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UK Members of Parliament Urge Overhaul of Child Detention and Strip Search Practices in Police Custody

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Children should only be detained or strip-searched when necessary, according to a new report from MPs examining how young people are treated in police custody. The all-party parliamentary group (APPG) on children in police custody has raised concerns about the routine use of these practices, calling for changes that would better protect minors and

ensure their rights are respected. The report recommends that detention be used only as a last resort and that strip searches should happen only in exceptional circumstances, with proper oversight.

The group's findings come after a year-long inquiry and include testimonies from young people who described their experiences as confusing, distressing, and at times humiliating. Some recounted being searched without an appropriate adult present, while others spent hours in police cells without understanding what was happening or why they were there. Many of the children affected were already vulnerable, dealing with mental health challenges, disengagement from school, or involvement with social services.

One of the most significant recommendations is a 12-hour limit on the length of time children can be held in custody. The report also calls for legal representation to be made available from the outset and for a consistent presence of an appropriate adult throughout the process. MPs behind the report emphasized that the goal is to ensure children are treated in a way that reflects their age and needs, rather than being subjected to procedures that may do more harm than good.

The 2020 case of Child Q, a 15-year-old Black schoolgirl who was strip-searched at school while menstruating, continues to serve as a point of reflection for many of these reforms. Although that case led to misconduct findings and the dismissal of two officers, the APPG report suggests similar incidents are not rare and that wider cultural and procedural change is needed.

The group also highlights that children from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds are disproportionately affected by current practices. They

argue that safeguarding should be central to any police response involving minors and that policies should be rooted in child welfare rather than control.

As the government and police forces review the report's findings, there is growing interest in how these recommendations might be implemented in practice. For campaigners and MPs alike, the priority is to create a system where children are treated with care and understanding, and where serious interventions like detention or strip-searching are used only when truly necessary.