

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AA

4 February 2021

Dear Prime Minister

Violence and abuse against retail workers

We write as senior retail leaders to raise our concerns about the increasing problem of violence and abuse being experienced by hundreds of thousands of our colleagues. We ask you to treat this issue with the seriousness it deserves and improve protection for our employees **by creating a new statutory offence of assaulting, threatening, or abusing a retail worker.**

This has been a growing trend for some time. In March last year, the annual [BRC Crime Survey](#) reported that over 400 incidents of violence or abuse were occurring daily. Major triggers for these incidents included challenging customers for ID when purchasing age restricted items or encountering shoplifters. Nearly a year on, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation and caused a dramatic spike in incidents and we now need action from the Government. We have already seen the Scottish Parliament enact similar legislation through Daniel Johnson MSP's Protection of Workers Bill. We hope you will do the same so that our colleagues in Carlisle have the same protections as those in Dumfries.

Retail businesses have played a full role in the public health response to the Covid-19 pandemic, implementing all regulations, ensuring safety guidance is followed and investing millions in measures to keep customers and colleagues safe from the virus. Many of our colleagues remain on the front line and while they are acting to keep the public safe, their personal safety is threatened as a result. The data is shocking: one business reports seeing more than 4,500 violent incidents involving a weapon during 2020; another has indicated a 600% increase in violent incidents against their employees because of implementing Covid restrictions, including enforcing the wearing of face coverings; another recorded 990 incidents of violence or abuse in the first week after face coverings became compulsory in shops; and many of our members report that their staff have been coughed at or spat on. It is particularly poignant that many people are coming to accept this as just a part of their job.

These are not business crimes, and certainly not victimless crimes. They have a serious impact on people, who have been injured or experienced psychological trauma, their families, and the communities they serve.

The industry is doing all it can to tackle this growing problem and has invested £1.2 billion in crime prevention measures in the last year. This includes supplying body-worn cameras and employing more security guards.

Of course, the majority of customers treat our employees with the kindness and respect they deserve; however, action needs to be taken to deter those who think it is acceptable to be abusive or violent towards them. That is why we are seeking help from the Government and asking you to create a new statutory offence of assaulting, threatening, or abusing a retail worker, allowing for the aggravation of that offence where the retail worker is seeking to enforce a statutory age restriction. This could easily be included in the upcoming Sentencing Bill, either during its introduction, or through an amendment.

We hope you will do everything you can to keep our retail colleagues safe from harm.

Yours sincerely

Helen Dickinson OBE, Chief Executive, British Retail Consortium

Giles Hurley, Chief Executive Officer - UK and IRE, ALDI

Jacqueline Gold CBE, CEO, Ann Summers

Roger Burnley, President & CEO, ASDA Stores

James Lowman, Chief Executive, Association of Convenience Stores

Graham Bell, CEO, B&Q

Mark Jackson, CEO, Bensons for Beds

Andrew Goodacre, Chief Executive, BIRA

Alasdair Murdoch, Group CEO, BKUK

Meryl Halls, Managing Director, Booksellers Association

Sebastian James, Senior Vice President and Managing Director, Boots UK

Leanne Cahill, Managing Director, Bravissimo

Paul Moody, Executive Chairman (Interim), Card Factory

Wilf Walsh, CEO, Carpetright

Melinda Paraie, CEO, Cath Kidston

Debbie Robinson, Chief Executive, Central England Co-operative

Neil Lake, Managing Director, Costa Coffee UK&I

Darcy Willson-Rymer, Chief Executive, Costcutter Supermarkets

Mike Hazell, CEO, Debenhams

Alexander Baldock, Group Chief Executive, Dixons Carphone Group

Daniel Rubin, Chairman & Chief Executive Officer, Dune Group

Roger Whiteside, Chief Executive Officer, Greggs

Manju Malhotra, Chief Executive Officer, Harvey Nichols

Doug Putnam, Owner, hmv

Damian McGloughlin, CEO, Homebase

Tarsem Dhaliwal, Group CEO, Iceland Foods

Peter Jelkeby, Country Retail Manager and Chief Sustainability Officer, IKEA UK

Peter Cowgill, Executive Chairman, JD Sports

Pippa Wicks, Executive Director, John Lewis

Paula MacKenzie, Managing Director UK&I, KFC

Christian Härtnagel, CEO, Lidl GB

Alia Hawa, Managing Director - UK & Ireland, L'Occitane

Steve Rowe, Chief Executive, Marks & Spencer

Paul Pomroy, CEO, McDonald's Restaurants

Toby Anderson, CEO, McKesson UK

Mark Neale, CEO, Mountain Warehouse

Anthony Short, Executive Director, Music Industries Association

Stuart Reddish, National President, NFRN

Peter Pritchard, CEO, Pets at Home

Nick Read, CEO, Post Office

Barry Williams, Managing Director, Poundland

Paul Marchant, CEO, Primark

Christos Angelides, Chief Executive Officer, Reiss

Julie Abraham, CEO, Richer Sounds

Simon Roberts, Chief Executive Officer, Sainsbury's

Doug Winchester, Managing Director, Savers Health and Beauty

Colin Temple, Managing Director, Schuh

Dr Pete Cheema OBE, CEO, Scottish Grocers' Federation

John Brodie, Chief Executive, Scottish Midland Co-operative Society

John Mewett, CEO, Screwfix Direct

Paul Hayes, CEO, Seasalt

Louise Hoste, Managing Director, Spar UK

Alex Rayner, VP & General Manager, Starbucks UK

Paul Kendrick, Managing Director (CEO Designate), Studio Retail

Peter Macnab, CEO, Superdrug Stores

David Boynton, CEO and Chairman/ Linda Campbell, UK Managing Director, The Body Shop

Jo Whitfield, Chief Executive, Food, The Co-operative Group

Sanjay Vadera, CEO, The Fragrance Shop

Gill Smith, Managing Director, The Perfume Shop

James Timpson, CEO, Timpson

Paddy Lillis, General Secretary, USDAW

Onur Koksal, CEO, Vision Express

James Bailey, Executive Director, Waitrose

Carl Cowling, Group Chief Executive, WHSmith

David Wood, CEO, Wickes Building Supplies

David Potts, Chief Executive, WM Morrison

CC: The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP, Secretary of State for the Home Department
The Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC MP, Secretary of State for Justice
The Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng MP, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Kit Malthouse MP, Minister of State for Crime and Policing
Paul Scully MP, Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Labour Markets