

# Diana Johnson MP

**Hull North's Voice in Parliament**  
**Labour MP for Hull North**

The Rt. Hon. Frank Field MP  
Chair  
Work and Pensions Committee  
House of Commons  
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Dear

## **Re. Request for a One-Off Evidence Session into Welfare Support for Those Affected by the Contaminated Blood Scandal**

As the Co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Haemophilia and Contaminated Blood, I am writing that the Work and Pensions Committee run a one-off evidence session to look into the welfare support available for those affected by the contaminated blood scandal.

When the scale of the contaminated blood tragedy became clear in the 1980s and 1990s, in addition to receiving ex gratia financial support the people affected were promised welfare support, such as Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and Disability Living Allowance. They were also assured that any money they received from the support schemes would be disregarded for the purposes of calculating tax liability or benefit entitlement. For those registered with some ex gratia schemes, the charities which provided them assistance provided them with benefits advice and support.

Unfortunately, the process of welfare assessment and re-assessment has broken the promise made to this community. Many have now been wrongly re-assessed as fit to work, unable to access Employment Support Allowance (ESA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP). Concerns have also been expressed about whether the assessment and re-assessment process truly accounts for the physical and mental impact this scandal has had on them, with many people with severe conditions being wrongly re-assessed as fit to work.

Many have also since encountered difficulties in ensuring that the tax and benefit disregard is applied to their ex gratia support, as the process of declaring this to the DWP has become considerably more onerous and bureaucratic than it was before. Some have even been brought into interviews under caution. For some time, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Haemophilia and Contaminated Blood has argued that this community should be passported over to ESA and/or PIP, without the need for a painful assessment or a re-assessment. We have also called for clearer guarantees that their ex gratia support will be disregarded for the purposes of calculating welfare entitlement and tax liability.

In the past year, the DWP has expressed an interest in looking into these and other ways of solving this problem, and improving the welfare support system for those affected by this tragedy. They have set up a Working Group to discuss this issue, which has met on two occasions thus far and is comprised of a number of people affected, together with a representative of the APPG from my office. At the same time, the Department's Work, Health and Disability Green Paper, which promised to look into some issues with the assessments system and came alongside changes to the re-assessments process for those with the most severe lifelong conditions, offered hope we might soon bring about improvements to the support available. We have also seen new organisations brought in across the four nations to manage the ex gratia support schemes, replacing the often mistrusted and ineffective charities which managed the support before. The APPG was therefore initially hopeful that we might soon see some positive change.

Unfortunately, despite a process of engagement lasting over a year, we have not achieved a satisfactory solution with DWP Ministers. I put a number of detailed requests to the Disabilities Minister in a letter to her some months ago (see enclosed), but in her latest letter to me (enclosed) she has refused to act on any of these concerns. She has highlighted that many of the requests we have made to them would require primary legislation, and the Government had no desire to introduce such legislation for the foreseeable future. Whilst we may soon see some positive changes to the guidance and descriptors so they are more relevant to those affected by the scandal, most of the other requests put forward by the APPG and campaigners have not been acted upon.

I feel this is doing a great disservice to the victims of the worst treatment disaster in the history of the NHS, and I am appealing to you to ask that you use the facilities of

the Work and Pensions Committee to set-up a one-off evidence session to discuss this issue. I feel that there is more the Government could do to make an exception for this very vulnerable and deserving group of people, and if this should require primary legislation, then Ministers have a duty to make these necessary changes.

The APPG on Haemophilia and Contaminated Blood would be happy to discuss this further with you in more detail, and I would also be delighted to provide further information in support of this application.

I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Diana Johnson MP

Labour Member of Parliament for Hull North and Co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Haemophilia and Contaminated Blood