



Date: 14 February 2023

Ms Suella Braverman
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Email: privateoffice.external@homeoffice.gov.uk

Re: Violent assault on a Black teenage girl in Ashford on 6 February 2023

Dear Home Secretary,

The Racial Justice Advocacy Forum (RJAF) is a network of historical bodies which advocates racial justice on behalf of churches in Britain and Ireland. We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the incident of a mass assault on a Black teenage girl in Ashford on 6 February 2023.

The physical and emotional welfare of the student is of paramount concern. We understand that the teenager sustained injuries sufficient to require hospital treatment as a result of the attack. We are disturbed by the nature of this attack, and the ongoing sharing of video footage online and on social media, which we believe will cause significant emotional trauma to the victim. The RJAF would be grateful if you can confirm that professional support is being made available to the injured party and her family, and how this aligns with support offered to victims and families who have been impacted by similar attacks in the past.

Social media reports appear to indicate that this attack was racially motivated, that it involved students who attend the same secondary school as the assailed, and that some parents were seen to be actively encouraging the attack. We are given to understand that the incident took place in very close proximity to the school, at a time when the school would be expected to exercise a duty of care towards its pupils, yet intervention by school staff was both tardy and minimal. The RJAF is deeply troubled by these reports. We are concerned at the risk of tensions in the Ashford community being inflamed, and the possibility of reverberations in Black communities in the United Kingdom more widely. We would appreciate it if you could confirm whether racism is being investigated as a motive for this incident; whether the victim has been subjected to physical and or verbal racial abuse by other students prior to this event; and details of the response from both school and police to this incident, particularly if this is not the first instance of racist abuse experienced by the victim in the school.

Given the national importance and urgency of this matter, the RJAF would be grateful if you, or the Education Secretary, can share further information on the safeguarding practices that are in place to

protect Black and Brown students from the risk of racist abuse; the level of mandatory racial justice training with which school staff are required to engage; and the disciplinary procedures which are implemented where due process is not followed.

The RJAF is aware that there is a criminal investigation taking place due to the serious nature of the assault in Ashford. We await the outcomes of that investigation. At the same time, we believe this incident highlights the need for wider conversations regarding the issue of racism in our schools, and we are requesting a meeting with the Home Secretary to discuss these matters.

Yours sincerely,

Wale Hudson-Roberts

Revd Wale Hudson-Roberts
Co-chair - Racial Justice Advocacy Forum