about. They will not have to go to

their employer to ask for leave, they will not have to worry about whether they might be pressed into coming back and they will not have to worry about making the case for leave. Although leave might be only a tiny thing in the circumstances, anything that reduces the stress and pressure is hugely welcome.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton will correct me if I am wrong, but I welcome the fact that the schedule introduces proposed new section 80EE to the Employment Rights Act 1996, which will allow the Government to make regulations to extend the provision to include stillbirths, which is hugely important.

In response to questions raised by hon. Members in this debate, my hon. Friend rightly said that elements of the Bill could be clarified or considered further, but I hope it is not only a hugely important step in its own right but part of broader progress on the issue and on what we do to support people in such circumstances. My hon. Friends the Members for Colchester and for Eddisbury have made the case for building on the work to introduce bereavement rooms, dedicated space and facilities in hospitals and elsewhere. The Government have already invested £35 million, and there is more to do. I hope the Bill will help to stimulate those further improvements.

The Bill strikes the right balance between employers and employees. It reflects the compassion and the sort of society that all of us in this Chamber and in this country, regardless of the political disagreements we may have, would wish to see. The Bill's time has come, and I am proud to support it wholeheartedly, as I am sure are all other hon. Members.

1.47 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I did not plan to speak in this debate. I planned to come along and show my support for the Bill by sitting on the Front Bench, but the powerful debate has compelled me to add my voice and to pay tribute to everyone who has worked so hard to get the Bill to this stage. I will not detain the House too long other than to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) for choosing this subject for his private Member's Bill.

I have had a couple of opportunities to introduce a private Member's Bill. One I was successful in enacting, and the other was sadly talked out by the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), who thankfully is not here today. That is probably why we are having so much consensus and success today.

It is great that the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton chose this subject. There are always thousands of possible choices, but there could have been no better one. I offer him huge congratulations and thanks from all of us who have campaigned on this issue, not least the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince), who I am sure is off doing something important—he is probably doing some media. He should rightly get the plaudits for first introducing this subject in a ten-minute rule Bill.

The hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) raised the issues of bereavement and baby loss in an Adjournment debate, and when she approached Members on both sides of the House, including the hon. Members for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), for Colchester, for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) and me, about

setting up an all-party parliamentary group, I did not hesitate. Indeed, I had some guilt because I had been here for 10 years and had felt the importance of all these issues but had never felt brave enough to do what she and other colleagues, who were brand new to the House, were able to do with such vigour and immediacy. So, I continually take my hat off to her and those other Members for everything they have done to show leadership on this and take it forward. The great success in the short two years that that all-party group has been going is astonishing, with the bereavement care pathways, the bereavement suites and now this Bill on bereavement leave and pay. I am so thrilled and proud to be a small part of that group and to support it as much as I can.

I just want to give a small example from my journey when this happened to me, as sitting here has brought it all back and brought tears to my eyes. It was a very different time then, 19 years ago, and I was working part-time. I was not on a zero-hours contract, but I did not get pay for being off sick. My employer was good and gave me time off, but it was without pay. Of course I got time off for the funeral, but without pay. I was off for about two weeks but it was never paid. I did not have to take holiday to grieve and have the funeral, but, equally, I was not paid. My husband had a good employer and could have taken time off with pay but, like the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) was saying about people dealing with grief in different ways, he could not wait to get back to work. That caused problems and I still have not quite forgiven him for that, because I really needed him then. However, he chose to go back to work, needing to do so as his way of coping. So it is right that this is not forced upon people, but he would have chosen to have taken that time later if the option had been available.

I want to end my comments by commending the Bill to the House. I hope it has a swift passage through; it would be amazing if we could get it on the statute book by Easter—that would be fantastic. Again, I thank all the hon. Members who have brought it this far, especially the hon. Members for Colchester and for Thirsk and Malton.

1.51 pm

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson). I am delighted she was able to come off the Front Bench and give the speech she just made. It is a pleasure and privilege to have listened to everything she had to say.

I am delighted to give my strong support to the Bill today. I pay huge tribute to the Members who have brought it here. Of course it stands in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), who chose to bring it here and introduced it with such eloquence and passion, but, as many others have said, other Members have worked very hard on this issue for a number of years. My hon. Friends the Members for Colchester (Will Quince), for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) and for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) have shown enormous courage and compassion in bringing difficult personal experiences here to Parliament to ensure that the law will operate for other people in a way that will help them. Their conduct on this issue shows Parliament at its best; it shows Parliament demonstrating compassion, and people coming here

[Chris Philp]

with real experience and using it to improve the lives of our fellow citizens. I congratulate and pay huge tribute to all of those Members who have brought us to where we stand today.

Other Members have spoken eloquently about the Bill's merits. In a way, it is sad that it is even necessary, because if all employers behaved with compassion and sensitivity, it would not be. But we have heard examples where employers, either deliberately or just through carelessness, have not behaved as they should towards bereaved parents. Making sure that it is compulsory that they do behave decently is exactly the right thing to do.

Some Members, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury and the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West, have drawn attention to the pay component. It is not enough simply to give people time off work and to make that automatic; it is important that people get some pay for that, too. That is particularly the case in order to help people on lower incomes, for whom a loss of pay even for a couple of weeks is a really serious matter. I am therefore delighted that the Bill encompasses not only time off, but pay.

I should like to raise an issue, and I hope that the Minister will respond to it. It is closely linked to the issues in the Bill, and it might be something that my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton and the Government could consider in Committee if it were in order to do so. If not, perhaps the Government could consider it more generally. It relates to children who are born incredibly prematurely. My twins were born at 25 weeks and one day. For many parents whose children are born so prematurely, there is not a happy ending. I saw many parents in the University College hospital neonatal unit who had been bereaved following the birth of their children at that level of prematurity. Thanks to the miracles of modern science, however, some children do survive, and thankfully my twins were among them.

A Croydon resident, Catriona Ogilvy, has articulated a good case for giving the parents of extremely premature babies extended maternity leave. The case that Catriona makes is that when the baby comes out of the neonatal intensive care unit, they will often be like any other baby, but while they are in the unit, the parents often have to be present almost 24 hours a day. There is a case for offering parents extended statutory maternity leave with pay when the baby is born before 30 or perhaps 34 weeks' gestation. I realise that this might be outside the scope of the Bill, given its short and long titles. If it is within the scope of the Bill, I would certainly urge my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton to consider tabling amendments that speak to this point. If it is not, I would be interested to hear what the Minister thinks about Catriona Ogilvy's suggestion. I believe it would be an improvement to our legislation if we could consider moves in that area.

I put on record once again my congratulations to the Members involved in bringing in the Bill. I strongly commend it to the House and hope that it will progress rapidly through the various stages of parliamentary approval and get on to the nation's statute book as expeditiously as possible.

1.57 pm

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): On 13 March 1942, in New End hospital, the older brother that I never knew, James John Dromey, died at three days old. I do not know whether my mother had difficulty, as a trainee nurse, in getting support from her employer. What I do know is that the trauma of losing that three-day-old baby stayed with her for the rest of her life. For years she was reluctant to talk about it, and the scars and the pain never went away. That is why, for me, the Bill is so important.

The hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) is to be congratulated on championing a noble cause. I would also like to pay tribute to the parliamentary pioneer of the legislation that I am confident we will pass through this House: the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince). I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) and the hon. Members for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) and for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) on the work they have done, born out of bitter experience, to ensure that, in future, grieving parents get the support that they deserve.

Like the hon. Member for Banbury, I am a patron of the Bliss charity, which does wonderful work in neonatal intensive care units. I will never forget going to see the one-to-one nursing of babies hanging on to their lives and fighting desperate battles to recover. I remember an instance when Mandy McKeon, a constituent of mine, told a meeting of parents what it had been like for her. She told them that her son Liam had died seven times but that he had eventually recovered. She described the joy when that happened. I pay tribute to the courage of the hon. Member for Banbury for telling her story at a Bliss reception—she was in tears, and so was I.

The Bill is a very welcome initiative. It offers two weeks' paid leave to any employed parent who loses a child under 18. That is right. It is right that every employee will be eligible for this right, irrespective of their length of service. It is right that in addition employed parents with at least 26 weeks' continuous service will be eligible for statutory parental bereavement leave, and it is right that we move beyond the ACAS code of practice to enact legal rights. The code of practice is admirable and most employers follow it—most employers are good employers—but too many are oblivious to the pain being suffered by grieving parents. I remember, many years ago when I was a district officer with the Transport and General Workers Union, sitting down with a young woman in the EMI factory in Hayes, west London, as she poured out her heart about how difficult it had been losing her baby and how bitter she was that her employer had not shown one ounce of sympathy or solidarity. So, yes, most employers are good employers and do the right thing, but many do not, which is why we need a change in the law.

The CBI, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, the TUC and all the major organisations in the world of work support the Bill. I am proud that the Bill, in creating a legal entitlement for parents, will go significantly further than equivalent legislation in many countries, including in western Europe, and so the Labour party strongly supports it. It is a positive step forward in supporting parents who lose a child. I stress again, as hon. Members here know, that losing a child is the most traumatic and tragic experience.

There will, of course, be issues to tease out in Committee. Points have already been made about employees with irregular contracts—agency workers, zero-hours contracts—and about whether parents in receipt of benefits should be entitled to no claim conditionality for the same period as bereavement leave to ensure that they continue to receive their full income during this time. Crucially, of course, all workers should have the same rights to pay and leave in the case of a child's death, irrespective of the nature of their contract of employment.

There is much good will on these issues across the House. We have an opportunity to construct a Bill that will send an unambiguous message to the country that we are on the side of grieving parents. The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) is right that this is a good example of Parliament coming together in a noble cause. We will work to ensure that the Bill passes through all its parliamentary stages as quickly as possible and to put in place legislation that recognises that to lose a child is an appalling tragedy, but that then to suffer from a lack of sympathy and support adds trauma to tragedy. No parent should be denied the time to grieve and make the basic necessary arrangements. No parent should have to worry about whether they can pay the bills if they take time off. That should never happen again.

The hon. Member for Colchester was right to say that we have heard the voice of the grieving, and I pay particular tribute to the champions here who have suffered the trauma themselves. We are on their side, and Parliament is determined to make a difference.

2.4 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Margot James): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), who spoke so eloquently in sharing his family's own story. That shows what a timeless and terrible problem we are discussing. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) on securing a high place in the private Member's Bill ballot and thank him for choosing to introduce such an important Bill.

At the recent Westminster Hall debate on bereavement leave after the loss of a child, which was led by my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton), I was pleased to see that we have cross-party consensus on this issue, as has been borne out this afternoon. I am pleased that Members have shown a great deal of willingness to work across party lines to achieve a positive outcome today, and I have high hopes that that will continue as we discuss the Bill's detail in its subsequent stages.

As many as one in 10 of the workforce are bereaved in any year. Although the Bill addresses only those who lose a child who is below the age of 18, that is an important place for us to focus our efforts. I completely understand that it is deeply distressing for a parent to lose a child at any age, and we will continue to work with ACAS and Cruse to identify the best way to encourage employers to act sympathetically to requests for leave following the loss of an older child who has reached adulthood.

The loss is particularly harrowing, though, when a child has barely had a chance to start their life. All the hopes, anxieties and dreams invested in that baby, toddler, young child or teenager: gone in such a desperately final

way. I extend my heartfelt sympathy to all parents who have suffered and, of course, continue to suffer from such a terrible loss. Like other Members, I commend those who have spoken in the House about their own loss of a child. Their bravery in so doing has raised awareness of this issue and enabled my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton to introduce this Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) made such a passionate speech. The ten-minute rule Bill that he so bravely introduced in the previous Parliament led to the inclusion of a commitment in our manifesto to ensure that all families who lose a baby are given the support that they need, including through a new entitlement to child bereavement leave. There is currently a clear imbalance between the experience of those who work for a good employer and are given the time and space needed to deal with the loss of a child, and the experience of those who, as we have heard in many examples, are not afforded such consideration. The House also heard in the Baby Loss Awareness Week debate last week, to which I also responded, of horrendous experiences and some employers' cold and callous treatment of their employees following the death of a child. The Bill will go some way towards addressing this issue, which is why the Government support it.

I shall try to address some of the specific points that were made in the debate. The hon. Member for Lincoln (Ms Lee) asked about those on zero-hours contracts and those whose status is that of a worker rather than an employee. I very much sympathise with the point she made. It is helpful that the Bill mirrors existing employment provisions, thereby minimising any additional complexity for employers and parents. Nevertheless, I accept that the hours of some workers—in fact, many—are really under the control of their employer in many ways, even if the hours are flexible and the workers can take time off. Of course, they do not have an entitlement to pay during that period. We heard from the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) about her personal experience of having to take off the time that she desperately needed without pay. I assure the House that, in line with the recommendations made by Matthew Taylor, we will consider this and other matters raised in the debate when we respond to the Taylor review before the end of the year.

The hon. Member for Lincoln and the shadow Minister mentioned people on benefits and universal credit claimants, who are actually not sanctioned for taking time off work after a bereavement. I am pleased to say that there is already flexibility in the conditionality to safeguard claimants in that position. If a claimant's child has died, the work search and availability requirements are not applied for up to six months from the date of the death.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp) spoke about babies who are born prematurely. He mentioned Catriona Ogilvy, who I had the privilege of meeting with my hon. Friend's constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed), as a result of the latter's ten-minute rule Bill in the last Parliament. As a result of that meeting and his Bill, we have worked with ACAS on new and detailed guidance for employers to use when employees have a premature baby. The guidance was published last month, and I trust that my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South will join efforts in raising awareness of it.

[Margot James]

A wider culture change is needed in the way in which some businesses deal with staff who have suffered a bereavement. Of course, we are only here this afternoon because that is very much the case. There are some other issues that the Bill will not address, but things are happening so I want to mention a few of those points.

Antoinette Sandbach: One of the key aspects of the Bill is that a mother or, indeed, a father who was on maternity or paternity leave when they were bereaved is entitled to carry on having that right. That is being enshrined in the legislation. What steps will be taken to ensure that employers are aware of this impending legislation so that they can adequately prepare or, at least, try to amend their policies even before the legislation comes into effect?

Margot James: We will inform employers through the various advisory services, via gov.uk and via other means. We will also work with ACAS to ensure that the maximum number of employers are made aware of the legislation. The efforts of all in this House to amplify the message would be extremely welcome.

More needs to happen in various areas in the handling of bereavement as a whole. We would like more employers to familiarise themselves with the ACAS guidance, “Managing bereavement in the workplace—a good practice guide”, which was developed in conjunction with the charity, Cruse Bereavement Care. This has been created specifically to support employers in managing staff who have suffered a bereavement.

The fact is that, as well as needing to take time off work, employees may also find that their performance is affected when they return, or they may be temporarily unable to perform their role. I think that that is highly likely, and other hon. Members have already stated that it is impossible in some cases of bereavement—particularly when the loss is of a child—for someone to concentrate as they would normally. I am the first to accept that this experience could exceed the two-week period that we are here to discuss. We are bringing a new entitlement into law, but I do not wish to discourage employers from understanding that all cases are different and that, of course, some people will need greater periods of flexibility in how they approach their work following a bereavement.

The guidance sets out the benefits of effective engagement at such a time and the positive effect that it can have on the employee and the business in the long run. The employee feels supported, less pressured and therefore better able to deal with the issue they face, and that helps them with the overall process of grieving.

Alongside that, employees need to understand better what other support may be available to them should they suffer the terrible loss of a child. Concerns have been raised in the House in recent months that the cost of child funerals can be an additional concern. As such, where people meet eligibility conditions, a contribution towards the cost of a simple, respectful funeral may be available through the social fund funeral expenses payment scheme. In addition, it is open to local authorities to waive burial and cremation fees for children, as some already do.

Parents who lose a child at the point of birth also need quality care and support. They are the unit that somehow has to carry on functioning after such a devastating outcome. I am a former employer myself, and although it is many years since I was responsible for a lot of people in the workplace, I am pleased to say that I had a management team who tried their best to empathise with parents who had stillborn children or who lost their child, as the mother of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington did all those years ago, at just a few days old—indeed, the majority of parents who suffer the loss of a child under the age of 18 do so in the first six months of their child’s life.

Losing a child is a truly terrible time, and I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton is introducing a Bill to dramatically improve the situation for anyone unfortunate enough to be in the employ of a firm totally lacking in empathy. Such parents do need the protection we are here to debate this afternoon, but we know, as I said earlier—this was certainly true in my firm, and it is true in the vast majority of firms I am aware of—that having a period of time to cover the immediate bereavement and the tragic, heart-rending funeral service is the basics, and one has to continue to empathise with the individual after they return to work. As one of my hon. Friends pointed out during the debate, people obviously do not come back to work able to switch back on again. They will need time off for certain things. The registration of the death and all that sort of thing carries on. From my personal experience of bereavement—fortunately, it did not involve the death of a child, but being responsible for estates—I know that these things just take time. People want to take time over them; they do not want to feel in a rush and up against a deadline.

Of course I understand the needs of employers, and my company was fortunate enough to have people who could cover for absence and that sort of thing. It is different for a very small employer, and I do sympathise—it can be very difficult. It is also difficult for the self-employed. We have not heard much mention of the self-employed, who are not covered by this legislation, on the basis that they can take time off because they are their own boss. On the other hand, if they are providing services, there are other pressures on them. They have the difficulty of having to deal with customers and so forth without the back-up of a team underneath them who can take up the reins. When we come to consider issues regarding the self-employed in our response to the Taylor review, I trust that we will be able to cover some of these aspects for people who are currently not of employed status.

Mrs Hodgson: The Minister made a very good point about the time needed for people to go on the bereavement journey. Will someone who feels able to come back to work sooner but then finds that the grief hits later on—as it does; it hits different people at different stages—be able to take some of the two weeks’ paid leave later, perhaps within a six-month period? Will the Bill accommodate that?

Margot James: That is definitely the sort of thing that can be raised in Committee. At the moment, the period is two weeks. The hon. Member for Lincoln asked whether it could be divided into days here and there. That is currently not possible within the various types of family leave and carer leave that exist on the

statute book. The leave is divided into weeks, but it can be taken over a period of time. I am sure that when hon. Members get to discuss the Bill in Committee, the fixed period of time might be a subject of debate.

Thanks in large part to the work of the all-party group, the Government have recognised that the NHS needs to improve its own environments. That has led to better bereavement rooms and quiet spaces, now at nearly 40 hospitals. The Department of Health has funded Sands to deliver a national bereavement care pathway to reduce the variation in the quality of bereavement care provided by the NHS. Only last week, 11 pilot sites were announced in hospital trusts that are going to implement the new pathway.

From time to time, I receive letters from parents who have suffered the loss of a baby in my local hospital. I know that efforts have been made to improve the services for those parents. If the parents have lost their baby very, very shortly after childbirth, I can think of no worse place to be than the average maternity suite. My heart goes out to those parents. I am glad that the work of the all-party group is leading to improvements in the care in our local hospital trusts.

Again, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton for choosing this subject from among so many interests competing for our time. I very much welcome the consensus among hon. Members across the House and thank them all for their hugely valuable and sensitive contributions.

2.23 pm

Kevin Hollinrake: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to conclude the debate. Please tell me if I am likely to run out of time, as that is the last thing I want to do.

I thank the Minister and the shadow Minister for their very fine closing speeches. I also thank Members across the House for their consensus view that we need to provide more support for grieving parents. I can think of no more important issue that we might ever deal with in this Chamber. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) for

the work that she has done on this, and for her very good point about how we need to keep this leave flexible because people will need to take it at different times.

My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) spoke about managing grief. I have no idea how one would manage grief in this circumstance, but that is clearly something she is able to do. There is no way in the world that any of us can imagine what she has been through.

The taxpayer is picking up the cost of this, but I cannot imagine that any taxpayer would ever have a problem with doing that in this case. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), who talked about employers. The Bill is a signal to employers about the minimum that they should offer. They should really offer more time off, at full pay, and they should carry the cost of that because of the good will that it will generate and the sensitivity required in such situations. It is absolutely key for any employer to offer such support.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) spoke of the difference we hope to make when we come into this Chamber. I was struck by the fact that parents in my constituency who have suffered such tragedies have gone out to make a difference. I have mentioned Annika and James Dowson, who raised money for a bereavement suite at Scarborough hospital. Luke and Ruthie Heron suffered a loss at the crucial stage when a miscarriage becomes a stillbirth, and they want that to be changed to ensure that a child is formally recognised as such. Making a difference after a loss—directing their energies into something more positive—is a tremendous thing for people to do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) mentioned that I was able to take forward Claudia's law when we debated the previous Bill on this subject. Perhaps we should call this "Will's Bill"; I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time; to stand committed to a Public Bill Committee (Standing Order No. 63).

Health and Social Care (National Data Guardian) Bill

Second Reading

2.25 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Before going into the detail of the Bill, I should like to say that I very much appreciate the cross-party support that exists for the principle behind it. In fact, I have Conservative, Labour, Scottish National party and Democratic Unionist party support. Geographically, I have sponsors from all the nations of our United Kingdom, so there are MPs in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland who support the Bill. I am particularly grateful to the Minister of State for Health for coming to listen to the debate, and I appreciate the Department's help with the progress that we have made so far.

The Bill is designed to improve the handling of health and social care data. My sponsors are my hon. Friends the Members for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse), for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) for Colchester (Will Quince) and for Shipley (Philip Davies), and the hon. Members for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon). My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) would have been a sponsor, if numbers had permitted.

It would be wrong of me to move on without thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds, who is determined that the health and social care national data guardian should be put on a statutory footing and who has ensured that the Bill has reached this stage. I thank her for her advice, encouragement and knowledge in helping to prepare the Bill. I also want to thank her for, on occasion, nagging me to get on with the administrative detail that lies behind every private Member's Bill. Let me warn anyone who thinks of opposing this Bill that my hon. Friend is formidable and will not hesitate to take them to task.

I thank Nicola Perrin, head of understanding patient data at the Wellcome Trust. Her detailed advice and extensive knowledge have been a great help in preparation for today. I thank parliamentary counsel for drafting the Bill and for being very patient with me with the revision of one clause in particular.

In all fairness, we have looked at even the tiniest of concerns regarding this Bill, and I think we have satisfied everyone who has expressed an opinion. This is a Second Reading debate about the principle of having a national data guardian for health and social care. I do not claim that the Bill is perfect—it could perhaps be improved—so I urge any right hon. and hon. Members who want to improve it or have concerns about it to join me in Committee, if the Bill makes progress, so that it can be amended and improved.

Let me, Madam Deputy Speaker, give you a very brief outline of the Bill.

2.30 pm

The Deputy Speaker interrupted the business (Standing Order No. 11(2)).

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 1 December.

First World War Servicemen: Memorial Plaques

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Chris Heaton-Harris.)

2.30 pm

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): A number of years ago, before I was a Member of Parliament, I went to a local car boot sale and looking through all the bric-a-brac and things from days gone by, I came across a bronze plaque. It looked for all the world like a huge old Victorian penny. It had Britannia on the front, being shadowed by a lion, there were two dolphins and, at the bottom, a smaller lion was ripping apart an eagle. The lion with Britannia was the lion of courage, and the other lion was ripping apart the German eagle, while the dolphins signified the dominance of the seas enjoyed by the UK at the time. There was writing around the edge because the plaque was intended to commemorate the life of a fallen soldier. Such a plaque was known—rather crudely, given that it was to commemorate the life of one of our fallen soldiers—as a dead man's penny. The service people were from the fledgling Air Force of the time, from the Navy or those who had fallen on the battlefields.

I remember looking at the plaque—I did not know what it was; I researched it later—and wondering what had happened to the family of the fallen soldier, why the plaque had ended up there, what was the story behind the plaque and what was the story of the soldier's life and the family he left behind. It struck me that, more often than not, such plaques reach the market—militaria shops, auction sites—because the family have died. I emphasise strongly from the outset that militaria shops do us a great service by helping to keep alive the spirit of historical campaigns and conflicts that we only read about in the history books.

I found out later that 1,355,000 of these plaques were given out. They were struck from 450 tons of bronze. They arrived in a box, sometimes with the medals of the soldier, airman or seaman, and every one of them had a certificate signed by King George V. They were given predominantly after the war, although some were given before its end, to the families of the fallen.

What does this mean in our day and age, 100 years on? We have had other wars, but world war one was the only occasion on which these plaques were struck in honour of the fallen. Each plaque was individually struck, not engraved, with the name of a serviceman, but no mention of their rank. It was struck simply to commemorate the serviceman or woman who gave their life doing their duty in the service of their country. In fact, 1,500 were given to women service personnel. They were given out all across the Commonwealth, to everybody engaged in the conflict. In the great war, we lost 22 Members of Parliament, 20 Lords and in the region of 98 sons of people who worked here or who were Members. This particular debate therefore has meaning not just for the rest of the country, but for Parliament itself.

Members have probably seen me walking around the Chamber today. I know it is not customary to display a dead man's penny, but I have one with me. It says on the outside of the plaque, "He died for freedom and honour". Some plaques say, "She died", depending on the sex of the service person. As Members can see, the plaque is

quite large and weighty. The gentleman named on it is Charles Edward Woodward. The hole in the plaque makes me a little emotional, because it means that it would have been hung on the wall, over the mantelpiece in his parent's home. It is all they had left of him.

I bought this plaque from a militaria shop not far from here, and the staff were very helpful and honourable in the exchange. With it came this man's history. It says that it is a great war memorial plaque issued in memory of Charles Edward Woodward, who served as Private No. 1,200 of the 1/5th Battalion the Lincolnshire Regiment, Territorial Force, and was killed in action at Ypres on 30 September 1915. Having no known grave, he is commemorated by name on the Ypres Menin Gate memorial. He was aged only 20. He was younger than my son.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): My hon. Friend has mentioned the Lincolnshire Regiment and I suspect that he is about to explain the special part that this brave young man from my constituency played.

David Morris: I thank my hon. Friend for that timely intervention, because I was welling up. He was 20 at the time of his death and was the son of Parker and Mary Jane Woodward of Rose Cottage, Halton Fenside, Spilsby, Lincolnshire. This plaque is all that is left of him—he was a person.

I want to raise awareness. One day I hope that we will be able to follow Lord Ashcroft's commendable example by collecting the plaques for these fallen people and displaying them in a room—although it will be difficult to find one big enough to house more than 1.3 million of them—in order to commemorate those who died preserving the integrity of democracy and the freedom of our country.

Sadly, over the years, some of these plaques have been scrapped, because nobody knows what they are, although I do not think that many of them are finding their way to scrapyards. The previous Member for Croydon South promoted a private Member's Bill that resulted in legislation preventing war memorials from being attacked and melted down, and I would like these plaques to be covered by its provisions, because they mean something.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a very moving and passionate speech. He speaks of the Members we lost in this place in the great war. We see their shields in the Chamber every day. I would like to share a very positive initiative in one of the villages in my constituency, Crawley Down. A group of volunteers, led by Roger Webb and Philip Coote, is putting up memorial plaques on each of the homes of the servicemen who died in that awful conflict 100 years ago. It is wonderful to see that happening and I am hugely honoured to have been present when students from Crawley Down School have unveiled those memorials, keeping alive the memory of that generation of which my hon. Friend is speaking so eloquently.

David Morris: I thank my hon. Friend for that nice story. It is right that we should commemorate. This is only part of the story, but it is fitting for those homes to bear those plaques.

What is the Government's role? The Government would like to do everything they possibly can, but it is really up to the community to recognise that the plaques

mean something. I would love to see a national memorial to the fallen, or for the plaques to go to local regiments, local museums or even the Military Heritage Society. Personally, I would like for Charles Edward Woodward's plaque to be displayed here in the House of Commons. I understand, however, that because he does not have any ties with the Commons, that cannot be the case—maybe it could be displayed in the green case downstairs for a short time. I would therefore like to round off this emotive speech by letting him go home and handing the plaque to my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins).

2.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (John Glen): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) for securing this debate, and I commend him for his eloquence, emotion and seriousness of purpose.

It is interesting to hear of the number of memorial plaques and scrolls that were issued to the families of the fallen, reminding us of the huge losses suffered by Britain and the then empire. As we have heard, the plaques were issued by the Government to the next of kin of those who died serving with the British and empire forces in the first world war, along with a commemorative scroll and a message from the king. While most were issued in the years immediately after the war, the fact that they were issued until the 1930s reminds us that the loss of life from the first world war continued after the guns fell silent on 11 November 1918. The fact that over 600 were issued to the families of women is a stark reminder of the important role that women played during the war. Once issued, the awards became the property of the families to do with as they saw, and see, most fitting. Many are still treasured by descendants, but, as my hon. Friend points out, in some cases they were donated or used in local memorials, and many local museums have them in their collections.

As I am sure my hon. Friend will understand, it is not practical or possible for our national museums to accept every item offered to them. This is especially apparent, given the tragically large scale of distribution of the plaques. When I visit museums, which I have done numerous times in my first four months as a Minister, it is amazing to see the number of items kept in storage. As with all museums, the Imperial War Museum has strict criteria for accepting items. These are determined by its acquisitions and disposal policy, which is available on the Imperial War Museum website. Decisions have to be made on what is of most value in the context of its collections, and in telling the stories of the causes, course and consequences of the first world war. I am sure the hon. Members will agree that it is not for Government to decide what should be done with items that are in the private ownership of families or collections.

Victoria Atkins: Will you allow me a moment, Madam Deputy Speaker, to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale for making such a moving speech, and also for presenting me with a valuable and special token of the, sadly, very short life of someone who would have lived in Spilsby, in my constituency?

The Minister is talking about museums. We have a wonderful museum in Alford, just a few miles down the road from Spilsby, where that young man came from.

[Victoria Atkins]

It is run by volunteers, and currently has an exhibition commemorating the centenary of the first world war. The collection has been gathered from local people who have lent objects that have been found in their attics, or in their grandparents' homes, to the museum at Alford Manor House. It will be my very great honour to lend this plaque to the museum until next year—with, obviously, the consent of my hon. Friend.

David Morris *indicated assent.*

John Glen: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention. She has made the case for the importance of local museums all over the country, and the enormous impact that they can have as communities seek to do the right thing by those who came before them and remember appropriately the sacrifices that were made.

It is very difficult to categorise the appeal of the plaques to their owners 100 years on from the war. Indeed, the Passchendaele centenary has shown us how varied are the connections that people feel to the fallen of the first world war, not only through direct family relationships but through associations based in their local communities, or connections through a school, regimental club or society. While it is not appropriate for the Government to consider collecting plaques that are no longer in the hands of the families of those who lost their lives during the war, a number of other options are open to those who possess a plaque or wish to find out more about how to commemorate an individual.

As my hon. Friends mentioned, local, regimental or corps museums associated with the place where the person commemorated lived, or was born, may have an interest in the plaques, or, indeed, in any other items relating to the first world war and its aftermath. They may also have further information about that person and his or her experience of the war. Local museums may be seen to have a stronger claim to the acquisition of such items, and are often well placed to exhibit them in their local context. That, I think, brings more meaning to the community that the individual came from.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Families now remember their fallen by dedicating a corner of their living room to the young man, or young woman, who is lost. They have the helmet, the hat, the belt and the medal. The medal usually has the young person's name on it, written around the ring. The families generally have the letter of condolence as well. Families whom I have visited, because the people whom they have lost were under my command when they were killed, have had one of these pennies in the room. That brings family history to life, because, from the first world war to the present, it shows the family connection. It is wonderful to see that.

John Glen: I thank my hon. and gallant Friend for what he has said. Whenever I think of him, I think of his service and the sacrifices made by him and by those alongside him. Once again, he has made a very important point.

There are also two invaluable online resources that help to commemorate those who fell. They provide more information about the person commemorated, and give those in possession of a plaque the option to make their information publicly available. The Imperial

War Museum's Lives of the First World War project is a permanent digital memorial which records the stories of individuals from across Britain and the Commonwealth who served in uniform and worked on the home front. The website currently has more than 7.5 million individual life stories and more than 120,000 registered members. The site offers the opportunity to add details of medals and service to an individual's record, as well as photographs of items, thereby creating a permanent digital memorial of their first world war story.

A notable example is Isaac Rosenberg, the artist and poet. His online life story on the site includes pictures of Isaac and his gravestone, as well as an image of the next-of-kin memorial plaque received by his family. He served as a private in the 1st Battalion, King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment, where his experiences inspired some of his finest work. He was killed during the German spring offensive near Arras on 1 April 1918, but is remembered to this day.

The Royal British Legion also has its Every One Remembered database, which aims to ensure that by next year every man and woman from across the Commonwealth who fell during the first world war is remembered individually by those living today. This shows us that, while the way that people commemorate may have changed thanks to technology, the desire to remember the fallen is undiminished.

In the aftermath of the war, in addition to the memorial plaques, the fallen were recorded on many memorials up and down the country, and indeed across the world. As part of the Government's centenary programme, there are many ways that communities can find out more about these memorials. I invite all hon. Members to encourage their constituents to explore the funding and training available and to get involved in recording and preserving them.

The war memorial portal project has seen the Imperial War Museum, Heritage England and other partners develop a new portal called ukwarmemorials.org, which hosts information on all UK war memorials and signposts routes for advice and funding. The portal has the most up-to-date advice on conserving and repairing memorials, and will continue to grow over the coming year. The site also contains information about other work that Historic England, the Imperial War Museum, the War Memorials Trust and Civic Voice are undertaking as part of the centenary programme to record and conserve memorials. To date, Historic England has added 1,860 memorials to the heritage list for England and expects to have listed 2,500 by the end of the centenary. Supporting this, Civic Voice has run over 180 workshops to train communities to survey and record the status of local memorials. I suggest that hon. Members recommend the site to any constituents with an interest in local memorials.

The War Memorials Trust, which provides a programme of grants to help to repair and conserve memorials, has to date made over 360 repair grants across the country, totalling some £1.4 million. It is also worth recognising the work of the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Victoria Cross commemorative paving stones project, which my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale alluded to. This project aims to commemorate each of the 627 men who won the Victoria Cross during the first world war by placing a commemorative stone in the town or village of their

birth or, in the case of those born overseas, at the National Memorial Arboretum. The stones will be a visible reminder of the heroic contribution made by local people, as my hon. Friend referred to so eloquently.

In a debate on memorials to the fallen of the first world war, it is also appropriate to commend the work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Its Menin Gate memorial and Tyne Cot cemetery recently hosted some of the Government-led events to commemorate the centenary of Passchendaele, the third battle of Ypres. However, it should be remembered that there are nearly 300,000 war graves in the UK from the first world war and other conflicts at 13,000 locations—details of local sites can be found on the CWGC website.

As we look ahead to the significant centenaries of 2018, the Government will of course be doing all we can to draw attention to different aspects of commemoration, and to the ways in which we remember our war dead.

As part of that, we will of course do our utmost to ensure that the public are informed of the options open to them if they are in possession of memorial plaques, or indeed of any other personal items, and of how they can use them and resources such as Lives of the First World War to explore their own family and local history.

The memorial plaques and the many other memorials to the fallen of the first world war are a constant reminder of the huge sacrifice made by a whole generation 100 years ago, and I hope that through our commemoration programme, and by working with our partners on innovative ways of commemoration, we can ensure that future generations never forget those who fell.

Question put and agreed to.

2.55 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Friday 20 October 2017

HOME DEPARTMENT

IOPC: Appointment of Director General

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): I am today announcing the Crown appointment of Michael Lockwood as the first Director General of the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC), part of the package of measures which will create a stronger, clearer governance framework for the police complaints and discipline systems.

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 provides for the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), to be reformed and renamed as the IOPC. The existing Commission will be replaced by a single executive head of the organisation, the Director General, with corporate governance provided by a unitary board comprising a majority of non-executive members. The reforms are planned to come into effect in January 2018.

[HCWS187]

JUSTICE

Justice and Home Affairs Post-Council Statement

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Lidington): The Justice and Home Affairs Council took place on 12 and 13 October in Luxembourg. I represented the UK for justice day, along with the Minister for Immigration, my right hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis). My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department represented the UK for interior day.

Justice day (12 October) began with the adoption by 20 member states of the regulation establishing the European public prosecutor's office (EPPO). We have always been clear that the UK will never participate in an EPPO.

This was followed by a policy debate on the proposed regulation on mutual recognition of freezing and confiscation orders, which the UK has opted into. Discussion focused on extending the scope of the draft regulation to include systems of preventive confiscation, on condition of a clear link to criminal activities, and the application of procedural safeguards. The Minister for Immigration intervened to support this extension, which was agreed by Ministers.

Ministers proceeded to discuss the European criminal records information system (ECRIS) and the proposed extension on the exchange of information to third-country nationals. Debate covered questions on dual nationals and the threshold for the obligation to take fingerprints. The Minister for Immigration supported the extension, and urged for flexibility on the technical detail. There was

no clear majority on the specific questions and the presidency mandated further technical work on these issues.

Following this, the director of the Fundamental Rights Agency, Michael O'Flaherty, introduced its annual report on the application of the charter of fundamental rights. The discussion focused on rights protections in the EU. EU Ministers then adopted the Council conclusions on the application of the charter of fundamental rights.

Over lunch, domestic implementation of the EU general data protection regulation which will apply from 25 May 2018 was discussed. I used this opportunity to highlight the UK's ongoing commitment to strong data protection standards, and that the UK was readying itself for application of the GDPR in a number of ways, including through the Data Protection Bill currently in Parliament.

The afternoon comprised a joint session of Justice and Interior Ministers. The Commission updated Ministers on their cyber-security strategy, e-evidence, and encryption. The Minister for Immigration intervened to support strong encryption and effective law enforcement access to electronic evidence, offering to share the UK's expertise on working with service providers. The Commission noted that a new strategic framework for EU cyber-security will be adopted at the General Affairs Council in November, and they will shortly issue a communication on tackling illegal content online.

The final item on justice day provided Ministers with an opportunity to comment on the presidency's mid-term review of the JHA strategic guidelines. Ministers and the Commission were positive about the EU's progress against existing guidelines, but noted the change of priorities in light of evolving threats. Ministers' priorities included migration, data sharing and improved links between internal and external security policy. New guidelines will be proposed to the December European Council.

Interior day (13 October) began with a discussion on the Commission's proposal to amend the Schengen border code to allow internal borders to be raised in exceptional circumstances. As the UK is not part of the Schengen internal border-free zone, the Home Secretary did not intervene. The proposal will now be discussed at a technical level.

This was followed by a presentation from the non-EU counter-terrorism group (CTG). The CTG reported on the development of improved co-operation with Europol. Interventions from Europol, the Commission and the EU counter-terrorism co-ordinator focused on the continuing need for greater co-operation.

Finally, the presidency presented its progress report on the common European asylum system. There was no discussion.

Council concluded with a working lunch focused on resettlement. The UK, along with other member states, supported resettlement. The Home Secretary highlighted the UK's strong track record of resettlement, including our offer of 5,000 places so far in response to the Commission's latest call. This is part of our wider commitment to resettle 23,000 refugees from the region by 2020. The Home Secretary also stressed that resettlement should be from the refugee's home region to ensure that we do not inadvertently incentivise illegal migration.

[HCWS188]

Justice Update

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Dominic Raab): When the Supreme Court handed down judgment in the case of *R (Unison) v. Lord Chancellor* on 26 July, the Government took immediate steps to stop charging fees in the employment tribunals. We also said that we would bring forward detailed arrangements to refund people who had paid fees. We will today be launching the first phase of the refund scheme.

We will use this first phase, which will last up to four weeks, to ensure that the refund process works efficiently and effectively. From today, officials in the Ministry of Justice will be writing to an initial group of up to 1,000 people who paid fees for proceedings in the employment tribunals, inviting them to take part. This group will consist of people who have contacted us since the Supreme Court judgment inquiring about a refund. Those who receive a refund will also be paid interest from the date their payment was received.

We recognise that during the initial phase of the refund scheme, there is likely to be considerable interest in the details of the scheme. For those who have paid employment tribunals fees, but have not been invited to take part in the initial stage, we are setting up a pre-registration scheme so that they can register an interest in applying when the full scheme is rolled out. Those who wish to do so can register either by email at: ethelpwithfees@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk; or alternatively by post to the following addresses:

For proceedings in England and Wales

Employment Tribunals Central Office (England and Wales)/
Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) Fees
PO Box 10218
Leicester LE1 8EG

For proceedings in Scotland

Employment Tribunals Central Office Scotland/Employment Appeal
Tribunal (EAT) Fees
PO Box 27105
Glasgow G2 9JRX

This phase is primarily aimed at people making applications for refunds in single claims. During this

period, we will also be working with the trade unions on how this process should be best applied to applications for refunds in larger multiple claims.

We plan to roll out the full refund scheme early in November. At that point, anyone who has paid a fee in the employment tribunals, whether in a single or multiple claim, will be able to claim a refund.

Those who will be eligible to apply for a refund under the scheme are:

People who paid a fee directly to the Employment Tribunal or Employment Appeal Tribunal, and have not been reimbursed by their opponent pursuant to an order of the tribunal.

People who were ordered by the tribunal to reimburse their opponent their fee and who can show that they have paid it.

Representatives (such as a trade union) who paid a fee on behalf of another person and have not been reimbursed by that person.

The lead claimant (or representative) in a multiple claim who paid a fee on behalf of the other claimants.

Further guidance will be available when the scheme is rolled out.

To receive a refund, applicants will be invited to complete an application form with their details, details of their employment tribunal claim and the fees that they paid. These details will be verified against HMCTS's records. Where people are unable to provide full details of the fees they paid, or the details they provide do not accord with the details we hold, their application will not be refused automatically, but it may take longer to process.

Where a person is claiming for fees that they reimbursed to their opponent pursuant to a tribunal order, they will be asked to provide a copy of the tribunal order, and proof of payment. In cases where a person reimbursed their opponent under a private settlement, they will not be eligible for a refund; in such cases, the person who paid the fee to the tribunal will be eligible for a refund.

All applicants will also be asked to sign a declaration of truth about the details they provide. Refunds will be made to the applicant's bank account; if an individual does not have a bank account, they can contact HMCTS for alternative methods of payment.

[HCWS186]

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Friday 20 October 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
HOME DEPARTMENT	51WS	JUSTICE—continued	
IOPC: Appointment of Director General	51WS	Justice Update.....	53WS
JUSTICE	51WS		
Justice and Home Affairs Post-Council Statement.	51WS		

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Friday 27 October 2017**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Friday 20 October 2017

Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Bill [Col. 1103]

Motion for Second Reading—(Chris Bryant)—agreed to

Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Bill [Col. 1158]

Motion for Second Reading—(Kevin Hollinrake)—agreed to

Health and Social Care (National Data Guardian) Bill [Col. 1181]

Motion for Second Reading—(Mr Bone)

First World War Servicemen: Memorial Plaques [Col. 1182]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Written Statements [Col. 51WS]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
