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Epsom & Ewell MP presses government on firearm licensing safeguards

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Epsom & Ewell's MP **Helen Maguire** led a Westminster Hall debate on 28 January calling for tighter safeguards in the firearms licensing system, with a particular focus on making *medical markers* on GP records mandatory for gun licence holders.

Opening the debate, Ms Maguire set out the case for reform by referencing a series of fatal incidents where legally held firearms were used, including cases with direct relevance to Epsom & Ewell. She told MPs that the issue was not about restricting lawful gun ownership, but about closing gaps in safeguarding where warning signs were missed.

"This is a missed opportunity to save lives," she said. "A missed opportunity to safeguard vulnerable adults with access to firearms and protect public safety."

Local tragedy cited in Parliament

In a powerful and emotional passage, Ms Maguire referred to the double murder and suicide connected to **Epsom College**, a case that attracted national attention in 2023. She told the House:

"Gemma and her daughter Letty Patterson, who lived in my constituency, were shot and killed by Gemma's husband almost three years ago, before he turned the gun on himself… If they had [been able to intervene], maybe Gemma would still be working at Epsom College and Letty might have celebrated her 10th birthday this year."

Ms Maguire argued that the perpetrator's use of online medical services meant that neither his GP nor the police were aware of changes in his mental health when his shotgun licence was renewed.

Case for mandatory medical markers

Medical markers are digital flags on GP systems indicating that a patient holds a firearm or shotgun licence. They are intended to prompt doctors to consider whether changes in a patient's mental or physical health should be shared with police firearms units.

Although such markers are now available, their use by GPs remains voluntary. Ms Maguire said that this undermined their effectiveness:

"There is currently no obligation on GPs to use this marker. Their use is left to best endeavours… This cannot be allowed to happen again."

She cited support for mandatory markers from a wide range of bodies, including the British Medical Association, the Royal College of GPs, shooting organisations and police representatives. Quoting survey evidence, she added that "87% of existing certificate holders believe GPs should inform the police if they become aware of a change of health which could impact a certificate holder's ability to safely own a gun."

Balancing safety and rural life

Anticipating concerns from rural MPs, Ms Maguire stressed that her proposals were not an attack on shooting sports or countryside livelihoods.

"Our country is home to proud rural communities and individuals who rely on gun ownership for their work," she said. "This debate is in no way about firearm ownership… Today's discussion is on how we can ensure medical professionals have the information required to best support the individuals they serve."

She pointed to other licensing regimes, such as driving licences, where medical fitness is routinely monitored in the public interest.

Government response

Responding for the government, the Minister acknowledged the tragedy at Epsom College and confirmed that thousands of digital medical markers are already being applied each year. However, he stopped short of committing to make them

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mandatory, arguing that existing data suggested most GPs were using the system appropriately.

Ms Maguire challenged that position directly in the debate, asking: “If we’re saying there’s no additional cost to it, then I’m struggling to understand why it’s difficult to change the position.”

In her closing remarks, she expressed disappointment at the government’s stance and warned against complacency: “I do not want to be here again talking about another incident. And I truly hope the Minister will go away and really consider this.”

The debate concluded with broad cross-party support for the principle of stronger safeguards, even as ministers resisted calls for immediate legislative change.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Helen Maguire MP speaking in the Westminster Hall debate. Parliament TV

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