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Foreword

Older people make an important contribution to society but they sometimes feel vulnerable and have genuine fears and concerns about crime. Although Northern Ireland is one of the safest places to live in the UK, attacks against older people increase their fear and remind us of their vulnerability.

Tackling crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour is at the core of the Northern Ireland Community Safety Strategy. Fear of crime amongst older people, vulnerable adults, victims and children was identified as one of nine key issues and so I am pleased to present this consultation document that outlines proposals for the safety of older people.

A number of agencies and organisations often work in partnership to deliver initiatives that reduce crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour. Many of these have not been specifically targeted towards older people. However, older people have experienced the benefits as part of the general population. A range of initiatives have focused specifically on the needs of older people and have helped address some of their concerns. But more needs to be done.

These proposals outline the priorities for reducing crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour experienced by older people. I am grateful to anyone who has helped inform the development of the proposals.

I would urge everyone with an interest to consider the issues that are raised in the document and contribute to this important consultation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maria Eagle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Maria Eagle MP
Criminal Justice Minister

1. Introduction

1.1. Levels of crime and personal safety are concerns for everyone, both young and old. Although older people are less likely to be direct victims of violent crime compared to younger people, any crime impacts on the quality of their life. Feeling vulnerable to assault and abuse often acts to isolate and exclude older people, disconnecting them from their local community. Older people, particularly older women, are also more likely to have a fear of crime and often feel more vulnerable than young people because of their personal circumstances.¹

1.2. The safety of older people and their ability to live free from crime and the fear of crime is important. This consultation exercise aims to determine if the correct issues concerning the safety of older people have been identified. The outcome of the consultation process will help inform how the safety of older people can best be addressed over the next 3-5 years.

1.3. Views are welcomed on the issues raised in the document, particularly from older people and their representatives in the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. Further details on how to respond to the consultation are outlined in Chapter 6.

¹ Perceptions of and concern about crime in Northern Ireland: Findings from the 2003/04 Northern Ireland Crime Survey. Research and Statistical Bulletin 6/2004, Northern Ireland Office. Available from www.nio.gov.uk

2. Crime and older people

- 2.1. Interpreting statistics concerning the safety of older people is not straightforward as there is no agreed definition of what constitutes an older person. The World Health Organisation, for example, considers 50 as the threshold to encourage people in late-middle age to plan for their retirement and ageing². In this document, Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) recorded crime statistics are presented for people aged 65 and over.
- 2.2. The immediate and long-term effects of crime, particularly violent crime which includes offences against the person, sexual offences and personal robbery can be catastrophic. During 2006/07, there were 468 violent crime offences against persons aged 65+ (an increase of 64 from 2005/2006). This accounts for only 1.4% of all violent crimes where the age of the victim is known. However, 13.7% of the population is aged 65+ so older people are statistically less likely to be the victim of a violent crime compared to the remainder of the population.
- 2.3. There were 6,831 recorded domestic burglaries across Northern Ireland in 2006/07. Where the age of the victim was known, 13.4% of these burglaries were committed against people aged 65+. This is a decrease from the previous year when 16.6% of recorded domestic burglaries were committed against that age group.
- 2.4. Fear of crime can be difficult to measure but is a major issue for older people, particularly those living in rural communities. However, research undertaken by the Rural Community Network indicated that many rural voluntary and community groups felt that rural areas were a safer place to live than urban areas, although older people living in rural areas rated fear of crime as the highest rating of disadvantage.³
- 2.5. Fear of crime also has a different impact depending on age. In an Omnibus survey in 2006, 46% of people aged 65+ indicated that they were more

² The Heidelberg Guidelines for Promoting Physical Activity Among Older Persons, World Health Organisation, 1997

³ *Ageing and Rural Poverty. A Research Report by the Rural Community Network. 2004*

fearful of being a victim of crime than the same time last year compared to 31% of 25-44 year olds.

2.6. Attacks against older people can be severe and have lasting psychological and social consequences. Older people who are victims of crime may confine themselves to their homes because of the fear of becoming a victim again by leaving their home. Victims need to be reassured that crime is dealt with appropriately by the criminal justice system.

2.7. The UK judicial system is set up to give judges freedom to set sentences within the legal framework which allows them to take account of mitigating and aggravating factors. For example, in a case where violence is used, the age of a victim will be regarded as an aggravating factor. The Court of Appeal has also stated that violent offences against the elderly will be met with severe sentences even if the injury inflicted is not of the most serious kind. Where the offender has targeted the elderly for the purpose of taking advantage of them, this will also result in more severe sentences.

3. Context

3.1. The Northern Ireland Community Safety Strategy is the Government's overarching strategy for community safety in Northern Ireland⁴. Nine key issues were identified in the strategy to deliver improved community safety in Northern Ireland as follows:

- car crime;
- domestic burglary;
- business and retail crime;
- fear of crime, particularly amongst older people, vulnerable people, victims and children;
- anti-social behaviour and low-level neighbourhood disorder;
- offences against individuals, particularly domestic violence and sexual assault;
- youth offending and reducing criminality;
- offences motivated by prejudice and hatred; and,
- drug, substance and alcohol abuse.

3.2. Since publication of the strategy, a wide range of regional and local projects and programmes have been developed to tackle each of the key issues. Some were specifically targeted towards older people whereas other initiatives have had an impact across the population as a whole. For example, Operation CleanUp has removed a significant number of un-taxed 'run-around' vehicles to improve the safety of individuals within communities (indirect benefit to older people).

3.3. The Lock Out Crime Scheme which has been funded by the Community Safety Unit (CSU) has provided home security measures to individuals aged 65 or over and in receipt of housing benefit or rate/rent rebate. It is due to end in June 2007 when it is expected that over 16,000 homes will have benefited from the scheme. This scheme has been positively welcomed by older people and will be evaluated to capture its impact. A substantial number of personal alarms have also been issued to older

⁴ *Creating a safer Northern Ireland through Partnership, A Strategy Document. Available from www.communitysafetyni.gov.uk*

people and vulnerable adults across Northern Ireland by Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs), the PSNI and other agencies.

- 3.4. Some preliminary work has also been undertaken to develop a Northern Ireland-wide database of community safety projects targeted towards older people. Compilation of a comprehensive list is proposed as one of the first actions in the implementation of this strategy. This would provide a useful resource for policy makers and practitioners when developing new projects or considering expansion of projects that have worked well.
- 3.5. One of the key themes of the Community Safety Strategy is the delivery of local solutions to local problems. 26 local CSPs have been established, one in each District Council area. Representatives of older peoples' groups are involved in a number of CSPs and can provide an important input to the development of community safety policies and programmes at a local level.
- 3.6. CSPs will continue to be a key mechanism for delivering community safety projects at a local level. Each CSP published a strategy to address local priorities within their areas in June 2005 and some have identified fear of crime experienced by older people as a priority.⁵ Each CSP has also developed an Action Plan for the period April 2006-March 2008 based on their strategy and including a range of local projects. A number of projects specifically targeted towards older people are currently being delivered through their Action Plans. Action Plans have been formulated to be responsive to new and emergent issues and so CSPs will be able to amend their Plans to reflect issues arising from this strategy.
- 3.7. There are also a considerable number of initiatives undertaken by other statutory, voluntary and community organisations acting in partnership. For example, Belfast Healthy Cities has produced an intersectoral Healthy Ageing Action Plan and a statistical profile of older people in the Belfast and EHSSB area⁶. One of the main themes of the Action Plan is around

⁵ Copies of the strategies are available from www.communitysafetyni.gov.uk

⁶ Further information available from <http://www.belfasthealthycities.com/healthyageing.htm>

action to address the community safety needs of older people in the Eastern Health and Social Services Board Area.

- 3.8. Voluntary and community organisations also provide practical support and advice to older people, often working in partnership with statutory agencies. For example, the *SeniorLink* service run by Help the Aged provides an immediate response service that enables older people, at the touch of a button, to talk to someone when they need help. This may be assistance in an emergency, reassurance, or just to hear a friendly voice. An equivalent service run by Age Concern, *Aid Call*, provides an advice line where free advice is provided on a range of issues to older people, their families and carers.
- 3.9. The impact of crime is significant for any victim but can be particularly severe for older people who tend to be more vulnerable and may live alone. Victim Support Northern Ireland (VSNI) provides emotional and practical support and a referral service to specialist agencies, where required, for all victims of crime. Older people who are victims of crime can access this level of support through Victim Support Branch Offices. In addition, VSNI provides free support and advocacy in making a claim to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme and will support those individuals who appear as witnesses in a criminal court case. It is important that victims are aware of these support services and relevant community safety material developed specifically for older people will include details of such support services.
- 3.10. This consultation document must also be considered in the context of other initiatives that have a positive impact on the safety of older people. For example, *Ageing in an Inclusive Society*, the strategy that promotes and supports the inclusion of older people in Northern Ireland recognises the need to address the fears and concerns experienced by many older people within their communities.⁷

⁷ *Ageing in an Inclusive Society*, OFMDFM, March 2005.

3.11. *People & Place*, the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy is focused on tackling the most disadvantaged urban areas through a co-ordinated and integrated long term commitment to these communities. One of the strategic objectives of the strategy is focused on social renewal which includes the creation of safer environments by reducing anti-social behaviour, crime and fear of crime. It is expected that the work to regenerate these areas, whilst not exclusively focused on older people, will have a positive impact on the safety of older people.

3.12. The *Investing for Health*⁸ strategy contains a framework of action to improve health and well-being across society. Health and well-being is largely determined by the social, economic, physical and cultural environment. Reducing crime and fear of crime will have a positive impact on the health of older people.

⁸ *Investing for Health*, DHSSPS, March 2002.

4. Strategic Aims

- 4.1. This Section sets out proposed high-level aims for this strategy. The Northern Ireland Community Safety Strategy is also currently being revised and a draft is due to issue for public consultation later this year. It may be appropriate to integrate the outcome of this consultation process in the new Northern Ireland Community Safety Strategy to ensure greater inclusivity of community safety issues impacting on older people.
- 4.2. Two high-level aims are proposed for this strategy:
- To reduce crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour experienced by older people; and,
 - To raise awareness of community safety issues with older people through information and advice, enabling them to feel more confident about their personal safety.
- 4.3. These are expanded in the next few sections with proposed actions to help achieve these aims. The focus is on high-level actions to be taken forward at a regional level. It is not intended to capture local projects but it is recognised that such initiatives will also make an important contribution to achieving these aims. An emphasis will also be placed on building on the good practice and projects that have been implemented by other agencies including Age Concern, Help the Aged, PSNI, local councils etc.
- 4.4. Measuring success is an important aspect of any strategy although there are many different agencies and organisations that will contribute to the strategic aims. Information on recorded crimes will be used to assess changes in crime levels and surveys such as the Northern Ireland Crime Survey will continue to provide complementary information particularly around the fear of crime.

Strategic aim: To reduce crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour experienced by older people

- 4.5. A number of ongoing initiatives support this strategic aim. The **HandyVan** service, for example, is a scheme run by Help the Aged in partnership with Age Concern and provides a fully equipped van and specially trained fitter to improve home security to older people who are aged 60 and over and have savings/assets savings of £20,000 or under, excluding the value of their home. It is a free service and currently operates across the Belfast, Castlereagh, Lisburn and Newtownabbey council areas.⁹
- 4.6. Reducing crime, the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour is more effective when delivered in partnership. **Neighbourhood Watch**, for example, is a partnership initiative between the CSU, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Policing Board. It is designed to build relationships between local communities, the police and other agencies to reduce the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour. There are over 250 schemes across Northern Ireland that foster community spirit and encourage greater vigilance within communities.
- 4.7. Neighbourhood Watch Schemes are community-led and require one or more volunteers that act as a contact point between their community and the local police. The schemes have had a positive impact on reducing the fear of crime, particularly amongst older people and an evaluation on the impact of Neighbourhood Watch is ongoing.¹⁰
- 4.8. A number of **Good Morning projects** across Northern Ireland have been developed where older people receive a call in the morning to check they are safe and feeling well. A recent evaluation of Good Morning projects highlighted their benefits and the need for greater collaboration to share good practice and develop strategically. A Good Practice Guide for the development and operation of the projects was also developed.

⁹ Further details available from:

<http://www.helptheaged.org.uk/en--b/AdviceSupport/HomeSafety/SecureYourHome/default.htm>

¹⁰ Further information about Neighbourhood Watch is available from CSP Co-ordinators, District Policing Partnership Managers or local police.

- 4.9. **Anti-social behaviour** can cover a wide range of unacceptable behaviours that can blight the quality of community life.¹¹ Older people may be kept awake at night because of anti-social behaviour or can be afraid to leave their homes during the day to go to the shops. Many of their concerns are directed towards young people and anxieties about them congregating in the vicinity of their homes or close to the shops they use. Although older people can perceive this as threatening, young people are generally not intending to be intimidating, and may be unaware that older people perceive them as a threat. A range of interventions are available for tackling anti-social behaviour including diversionary activities and other interventions such as acceptable behaviour contracts (ABCs) or anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs).
- 4.10. New initiatives and pilot projects will continue to be developed in partnership with other agencies as appropriate. For example, the **Message in a Bottle** Scheme is being taken forward in partnership with the PSNI, Northern Ireland Policing Board and Northern Ireland Ambulance Service. The Scheme provides emergency services with vital details of any conditions, medications or allergies and someone to contact should they be called to a home in an emergency. The person's details are stored in a plastic bottle kept in the fridge and provides reassurance to older people.
- 4.11. **Intergenerational work** can help build bridges between the generations and negate some of the mutual mistrust. Growing evidence also suggests that intergenerational practice has an important role to play in neighbourhood renewal and in building vibrant, cohesive and safer communities. Age Concern has applied its experience in intergenerational work to develop a scheme with the Youth Conference Service to build positive relationships between young people and older people. Through the scheme, support is offered to older victims and programmes are devised for young offenders to help divert them from victimising others in the future. VSNI has also worked with the Youth Conference Service to

¹¹ The Anti-social Behaviour (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 defines anti-social behaviour as 'acting in a manner that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as the complainant'.

design a training programme which aims to make young people aware of the impact crime has had on their victims, including older people.

4.12. Finally, **befriending projects** can provide companionship and practical support to lonely and isolated older people within communities. They are particularly beneficial in rural areas where older people are more likely to feel isolated and may not have access to transport or social activities within the community and can have a positive impact on reducing the fear of crime experienced by older people.

Proposals

4.13. To help achieve this aim the following actions are proposed:

- To evaluate the operation and impact of the HandyVan Scheme by March 2008 and, if the benefits are positive, work with other partners to draw up a programme for extending the Scheme on a priority basis.
- To distribute information about the benefits and process for establishing new Neighbourhood Watch Schemes to older peoples' groups by March 2008 with the aim of establishing more Schemes.
- To work with relevant partner organisations to develop a structure for greater co-ordination and shared learning between Good Morning projects and support their strategic development by spring 2008.
- To work with partner agencies to distribute the Message in a Bottle to 80,000 older people across Northern Ireland by December 2007 to provide reassurance to older people.
- To support the development of at least four pilot intergenerational projects across CSPs in partnership with older peoples' representative organisations by December 2009.

- To develop models of good practice of youth diversionary initiatives aimed at reducing the impact of anti-social behaviour by autumn 2008.
- To work in partnership with older peoples' representative organisations to develop at least two pilot befriending projects and evaluate their impact by autumn 2009.

What other actions could help tackle crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour experienced by older people?

Strategic aim: To reduce the impact of crime against older people and raise awareness of community safety issues, enabling them to feel more confident about their personal safety.

- 4.14. Advice on crime prevention and personal safety has been disseminated in a range of different formats and different media outlets. For example, the “Stay Safe, Stay Secure” campaign was a major initiative to promote personal security amongst older people. It included a major advertising campaign which offered advice to older people not to open their doors to unknown callers without asking for and checking the identification of callers. In September 2006, the CSU launched a web-site – www.howsecureismyhome.com – and a DVD to raise awareness of simple, cheap and effective measures that can improve home security and reduce the fear of becoming a victim of crime. The DVD can be used by voluntary and community groups to generate discussion around home security issues.
- 4.15. A number of other agencies including the PSNI, Age Concern and Help the Aged have produced specialised literature and advice targeted at older people. It is essential that material such as this continues to be presented in a practical and straightforward manner to ensure that community safety messages are communicated effectively.
- 4.16. The media is a key influencer and could play a positive role in making older people more aware of their own personal security but also has the potential to increase fear of crime. Respondents to the 2003/04 Northern Ireland Crime Survey, for example, who felt very or slightly worried about crime were most likely to identify local television news stories (60%) and stories in the local newspapers (55%) as factors influencing their level of worry. Although these are population-wide figures there is no reason to suggest they are not representative of the views of older people.
- 4.17. Attacks on older people must be kept to an absolute minimum but it is important that any attacks are presented in the media in a balanced and responsible manner. Publicity that has surrounded some recent attacks on

older people has often increased the fear of crime. This fear of crime could be counteracted with more balanced reporting.

Proposals

4.18. To achieve this aim the following actions are proposed:

- To distribute up to 2000 copies of the “How Secure is my Home?” DVD to older peoples’ groups across Northern Ireland by March 2008 to help prevent older people from becoming a victim of domestic burglary
- To develop a directory of community safety projects and local support services available to victims specifically targeted towards older people by March 2008 and circulate to relevant older peoples’ groups across Northern Ireland.
- To proactively engage with the broadcast and print media to encourage dissemination of factual information that helps address the fear of crime experienced by older people – it is envisaged that events will be organised with local media representatives.
- To develop a good practice guide on developing and delivering community safety projects targeted towards older people and disseminate to key older people’s organisations by summer 2008.
- To produce an information leaflet focussed on reducing the fear of crime experienced by older people by autumn 2008 and disseminate through CSPs and older peoples’ groups.

What other actions could reduce the impact of crime against older people and raise awareness of community safety issues, enabling them to feel more confident about their personal safety?
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5. Equality Issues

5.1. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Section 75) requires the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:

- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- between men and women generally;
- between persons with a disability and persons without; and,
- between persons with dependants and persons without.

5.2. In addition to this obligation public authorities are required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. These obligations are designed to ensure that equality and good relations considerations are made central to policy development and have the potential to make a real difference to the lives of the people most likely to be affected, by consulting with and taking into account how policy development may impact on them.

5.3. The NIO is fully committed to promoting equality of opportunity and good community relations in all its policies. An initial screening exercise of this policy has been conducted in line with the Equality Commission's Guide to the Statutory Duties.

Assessment of impacts

5.4. The strategy is targeted at older people and so it will, by definition, have a positive impact on that age group. This is justified in the context of increased fear of crime experienced by older people compared to other age groups, and the devastating impact that fear of crime or being a victim of crime can have on an older person's quality of life. Since the proposals will apply to all older people, impacts across the other groups are also expected to be positive, largely as a result of the benefits accruing to older people within those groups.

Religious Belief

5.5. No adverse impact is expected.

Political Opinion

5.6. For the purposes of this assessment, it has been assumed that political opinion in Northern Ireland is closely associated with community background. Since the policy is applicable to all older people, no adverse impacts are anticipated for people of different political opinions.

Racial group

5.7. No adverse impact is expected. However, the NIO recognises that it will be important that any information or any implementation of the proposals are fully accessible to members of the ethnic minority communities.

Age

5.8. The policy is designed to benefit older people and so positive benefits are expected within this group of people. However, some specific schemes may apply to different age groups depending on specific criteria. Where appropriate, the impact of the specific age criteria will be considered as part of the implementation of schemes to seek to minimise any potential adverse impact. The policy will not benefit young people directly although the proposed intergenerational work will have a positive benefit to young people.

Marital Status

5.9. No adverse impact is anticipated because of marital status. However, older people are more likely to be widowed or single and living alone and so are likely to experience increased fear of crime.

Sexual Orientation

5.10. No adverse impact because of sexual orientation is anticipated.

Men and women generally

5.11. Positive impacts are anticipated for both men and women.

Persons with a disability and persons without

- 5.12. It is widely recognised that older people are more likely to have a disability than other age groups. In general, this policy should not have any adverse impact on people with disabilities. However, every effort will be made to make any of the initiatives available in a format and manner that ensures that people with a disability are not disadvantaged.

Persons with dependants and persons without

- 5.13. No adverse impact is anticipated.

Good Relations

- 5.14. Increased safety of older people is likely to lead to better relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion and racial groups.
- 5.15. Other issues may emerge and the findings will be reconsidered and the screening document finalised at the end of this consultation process when all responses have been considered. Your comments are welcome on the equality implications of this policy, particularly with regard to the following criteria that the screening has taken account of:

On which equality categories do you consider the policy will have an impact?

Is there any evidence of higher or lower participation or uptake by different groups in relation to the policy within any of the nine categories?

Is there evidence that different groups have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to the main policy areas?

Are there particular actions under any of the three aims that would help older women, older disabled people or older members of ethnic minority groups?

Is there an opportunity to better promote equality of opportunity or good relations by altering the policy, or by working with others, in Government or the community at large?

6. Responding to this consultation

- 6.1. This consultation document has highlighted the key issues around the safety of older people and outlines proposals for future actions to help reduce crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour experienced by older people.
- 6.2. Your views on the specific questions raised in the document and comments on any other relevant issues are welcomed. Responses can be forwarded as follows:

By Post: Safety of Older People Consultation
Community Safety Unit
4th Floor, Millennium House
Great Victoria Street
BELFAST
BT2 7AQ

By e-mail: csuconsultation@nio.x.gsi.gov.uk

By fax: (028) 9082 8556

- 6.3. The closing date for comments is **Wednesday 31 October 2007**.
- 6.4. This consultation document is available on www.communitysafetyni.gov.uk and the NIO's central register of consultations: www.nio.gov.uk. Further copies of this consultation document can be obtained from the above contact points, or by telephoning 028 9082 8573.
- 6.5. If the document is not in a format which meets your needs please contact us. A text-phone facility is available by phoning 028 9052 7668.
- 6.6. A list of those organisations that comment on these proposals and their comments may be published. If a response is being made on behalf of a number of people or organisations, please provide a summary of the people or organisations represented. If you would prefer your name/organisation not to be named, please let us know. Any automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will be taken to apply only

to information in your response for which confidentiality has been specifically requested.

6.7. If we are asked to disclose responses under freedom of information legislation, we will take any requests for confidentiality into account. However, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. We will handle appropriately any personal data you provide in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office (or see the website at: www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk.)

6.8. If you have any concerns about the consultation process in Northern Ireland you should contact the NIO's consultation co-ordinator. The contact details are:

Central Management Unit
Northern Ireland Office
Stormont House
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SH
E-mail cmu@nio.x.gsi.gov.uk.

Telephone: 028 9052 7015

7. Summary

- 7.1. In building safer communities, every stakeholder whether a Government agency, community or individual can make an important contribution. Working in partnership can deliver better and more sustainable outcomes and so a majority of the proposed actions will be taken forward in partnership with other relevant agencies.

- 7.2. The proposals in this consultation document outline the priorities for reducing crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour experienced by older people. They have been informed by input from a range of stakeholders across the statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

- 7.3. The responses to this draft strategy will help inform the way forward for addressing the safety of older people. The Northern Ireland Community Safety Strategy is also currently being revised. The structure and format of the new Community Safety Strategy has not been agreed and the outcome of this consultation process may be reflected, if appropriate, in that document.