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Surrey MP intervenes in local prison transgender issue

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The Member of Parliament for Reigate has called for biologically male inmates to be excluded from the women's estate at HMP Downview in Banstead. **Rebecca Paul MP** argued that the presence of male-born prisoners in a women's jail placed vulnerable female inmates at risk and reflected a wider policy approach that "put inclusion and ideology above safety and reality". She made the remarks during a House of Commons debate on 24 November concerning the management of transgender prisoners at HMP Downview.

The debate heard that transgender women are placed at Downview primarily for their own protection and are escorted by guards when mixing with the wider prison population. MPs were also told that, since 2019, there had been no recorded case of a trans inmate assaulting a biologically female prisoner. Evidence was cited that transgender women held in the men's estate themselves experience disproportionately high levels of sexual assault.

Mrs Paul said HMP Downview includes a dedicated E Wing "specifically for biological males who identify as women", used for transgender women who, with or without a Gender Recognition Certificate, cannot be safely housed elsewhere in the female estate. She stated that between five and seven such prisoners had been accommodated in E Wing over the past year. Citing Ministry of Justice data, she said: "In 2024, of the 245 transgender males in prison, 151 — or 62 per cent — were convicted of a sexual offence, far higher than the 17 per cent rate for the overall male prison population. A similar pattern can be seen in 2023."

She concluded that "the male transgender prison population poses a much higher risk to women and girls," and urged the Government to "take action and protect women at HMP Downview and across the female prison estate".

Responding for the Government, The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice **Alex Davies-Jones MP** acknowledged that transgender women had specific vulnerabilities, but said the allocation of prisoners required "thought and tact" to ensure fairness and safety. She emphasised that exemptions allowing transgender women into the general women's population are granted only when there is a compelling reason, such as acute self-harm or suicide risk, and only when there is high confidence that the prisoner poses a low risk to others. No such exemptions have been issued recently.

The Minister noted that more than 95 per cent of transgender women are held in men's prisons and that those placed in Downview are mostly housed on the stand-alone 16-bed E Wing unit, separated from biological women and situated within its own secure compound. The unit, introduced in 2019, was created because transgender women in men's prisons face disproportionate levels of bullying, harassment, self-harm and sexual assault.

She told MPs: "There have been zero assaults and zero sexual assaults committed by transgender women in the women's estate since 2019," adding that she hoped the figures demonstrated the Government's attempt to "strike a balance" in the placement of transgender prisoners.

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HMP Downview (image Google)