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### **Private Messaging and the On-line Safety Bill:**

I believe that it is important to ensure messaging providers protect users' freedom of expression and personal privacy.

I am aware of concerns that a clause in the Online Safety Bill may give Ofcom powers to view private messages if there is suspected illegal activity within the messages. The Government has said the Online Safety Bill does not give them any power to view users' private messages and will enable Ofcom to direct companies to use technology to identify and remove illegal child sexual abuse content.

I do not believe it is right for encrypted messages to become decrypted. There must be a balance between our fundamental right to privacy and keeping people safe online, which raises difficult questions for platforms such as WhatsApp.

I note concerns from private messaging apps that the removal of end-to-end encryption would allow unlawful third parties to monitor private messages, as well as Government authorities, in order to curb illegal activity. Indeed, both WhatsApp and Signal have said they will pull their services in the UK if the Bill is to proceed with the clause.

However, I do not believe that the legislation impacting private messaging will damage this encryption, as a variety of technologies are emerging that could allow for scanning on issues such as child sexual abuse material while retaining the privacy benefits afforded by end-to-end encryption.

More widely, I am concerned that Ofcom will both monitor private messages and also be the regulator for the services. Instead, I support implementing a regulatory body similar to the model used in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act, which monitors offline surveillance.

The Online Safety Bill is now with the House of Lords. I hope we will see further improvements to the Bill as it progresses. I assure constituents that I will continue to call for the Government to keep the balance between safety online and freedom of expression within the Bill.

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