

PRISONERS' ADVICE SERVICE

THE INDEPENDENT LEGAL CHARITY PROVIDING INFORMATION AND
REPRESENTATION TO PRISONERS

JUSTICE BEHIND BARS

Dear Friend

The three months since lockdown began have been difficult for everyone, but particularly for prisoners and their families who are living through a double lockdown. With all visits cancelled and alarming news coming out of prisons, their anxiety has been increased by the lack of clear guidance and information from government on changes to the regime and entitlements. PAS staff are working remotely during the crisis and focusing all our resources on advising and supporting prisoners through the Advice Line. We have also taken action where possible to pressurise the Ministry of Justice to make public its guidance on Covid-19 regimes and release programmes.

This update has been put together by PAS volunteer, Lindsay Swan, to whom we are most grateful.

News: PAS Secures Prisoner End of Custody Temporary Release

A low risk, Category D (minimal security) adult male prisoner, serving four and a half years, made contact with PAS about the government guidance on End of Custody Temporary Release (ECTR).

Prior to the Covid-19 restrictions, he had been working in the community on five daily ROTLs (release on temporary licence), visiting his partner and helping to care for their disabled child. After lockdown he was unable to provide this assistance and his partner was left to cope on her own.

Although he was within the last two months of his sentence, he contacted PAS after the prison informed him that he was ineligible for ECTR. We advised him that he was eligible for consideration under ECTR guidance, and he was identified as such by the ECTR team.

The prisoner signed the application paperwork for ECTR on 16th April 2020.

PAS corresponded regularly with the prison and the ECTR team, pressing for the prisoner's application to be considered urgently, and for information regarding the application's progress to be relayed to the prisoner and his partner. The prisoner's ECTR was finally

granted on 28th May.

This case highlights the distress caused to prisoners and their relatives by the lack of transparency surrounding ECTR applications. PAS has subsequently communicated to the head of the ECTR team the importance of keeping prisoner's informed at this distressing time.

Despite Lockdown, PAS Responds to Record Call Numbers

With the suspension of Outreach Clinics due to lockdown, and additional Caseworkers currently focussed on the Advice Line, it has never been busier. From 12 March (when PAS closed its office) to 12 June, we received 15,156 calls from prisoners and families faced with news of increasing numbers of cases of Covid-19 across the prison estate.

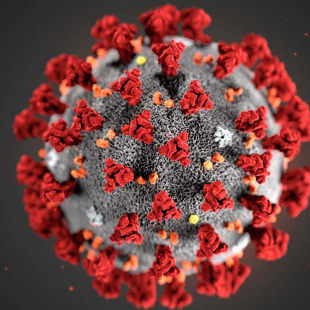
This is double the number that we received in the three months between 12 December and 12 March, when 7,588 calls were received on the Advice Line.

Between March and June 2020, we successfully responded to a massive 10,728 calls, again double the number in the previous three months, when we were successful in responding to 5,906 callers.

With little or only vague information available to them during the pandemic, prisoners and their families have been understandably scared and PAS has been working hard to assuage the fears of all those who call.

Website and Social Media

Over the past three months PAS has



Online Resources

To cope with demand, PAS has published a number of tools to help prisoners understand their legal and human rights during lockdown. A [letter on our website](#), which provides a template for anyone to use and amend if they believe that a prisoner should be released early on compassionate grounds, has been viewed and downloaded 2,876 times. The template was only made available on 30 March.

Having received access to guidance and policy documents, which should have been available to the public but were not, these are now published on our website [here](#). They cover a range of matters, from cohorting prisoners and the management of symptomatic and shielded prisoners, to prisoner regimes during the pandemic. Of note is: the maintenance of the entitlement to 30 minutes in the open air daily; that all prisoners, regardless of IEP status should be provided with a TV; the

seen a significant increase in website traffic as well as social media activity. Between 1st April and 17th June, there were 17,750 views of the PAS website, with 6,203 unique visitors.

PAS' Twitter following continues to grow with an increase of 146 followers bringing our total to 2,459. Top tweets included those on the participation in the London Legal Walk (see below) and shared tweets on prisoner 23 hour solitary confinement and calls on the government to release vulnerable and at risk prisoners.

Facebook is also proving a successful way to share news. The most popular posts over lockdown have been the PAS letter to the Secretary of State concerning Early Release on Compassionate grounds (see above) and a video of PAS Caseworker Laura Orger on the BBC Victoria Derbyshire show, which you can view [here](#)..

London Legal Walk Postponed to 5 October 2020

The annual London Legal Walk, organised by the London Legal Support Trust, which was due to take place on 8 June, is another casualty of coronavirus. The 10K for Justice Walk will now be on 5 October 2020, with a team from PAS staff and volunteers taking part.

However, five PAS supporters did mark the 8th June date by doing a virtual 10,000 Steps for Justice. They and others are looking forward to coming together with thousands of lawyers in solidarity and support for frontline free legal advice services at

provision for prison to prison transfer only available in exceptional circumstances such as compassionate family or specific legal circumstances.

Early on in lockdown PAS wrote to the Justice Secretary to press the government to grant early release to prisoners and amend current guidance on Early Release on Compassionate Grounds (ERCG) to permit the release of vulnerable and elderly prisoners at high risk of becoming seriously ill and dying of Covid-19. Although we received no response to this letter, we were however able to access and then publish a considerable amount of new information, both about the consideration of ERCG applications and about the new Restricted Temporary Release provisions, none of which had been previously published anywhere for affected people to access.

Our colleagues at Appeal have also created a set of tools and resources for those with clients or loved ones in custody. You can access these [here](#)..



For all the latest PAS news, don't forget to follow us on Twitter and

the main London Legal Walk on 5 Facebook!
October.

The London Legal Walk raises funds for charities that provide legal advice and representation, which is needed more than ever in these difficult times. If you would like to support PAS work, our fundraising page at [Virgin Money Giving](#) is always open for donations!



PAS' telephone Advice Line is run by caseworkers four days a week. Our telephone number is globally cleared within all prisons throughout England and Wales. **Please note: In order to assist a prisoner, we need to be contacted by them directly before we can discuss matters with family members.**

NUMBER: 020 7253 3323

OPENING TIMES

**Monday, Wednesday and Friday
10:00-12:30 and 14:00-16:30;
Tuesday Evening 16.30-19.00**

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