



Department
for Transport

Stephen Hammond MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

From the Minister of State
Chris Heaton-Harris MP

Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Tel: 0300 330 3000
E-Mail: chris.heatonharris@dft.gov.uk

Web site: www.gov.uk/dft

Our Ref: MC/292919

15 June 2020

Dear Stephen

Thank you for your email of 3 June, enclosing correspondence from your constituent, Ms Jessica Burt, about the death of Belly Mujinga, a railway ticket office worker at Victoria Station.

I understand Ms Burt's concerns about the tragic death of Ms Mujinga. My sympathies and thoughts are with Ms Mujinga's family, friends and all those who have been affected by her death. Any death in the transport sector is regrettable and, sadly, Ms Mujinga is one of several frontline workers who have died as a result of COVID-19.

The British Transport Police (BTP) released a statement regarding the alleged incident after conducting their investigation. It concluded, based on key witness statements and having reviewed the CCTV footage, that 'there was insufficient evidence to substantiate that any criminal offences had taken place and that the death of Ms Mujinga did not occur as a consequence of that incident'. In recognition of the wider public interest, the BTP has asked the Crown Prosecution Service to carry out an independent review of its decision.

The outcome of the BTP investigation, however, does nothing to change the fact that no one should be treated disrespectfully or made to feel unsafe when they are trying to do their job.

I wish to reassure Ms Burt that our priority is ensuring the safety of hard-working frontline railway staff, who are helping passengers at stations and keeping key services on the network running. We have therefore agreed principles with industry which set out that operators must at all times follow Public Health England Advice, including ensuring staff are able to maintain social distancing through adapting working arrangements where possible.

The Government is also very concerned by reports of a disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. It is important that we understand what underlies these reported issues, and that we have robust and accurate data to support that understanding, so that we can take appropriate and effective action. Without that understanding, we risk taking the wrong action.

We are looking very carefully at the impact COVID-19 is having on these communities and have commissioned Public Health England (PHE) to study the issue in detail. PHE published its findings on 2 June 2020¹ and we are taking seriously the findings from the report. We will be working to understand the key drivers of the disparities identified and the relationships between the different risk factors.

Furthermore, the Equality and Human Rights Commission is to mount a statutory inquiry into the racial inequalities exposed by the coronavirus crisis in the UK. The Equalities Minister is leading the work, supported by the Race Disparity Unit, to help protect our communities from the impact of coronavirus. It is vital we understand the disproportionate way that this disease affects people, including those who are black or from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Thank you once again for raising Ms Burt's concerns with me. I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely,



Chris Heaton-Harris MP

Minister of State for Transport

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-review-of-disparities-in-risks-and-outcomes>