



13 June 2019

Dear colleague,

DIVORCE, DISSOLUTION AND SEPARATION BILL

The Government announced in April our intention to bring forward reform of the legal requirements for obtaining a divorce or civil partnership dissolution in England and Wales. I am pleased to inform you that today we have introduced the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill to Parliament. This letter briefly sets out why the Bill is needed and what it is intended to achieve. These are important and long-overdue reforms.

Marriage will always be of vital importance to society, and it is deeply sad when a marriage breaks down irretrievably. When people take the difficult decision to divorce, the legal process should not incentivise conflict. The reality is that the current legal process does just that: it incentivises one spouse at the outset to make allegations about the other's conduct to avoid otherwise waiting for two years of separation. Such allegations can set the scene for acrimony and conflict during the legal process that can last beyond its conclusion. This can be especially damaging for any children of the relationship.

Instead, the Government believes that the legal process should better support couples who divorce or dissolve their civil partnership to move forward as constructively as possible. This is particularly important for parents, as conflict is damaging to children's life chances and those life chances are improved by co-operative parenting and positive parenting relationships.

The Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill removes the conflict flashpoints inherent within the current legal process, and introduces for the first time a minimum overall timeframe for that process. These reforms will encourage couples who have been unable to reconcile to approach arrangements for the future as constructively and co-operatively as possible.

These reforms do not seek to make the decision to divorce or dissolve a civil partnership 'easier'. That will remain one of the hardest decisions people can make. This is targeted reform to remove those elements of the current legal process that can exacerbate conflict and cause unnecessary distress at an already difficult time. I hope that you will take great interest in this opportunity to make a positive impact on the lives of the many families who sadly find themselves affected by family breakdown, and that will support the Government to deliver this much needed change.

I look forward to working with you during passage of the Bill.

Yours sincerely

RT HON DAVID GAUKE MP