**Protect Retail Workers from Abuse, Threats and Violence.**

Enact legislation to protect retail workers. This legislation must create a specific offence of abusing, threatening or assaulting a retail worker. The offence must carry a penalty that acts as a deterrent and makes clear that abuse of retail workers is unacceptable.

**62,317 signatures**

[Show on a map](https://petitionmap.unboxedconsulting.com/?petition=328621)

100,000

**Government responded**

This response was given on 15 September 2020

The Government is not persuaded that a specific offence is needed as a wide range of offences already exist which cover assaults against any worker, including shop workers.

Everyone should feel safe at work which is why assaults on shop workers, doing vital work for the country and the economy are simply unacceptable. The Government pays tribute to all shop workers who have worked tirelessly during the pandemic to keep shops stocked with essential items.

Although the Government is sympathetic to the motivations behind the petition, it remains unpersuaded of the need for a specific offence as there are already a wide range of offences which exist and which cover assaults against any worker, including shop workers and those selling age restricted items. Relevant offences include common assault, actual bodily harm and grievous bodily harm, harassment and other public order offences which criminalise threatening or abusive behaviour intended to harass, alarm or distress a person. All these offences already apply to people whose work brings them into contact with members of the public.

In April last year, the Home Office published a call for evidence - `Violence and abuse towards shop staff’ - to further understand the issue of violence and abuse towards shop workers, the measures which may help prevent these crimes and the extent to which existing legislation is being used to tackle them. The consultation concluded on 28 June 2019.

An overview of the responses to that call for evidence, showed there to be a general lack of faith in the way in which these crimes are dealt with either by the police, the shop worker’s employer or in response to shop workers themselves. This seemed to contribute to the view that the response to such crimes was often inadequate and was also a factor that led individuals to decide not to report further incidents. The Government believes that it is this issue that requires more urgent action rather than a change in the law.

The Government’s response to that call for evidence was published on 7 July 2020 and sets out plans to crack down on abuse and violence against shop workers. The steps, which are detailed in the Home Office’s response to the call for evidence (see - <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/violence-and-abuse-toward-shop-staff-call-for-evidence>) are designed to improve support for victims and ensure perpetrators face justice. They include working with the National Retail Crime Steering Group (NRCSG) on a best practice guide to support staff in reporting these crimes, strengthening and making full use of existing laws, and improving data sharing between businesses and the police.  
  
The courts also have a statutory duty to follow sentencing guidelines. The current guidelines for assault offences specify that it is an aggravating factor for an offence to be committed against a person who works in the public sector or who is providing a service to the public, such as a shop worker. In 2019, the independent Sentencing Council for England and Wales provided additional advice on this factor in order to make clear that it could apply to those working in the private as well as the public sector. In all cases, therefore, the fact that an offence has been committed against a person serving the public will be considered an aggravating factor when passing sentence. In addition, due to the outbreak of Covid-19, the Sentencing Council also published interim guidance in April that clarifies that, when sentencing assault offences relating to the transmission of Covid-19, the courts should treat this as meriting a more severe sentence.

Ministry of Justice