



(Sent Electronically)

28th April 2023

Dear Alex Chalk KC MP,

The UK Anti-SLAPP Coalition¹ would like to congratulate you on your recent appointment as Secretary of State for Justice. While we appreciate the numerous priorities and pressures that face your department, we believe it is vital that the British justice system is protected against abuse from those seeking to stifle free speech. As a result, we urge you to bring forward legislative measures to address SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) without delay.

We welcomed the UK Government's commitment to introduce primary and secondary legislation to address SLAPPs in July 2022. Based on the framework proposed by the Ministry of Justice, the UK Anti-SLAPP Coalition, working with leading lawyers and industry experts, has drafted the [UK Model Anti-SLAPP Law](#) to demonstrate how SLAPPs can effectively be addressed in legislation. This model law was supported by the editors of every leading newspaper, as well as eminent journalists, lawyers, whistleblowers, academics and experts in a [letter sent to your predecessor, Rt. Hon. Dominic Raab MP](#) in November 2022.

However, we have been disappointed by the lack of urgency to build on this support to bring forward a bill. At the recent US Summit for Democracy, the [UK pledged](#) to introduce an early dismissal mechanism by March 2025, but beyond that there has been no timeline or approach outlined by the UK Government. Addressing SLAPPs in the UK is long overdue and while regulators, such as the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) have moved to action including publishing a warning notice and conducting a thematic review, to date, the UK Government has not kept pace.

As someone who has spent his career working to strengthen the British legal system as a barrister, Solicitor General, and now Justice Secretary, we trust that you recognise the urgent need to ensure the legal system is protected against abuse and retains public confidence. There is cross-party support to address this issue, as well as a unique

¹ The UK Anti-SLAPP Coalition is an informal working group established in January 2021, co-chaired by the Foreign Policy Centre, Index on Censorship and English PEN. It comprises a number of freedom of expression, whistleblowing, anti-corruption and transparency organisations, as well as media lawyers, researchers and academics who are researching, monitoring and highlighting cases of legal intimidation and SLAPPs, as well as seeking to develop remedies for mitigation and redress.

opportunity for the UK Government to display international leadership on an issue that is currently animating governments across Europe.

We call on you to address this issue with the urgency it requires and we would be happy to meet with you at your convenience to discuss this matter further.

Yours,

UK Anti-SLAPP Coalition co-chairs on behalf of the coalition

Susan Coughtrie, Director, Foreign Policy Centre

Jessica Ní Mhainín, Policy and Campaigns Manager, Index on Censorship

Dalia Nasreddin, UK Campaigns Manager, English PEN

Charlie Holt, European Lead, CliDef