



Protect the Protectors: our members changing the law

25 Jul 2018

GMB was in Parliament this week to witness the final stages of the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Bill. The legislation is better known as the Protect the Protectors Bill.

For some of the people present, this represented the end of a long journey. Sadly, too many of our members have been violently attacked simply because they are NHS workers.

This is a national crisis. At least eight ambulance workers are attacked every day and as GMB's research shows, more than a third of ambulance workers have considered leaving their jobs because of the risk of violent assault.

After a Yorkshire Ambulance Service technician was sexually assaulted by a patient in 2016, GMB resolved to take action.

GMB Yorkshire & North Derbyshire met local MP Holly Lynch who brought a new Bill before Parliament to impose tougher penalties on people who attack emergency service workers. And when that legislation was picked up by Chris Bryant MP, we worked closely with both MPs to ensure it passed in the Commons.

At first, Ministers did not want to include sexual assaults in the Bill so we put forward the evidence that exposed the scale of the problem and helped change their minds.

This is a difficult issue for many of our members to talk about, and we are grateful to all the GMB staff who took the time to fill out our survey.



It really did make a difference.

This week, the House of Lords approved the new legislation. As soon as it receives Royal Assent, it will become law.

It will become a specific criminal offence in England to assault an emergency service worker, and attacking an emergency worker will be an aggravating factor for sentencing purposes - including for sexual assaults.

This is a great victory for GMB members and all other emergency workers.

It is a testament to the campaigning work of Sarah Kelly, a GMB member who spoke up about her experience and received the Eleanor Marx special award at Congress this year.

But we know that, by itself, a change of the law isn't enough. These new provisions must be enforced, and the culture in NHS Trusts has to change.

NHS workers are not disposable— they are integral to the functioning of society, and they need so much more support from the Government and their employers than they currently receive.

Slowly, but surely, GMB is making that happen.

