

IMMEDIATE

Tuesday 8 June 2004

NASUWT petition for anonymity for teachers facing malicious allegations to be presented to House of Commons

A petition of more than 30,000 signatures in support of NASUWT's campaign for anonymity for teachers facing false, exaggerated and malicious allegations will be presented tomorrow following a Private Members' Debate in the House of Commons.

The petition, representing approximately half of the signatures collected by NASUWT over the past six months, will be handed over by Claire Curtis-Thomas MP after the debate on the interviewing of witnesses in sex abuse cases.

Chris Keates, Acting General Secretary of NASUWT (the teachers' union with 223,500 members), said:

"NASUWT's campaign aims to secure amendments to legislation to give anonymity to teachers facing the trauma and stress of false accusations of child abuse.

"The Private Members' Debate will highlight the vulnerability of teachers facing malicious allegations and I welcome the support of Claire Curtis-Thomas MP who has been a vigorous campaigner on these issues.

"The Secretary of State, Charles Clarke, also expressed his wish to give consideration to how anonymity may be secured when he spoke at NASUWT's Annual Conference in April this year."

Ms Keates continued:

"Over recent years, there have been 1,907 NASUWT members investigated by police following allegations of criminal abuse – an average of 12 per month. Conviction has followed in fewer than four per cent of these cases.

"Many teachers facing malicious allegations cannot sustain family relationships, have nervous breakdowns and cannot return to the classroom when their ordeal is over. The Association has three cases where members committed suicide.

"NASUWT wants to rectify the injustice of an allegation in itself being seen as proof of guilt and to minimise loss to the profession by securing anonymity for victims of false, exaggerated and malicious allegations until a decision of the court.

"The Association has also called for a reduction in the length of time taken to investigate such claims. The minimum time taken to investigate is on average six months although NASUWT has dealt with cases which have taken years to resolve.

"This is not a campaign to protect abusers. Such people have no place in schools and all allegations must be investigated thoroughly with those found guilty facing the consequences.

"Anonymity will strengthen the crucial principle of innocent until proven guilty."

ENDS

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Notes to Editors:

1. NASUWT launched the campaign for anonymity in December 2003. At this time, 1,782 NASUWT members had required legal support from the Association since 1991 following police investigations into false, exaggerated or malicious allegations.

2. Latest figures show 1,907 NASUWT members have required legal support from the Association over the past 13 years. Of these cases, 1,663 have been concluded with 74 convictions.

3. There have been 92 cases this year alone with 30 cases closed and no convictions.

4. The postcards have been returned with signatures of teachers, colleagues, friends and family in support of NASUWT's campaign.