# Briefing for Quakers: Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill

Updated December 2021

## Overview

Quakers in Britain object to this bill for three main reasons:

* It strikes at the heart of our human right to freedom of assembly. Protest has always been one of the methods Quakers use to put faith into action by trying to change the world using nonviolent methods.
* It increases the punitive nature of our policing and criminal justice system by increasing fines, prison sentences and ‘stop and search’.
* It will have disproportionately negative effect on groups who are already marginalised in our society, including people of colour and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

The [full text of the bill can be found here](https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/43970/documents/1042).

We are calling for Part 3 (public order) and Part 4 (unauthorised encampments) of the bill to be removed entirely, and failing that for positive amendments to be made to these sections.

## Part 3 – Public order

* The bill strikes at the heart of the human right to freedom of assembly by seeking to ban protests that are ‘disruptive’.
* The definition of 'disruption' is so vague that almost any protest could be seen as 'disruptive' and therefore be banned.
* Any officer could impose any condition on a protest, including banning it altogether, without needing to consult with anyone.
* It slaps massive fines and jail sentences on the organisers and attendees of protests who stray from conditions. A nurse who organised a protest about the 1% pay rise recently was fined £10,000, and under this bill might have been fined more and also been put in jail for 11 months. People who damage memorials could spend up to 10 years in prison.
* It restricts people's ability to protest outside the UK Parliament, where people's voices can be heard by those in power.
* It criminalises people who unknowingly breach conditions imposed by the police, even if their behaviour wouldn't otherwise be unlawful.
* Existing laws already give the authorities the ability to stop violent protest.
* Experience tells us that increasing punitive measures in this way will have a disproportionately negative effect on people of colour.
* The government has introduced further amendments to this section of the bill which make it even worse, including new Serious Disruption Prevention Orders (SDPOs. More information is available in [Liberty’s briefing](https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/protest-briefings-and-reports/).

## Part 4 – Unauthorised encampments

* The bill introduces measures to create a new offence of trespass by “residing on land without consent in or with a vehicle.
* This will criminalise the way of life of nomadic Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, who are already marginalised in our society, and put them as risk of having their homes and all their belongings confiscated.
* It will also criminalise people who are homeless and sleeping in their cars.
* Landowners wishing to make the countryside a hostile place for those seeking to enjoy it will gain a powerful new tool to deter wild campers, cyclists and others.
* This measure could also be used against protesters who camp on protest sites.

## What you can do

* Write to your MP now using [our template letter](https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/template-letter-to-mps-on-policing-bill---dec-2021) before the bill returns to the House of Commons for its ‘ping pong’ stage. This will encourage your MP to vote to keep any good amendments made in the House of Lords.
* Share social media posts by @BritishQuakers, @GypsyTravellers and @LibertyHQ about the right to protest and live a nomadic way of life.
* Put a poster or banner up outside your meeting house that can be seen by passers-by. Put a photo of it on social media and tag @BritishQuakers.
* Sign petitions run by other organisations, such as [NetPol's petition](https://netpol.org/charter/) for a Charter for Freedom of Assembly Rights and [Friends of the Earth's petition](https://act.friendsoftheearth.uk/petition/add-your-name-defend-right-protest?_ga=2.6480240.358378883.1617279919-68571583.1617279919) on protest and trespass.
* Participate in peaceful protests about the bill where it is safe to do so. To find out more about the right to protest under the current Covid-19 regulations, see [Friends of the Earth’s guidance](https://campaigning.friendsoftheearth.uk/news/coronavirus-guidance) for England and Wales and the [Scottish Community & Activist Legal Project](https://www.scottishactivistlegalproject.co.uk/covid-resources/) guide for Scotland.

## Contact us

If you have any questions or wish to share your experience of lobbying on this bill, please contact Grace Da Costa, Public Affairs and Media Manager at Quakers in Britain, on politics@quaker.org.uk.