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The Rt Hon Peter Walker MBE MP
Secretary of State
Welsh Office
Gwydyr House
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My ref:

Your ref:

20 November 1987

Dear Peter

NBM

COMMUNITY CHARGE: WOMEN'S REFUGES

Our officials have been in discussion with representatives of Women's Aid Federation England and Wales Women's Aid about the effect of the community charge on women's refuges and the women staying in them.

One of the concerns which has been expressed is that women in refuges may be tracked down by violent husbands, if their names appear on the extract from the community charge register which will be available for inspection and sale. Similar concern has been expressed on behalf of political refugees who might be traced down by their Governments. I accept that there is a genuine problem here. To overcome it I propose that registration officers should be required to delete from the public extract the name of any individual who satisfies them that he or she may suffer physical injury if his or her name is listed. I also propose that, in cases where the result would be to leave an address with no names on the extract, the address should also be deleted. This will ensure that attention is not drawn to properties where people in danger are resident.

I am advised that we do not require an amendment to the draft Bill, because the scope of the regulation-making power dealing with the register extract is wide enough to achieve what I propose. (This is subject to confirmation by Parliamentary Counsel). I understand, however, that an amendment to the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc (Scotland) Act would be required, if a similar proposal were to be adopted in Scotland. I know that Malcolm Rifkind's officials are already considering the inclusion of such an amendment in my Bill.

Women's Aid have other concerns about the community charge registration process, and are likely to press for special registration rules for women in refuges and for an exemption. I do not believe we can accept these proposals without implying a lack of confidence in the workability of the new system and without setting an undesirable precedent.

Subject to any views from you and other colleagues, I propose to announce at a suitable opportunity my decision on the deletion of



names and addresses from the register extract. In the absence of comments by 30 November, I shall assume I can proceed.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, members of E(LF), David Waddington and Sir Robert Armstrong.

NICHOLAS RIDLEY