Dear Bob,

Courts and Tribunals (Judiciary and Functions of Staff) Bill

I am writing to update you on our plans for court reform legislation.

The Prisons and Courts Bill, which was introduced in February 2017 but fell when the General Election was called, included important measures that underpin our ambitious programme of court and tribunal reform. The vision of our programme is to modernise and upgrade our justice system so that it works even better for everyone, from the victims of crime, witnesses and litigants to judges and legal professionals. We want everyone who engages with the courts and tribunals to have the finest justice system in the world available to them and we are investing over £1 billion to transform our courts and tribunals - making them fit for the 21st century, more straightforward, and providing better value for the taxpayer.

The Queen’s Speech announced that we would be bringing forward legislation to modernise the courts system. I am pleased to announce that we have today introduced a Courts and Tribunals (Judiciary and Functions of Staff) Bill in the House of Lords, which will make it easier and swifter for people to resolve disputes and secure justice.

The Bill is an important first legislative step in implementing the wider programme of reform of the courts and tribunals system. While technical in nature, it makes measures that are essential to enabling the judiciary to respond to the changing demands of a reformed courts and tribunals system and delivering better services to users. Our world class judiciary is a highly valuable resource and we want to enable them to continue to deploy their time and expertise where and when it is most needed. The Bill will introduce much greater flexibility to the deployment of judges. It will also free up judges’ time to focus on more complex matters by allowing suitably qualified and experienced court and tribunal staff to be authorised to handle uncontroversial, straightforward matters under judicial supervision. The measures in the Bill will therefore increase the efficiency of the courts and tribunals.

We are delivering significant reform in advance of legislation. For example, we have delivered high-quality, new digital services through a number of pilots; the public can now apply for uncontested divorce online, apply for probate online, make pleas online for low level offences (such as traffic offences or evading bus fare), respond to jury summonses, track social security appeals online, and issue and respond to civil money claims. Over 6,000 people have used these pilots and got straightforward, digital access to the courts for the first time.
The Government remains committed to implementing the other court reform measures that were included in the Prisons and Courts Bill. We will introduce these as soon as parliamentary time allows.

The Government hopes that, as you did with the Prison and Courts Bill, you feel able to support the provisions in this Bill and I look forward to discussing its contents with you and the wider Justice Committee as the Bill progresses.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

RT HON DAVID GAUKE MP