

PE2190/D: Hold an inquiry into grooming gangs in Scotland

Petitioner written submission, 3 March 2026

I write further to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills' written submission dated 2 March 2026 regarding Petition PE2190: Hold an inquiry into grooming gangs in Scotland.

I welcome the Cabinet Secretary's confirmation of the intention to establish a statutory public inquiry under the Inquiries Act 2005 into Scotland's response to group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation. This represents an important and necessary step forward, and I acknowledge the seriousness of the Government's statement to Parliament.

However, I respectfully submit that the establishment of an inquiry must now be accompanied by clear safeguards, survivor-led involvement, transparency of scope, and firm commitments to accountability.

In her statement, the Cabinet Secretary acknowledged that survivors describe "a system which, far too often, does not believe young people" and that institutions with the power to act "did not act to prevent abuse from occurring." This admission reflects precisely why PE2190 was brought forward. Survivors have consistently raised concerns about systemic failures, institutional defensiveness, and the prioritisation of reputation over child protection.

While I note that the new statutory inquiry will be distinct from the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, it is essential that there is no fragmentation of evidence or narrowing of focus that would prevent full examination of organised and group-based exploitation. The public must have confidence that this inquiry will examine not only prevalence, but also:

- Institutional responses and decision-making;
- Failures in inter-agency cooperation;
- The handling of disclosures and whistleblowing;
- Any patterns of minimisation, misrecording or under-reporting;
- Cultural or systemic barriers that prevented action.

I welcome the appointment of Professor Alexis Jay to chair the inquiry, given her experience leading major investigations into child sexual exploitation. Her leadership will bring expertise and credibility. However, independence must be visible as well as operational. Survivors must be involved in shaping the Terms of Reference at the earliest possible stage.

The Cabinet Secretary also confirmed the development of a Scottish Truth Project, to be led by John O'Brien. This is a positive commitment. However, participation must be trauma-informed, properly resourced, accessible across Scotland, and supported by long-term aftercare. Survivors should not simply be invited to give testimony; they must help guide how evidence is gathered, understood, and acted upon.

Importantly, I believe this announcement may mark a turning point for survivors in Scotland. Many survivors have not come forward publicly or formally because they fear making themselves a target. They fear not being believed. They fear being dismissed, scrutinised, or retraumatised. In previous submissions I have expressed my belief that the relative silence in Scotland — and the perception that this issue is less prevalent here — may in part reflect that fear.

When survivors believe they will not be taken seriously, silence becomes a form of self-protection. That silence should never be mistaken for absence.

It is my sincere hope that the establishment of an independent statutory inquiry will now give survivors the confidence, courage and reassurance that they will be heard, believed, and supported. If this process is genuinely independent, survivor-centred and transparent, it may finally create the conditions in which those who have remained silent feel safe enough to come forward.

The Cabinet Secretary stated that there is “limited evidence at the current time on the nature and extent of group-based child sexual abuse in Scotland.” I would respectfully suggest that limited evidence may also reflect limited disclosure. An inquiry of this nature should actively consider whether under-reporting, cultural pressures, stigma, or fear of repercussions have suppressed the true picture.

The statement also references the National Review and Police Scotland's review of cases. It is imperative that the statutory inquiry has full access to those findings and the authority to scrutinise their methodology and conclusions independently. Survivors' mistrust is rooted in lived experience. Additional layers of scrutiny must therefore be meaningful and robust.

If this inquiry is to restore public confidence, it must:

1. Be fully transparent in its Terms of Reference.
2. Guarantee survivor representation in advisory structures.
3. Protect and encourage whistleblowers.
4. Examine contemporary as well as historic cases.
5. Deliver interim findings where urgent safeguarding improvements are identified.
6. Commit to publishing recommendations alongside clear implementation timelines.

PE2190 was brought forward because survivors demanded that Scotland confront this issue directly. The Government's announcement acknowledges the seriousness

of that concern. The responsibility now lies in ensuring that this inquiry is fearless, thorough, and genuinely transformative.

Survivors in Scotland have lived with silence for too long. This development has the potential to change that — but only if it is carried out with integrity, independence and meaningful survivor participation.

I respectfully ask the Committee to continue its scrutiny to ensure that this process delivers the truth, accountability and reform that survivors deserve.