SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM (FRANCHISE) BILL

LETTER FROM HOWARD LEAGUE SCOTLAND TO DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER
ON VOTING RIGHTS FOR CERTAIN PRISONERS

As you will recall, the Stage 1 Report on the Scottish Independence Referendum (Franchise) Bill included the statement that:

"The Committee notes that remand prisoners, together with a small number of civil prisoners and people imprisoned for defaulting on a fine, will still be entitled to vote, and seeks assurances from the Scottish Government that the Scottish Prison Service is fully prepared to put procedures in place to ensure that these prisoners are able to register, to receive all relevant information about the referendum, and to exercise their right to vote." (paragraph 55)

We are not aware that the government has yet provided a response to this specific part of the report, and I am therefore writing to seek confirmation that all reasonable steps will now be taken to ensure that those people who are in prison in Scotland next September, and who remain entitled to vote, will be made aware of their right to do so and enabled to exercise that right. We would be grateful if you could advise what is being done in due course.

Howard League Scotland would of course be happy to provide whatever support we can for that process, in so far as our limited resources allow.

I am copying this letter to Bruce Crawford MSP, Convenor of the Referendum (Scotland) Bill Committee, to Colin McConnell, Chief Executive of the Scottish Prison Service and to John McCormick at the Electoral Commission.

Yours sincerely

John Scott QC
Chair
Howard League Scotland

18 September 2013