

The Rt Hon Mrs Kemi Badenoch MP  
Leader of His Majesty's Opposition  
House of Commons  
SW1A 0AA

11 June 2026

Dear Kemi Badenoch,

**Re: Remarks concerning Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and responsible public discourse**

We are writing regarding comments you made during your speech on the Public Sector Equality Duty on 9 June, in which you stated that:  
“Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities [are] breaking laws that no one else would get away with.”

As parliamentarians, we recognise the importance of robust debate and the right of elected representatives to discuss matters of public policy. However, we are deeply concerned by comments which make sweeping generalisations about entire ethnic communities and associate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people with criminality.

Your remarks are particularly concerning during Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month, when society and Parliament should be recognising the rich histories, cultures and contributions of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission's guidance on *Freedom of Expression and Respectful Discourse for Political Candidates and Parties* recognises the importance of free political speech, while also urging politicians to avoid “stating or implying that people who share a protected characteristic also share a particular negative trait, or are collectively to blame for a specific social problem”.

The guidance warns that such language can increase hostility towards minority groups and deter participation in public life. Romany Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers are recognised ethnic groups protected under equality legislation. As such, comments that associate entire communities with law-breaking carry particular

weight and risk, contributing to prejudice that these communities already face on a daily basis.

Evidence consistently shows that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people experience high levels of racism, discrimination, hate incidents and victimisation. Community and academic research and projects have documented the routine hostility, abuse and discrimination experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people across the United Kingdom.

We are particularly concerned about the wider consequences of inflammatory rhetoric at a time when tensions affecting minority ethnic communities remain high. The recent violence in Northern Ireland, including anti-Roma hate and attacks, demonstrates how quickly harmful narratives about minority groups can contribute to hostility, fear and division.

Political leaders across the United Kingdom have rightly condemned those attacks and the racist targeting of ethnic minority communities. Language matters. When senior political figures make broad negative assertions about ethnic groups, it can legitimise prejudice and embolden those who seek to scapegoat already marginalised communities.

We are also concerned that these remarks form part of a broader pattern in which Gypsy and Traveller communities are frequently discussed in public debate primarily through the lens of unauthorised encampments. Such narratives often overlook the longstanding failure of successive governments and local authorities to meet accommodation needs, including the chronic shortage of sites and stopping places available to Gypsy and Traveller families.

More broadly, we are concerned by proposals to abolish the Public Sector Equality Duty. While this letter focuses principally on your comments regarding Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, we note that the Duty plays an important role in helping public bodies understand and address barriers faced by communities experiencing discrimination and exclusion. For Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, who continue to experience some of the poorest outcomes in health, education and housing, weakening these protections risks pushing inequalities further out of sight and out of mind.



For Gypsies,  
Travellers and  
Roma

Political disagreement is an essential part of democratic life. However, it is equally important that public debate is conducted in a way that does not stigmatise minority ethnic groups. We hope you will withdraw these remarks, refrain from making sweeping generalisations about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in future, and engage constructively with the realities these communities face.

May we discuss these issues further with you and facilitate engagement with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller organisations and representatives.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Kelly Foy  
Janet Whitaker  
Sarah  
Cathy Bakewell

Mary Kelly Foy MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma

Baroness Janet Whitaker, Co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma

Sarah Dyke MP, Vice Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma

Baroness Cathy Bakewell, member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma

**[gypsy-traveller.org/appg](http://gypsy-traveller.org/appg)** All Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma

Co-chairs: Mary Foy MP, Baroness Janet Whitaker | Honorary President: Lord Nick Bourne

Friends, Families & Travellers (Charity Number: 1112326) acts as Secretariat to the APPG for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma.

@APPGGTR | T: 01273 234 777 | E: [appg@gypsy-traveller.org](mailto:appg@gypsy-traveller.org)