



Liberties Groups Warn People Being Convicted WITHOUT TRIAL For Lockdown Breaches

Description

UK: “Hundreds of people have been wrongly charged and prosecuted under the Health Protection Regulations and the Coronavirus Act 2020?”

A coalition of liberties rights groups has warned that people in the UK are being convicted of breaking coronavirus “laws” without being provided the means to plead innocent.

The London Independent reports that cases are being processed under a system known as the ‘Single Justice Procedure’ where one magistrate decides the outcome of a case based solely on evidence supplied by police.

This means that anyone accused of breaching lockdown restrictions could be found guilty and notified by letter without even getting a court hearing.

The watchdog groups have penned a letter to the justice secretary outlining how “likely thousands” of people have been subject to miscarriages of justice, and calling for the practice to stop.

The letter states that “Hundreds of people have been wrongly charged and prosecuted under the Health Protection Regulations and the Coronavirus Act 2020 and we are concerned that many more unlawful charges brought via the Single Justice Procedure remain unchallenged.”

It continues, “These charges and prosecutions are being brought without sufficient oversight, without any meaningful review process, and are resulting in guilty pleas and convictions for offences people have not committed, in a process they may also not be aware of. The current situation is unjust and the current process is unfit for purpose.”

The Independent notes that so far a third of prosecutions in England and Wales under coronavirus laws have been proven to be wrongful, according to a review that is still ongoing.

Ministry of Justice figures reveal that 4,400 defendants were prosecuted and 3,500 convicted under such laws in 2020 alone. It is thought that close to half of those cases fell under the Single Justice

Procedure.

Most cases are believed to relate to fines that have been issued by police and not paid. However, there is currently no way of appealing the fines other than to not pay them.

Human rights lawyer Kirsty Brimelow QC told the newspaper that the “opaque” Single Justice Procedure has since its introduction in 2015 been “not easily accessible to the public”.

“It is a failing of the justice system that this has been allowed to continue when the consistent misuse and misunderstanding of the Covid laws is well known,” Brimelow urged, adding “People likely are paying financial penalties that they cannot afford in order to avoid prosecution of offences which do not exist.”

The Ministry of Justice has claimed that the Single Justice Procedure is only used for “low level, non-imprisonable crimes” and that people are able to “request an open hearing”.

As we previously highlighted, a plethora of accounts and videos have surfaced highlighting how police in the UK are enforcing lockdown rules in an increasingly draconian manner. In one incident, a man was interrogated and arrested for refusing to provide his name, while another was hauled away for giving soup to homeless people.

By Steve Watson

Date Created
06/03/2021