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The Lord Bridges of Headley MBE
Chair, Economic Affairs Committee
The House of Lords
London SW1A 0PW

via email

Dear Lord Bridges

Re: The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms
[Justice, Power and Resistance 6\(2\): 217-228](#)⁴

I am writing in my capacity as the research lead for the Preventable Harm Project,¹ ongoing since 2009. Further to your recent published letter to Liz Kendall MP, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions² and the evidence provided for the Economic Affairs Committee by members of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP),³ may I please alert you to the above link to a research paper published in 2023 demonstrating the public health crisis created by the DWP and the UK social policy reforms.⁴

‘Duncan Smith successfully claimed that fraud was a significant problem for the growing welfare budget, which negatively impacted on what had been the past public support for the disabled community. In reality, when Duncan Smith was creating a moral panic claiming that there were excesses of fraud by benefit claimants, the DWP’s published figures were stating the opposite. In fact, ‘the fraud rate for sickness benefits is just 0.5 percent, meaning that 99.5 percent of claimants were not fraudulent’ (Garthwaite, 2014). His hostile claims about benefit claimants informed public opinion to the detriment of the chronically ill and disabled community, as reproduced by the tabloid press.’⁴

¹ [The Preventable Harm Project](#)

² [Letter from the Chair of the Economic Affairs Committee to the Rt Hon Liz Kendall MP Secretary of State for Work and Pensions](#)

³ [Parliamentlive.tv - Economic Affairs Committee](#)

⁴ [The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms: Justice, Power and Resistance Volume 6 Issue 2 \(2023\)](#)



Please be advised that the adoption of social policy reforms based on a fiscal priority, whilst disregarding health and wellbeing, was a predictable cause for a lot of the financial problems you have identified due to the '*economically inactive*' population claiming benefit for long-term health conditions when intimidated by the State. Furthermore, the relentless DWP hostility demonstrated since 2010⁴ by successive administrations towards those in greatest need has led directly to a government induced public mental health crisis, with no-one held to account and no-one accepting responsibility.^{5,6,7} A public health crisis costs a lot of money.

As a former healthcare professional, it is cause for serious concern to listen to evidence from a DWP minister claiming that she's concerned with the low level of benefit claimants leaving the security for those in greatest need placed in the Limited Capability for Work-Related Activity (LCWRA) group following an assessment, which is for claimants with the greatest and most extreme health conditions. ** Many will never, ever recover from what is a catastrophic permanent illness hence very, very few have the ability to leave the LCWRA to find work, and it is cause for concern that DWP Ministers fail to comprehend that it is very possible for someone to be chronically ill and unable to work indefinitely. This is the danger of DWP social policies devoted to a fiscal priority whilst disregarding health and wellbeing, with DWP Ministers demonstrating that they fail to comprehend the consequences of their policies.⁴⁻⁸

There is a public health crisis ongoing in this country generated by extreme right-leaning social policy reforms and dangerous sanctions, dominated by a fiscal priority and a political indifference to human need. Those in greatest need are persecuted because they are costing the DWP cash and receive no care, so their health deteriorates, which is linked to a growing government induced public health crisis enforced by relentless DWP hostile rhetoric.⁸

'The worst thing, I find, is realising that I am forced into looking for a life that I want but have no chance of having. I seriously feel I may kill myself because being sick, having next to no money, no life, no future, no cure, constant pain and constant disapproval and rejection defeats me.'⁸

This relentless DWP hostility towards those in greatest need was instigated during the Coalition administration with the adoption of austerity measures, as the then Secretary of State for Work and Pensions began his social re-engineering to discredit the welfare state and those who needed to use it. He was very successful. Disability hate crimes dramatically

⁴ [The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms: Justice, Power and Resistance Volume 6 Issue 2 \(2023\)](#)

⁵ [Preventable harm: creating a mental health crisis: Journal of Public Mental Health 18\(4\) 2019: 224-230](#)

⁶ ['First, do no harm': are disability assessments associated with adverse trends in mental health? Journal of Epidemiol Community Health 2016; 70: 339-345](#)

⁷ [Dismantling the social safety net: social security reforms, disability and mental health conditions. BJPsych Bulletin, Volume 44, Issue 5, October 2020, pp.208 - 212](#)

⁸ [Fulfilling Potential? ESA and the fate of the Work-Related Activity Group. Sheffield, The Centre for Welfare Reform, 2014](#)



increased by 213 percent⁹ during the Coalition government's term in office (2010- 15), and chronically ill and disabled people are dying in their thousands when, quite literally, 'killed by the state'.¹⁰ This, Lord Bridges, is an ongoing national scandal which you are encouraging.²

In your letter to the Secretary of State² you advise that [the very limited] evidence accessed by the Committee *'received no convincing evidence that the main driver of the rise in these benefits is deteriorating health or high NHS waiting lists, the Government should instead focus on the benefit system itself; and whether the system is dealing effectively with protecting those with health problems while providing support in helping them back into employment.'*²

May I suggest that if you access the links to published research evidence included in this letter – not commissioned or generated by the DWP or right-leaning think tanks – you would be much better informed as to the ongoing government induced public health crisis. Forcing people who are unable to work to search for work will increase suicides but will do very little else.¹¹ I strongly suggest that the DWP stop the relentless hostility.¹⁰ Liz Kendall should be encouraged to change her script instead of duplicating Conservative rhetoric. If the hostility towards disability benefit claimants ends and the consequent public hostility to the disabled community reduces, then many more benefit claimants will have the confidence to seek employment. Threatening chronically ill and disabled people does not reduce the welfare budget and, clearly, the Office for Budget Responsibility identifies this crisis as developing since 2010 when the Coalition administration began their social re-engineering by persecuting the disabled community to encourage private health insurance.¹⁰

Actions have always had consequences and the hostility of the DWP betrayed the trust of those in greatest need. This is now 'the norm' in the UK and is totally unwarranted.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mo Stewart', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mo Stewart

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Copied to: Professor Ben Geiger, Kings College London
Professor Jonathan Portes, Kings College London
Dr Jed Boardman, Consultant Psychiatrist/Senior Lecturer in Social Psychiatry

² [Letter from the Chair of the Economic Affairs Committee to the Rt Hon Liz Kendall MP Secretary of State for Work and Pensions](#)

⁹ [EXCLUSIVE: Hate crimes on disabled rise by 213% | UK | News | Express.co.uk](#)

¹⁰ [Killed By The State? Social Policy Abused, the Centre for Welfare Reform, November 2020](#)

¹¹ [The Department: How a Violent Government Bureaucracy Killed Hundreds and Hid the Evidence: Amazon.co.uk: Pring, John: 9780745349893: Books](#)