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Date: 28th November, 2024

Alison McGovern MP
Minister for Employment
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9NA

via email

Dear Minister

Re: The public health crisis created by the UK social policy reforms

[Justice, Power and Resistance 6\(2\): 217-228](#)¹

Some of your colleagues who are familiar with my work invited me to write to you in my capacity as the research lead for the Preventable Harm Project² to alert you to the above published paper. Collated over several years, the evidence demonstrates the ongoing public health crisis directly linked to social policy reforms adopted during the coalition and Conservative governments' years in office, only to find that the Labour administration elected in July 2024 has continued to threaten those in greatest need who are unable to work.^{2,3}

Given that part of your responsibilities as Minister for Employment is disability employment, please be advised that the relentless claims by Ministers at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is causing an identified mental health crisis within the chronically ill and disabled community who are unable to work, and who will never be able to work. This is a concept not acknowledged by various DWP Ministers, with the Secretary of State – Liz Kendall MP - once again demonstrating her failure to acknowledge the needs of the chronically ill community who will never be well enough to consider paid employment.³

¹ [The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms in: Justice, Power and Resistance Volume 6 Issue 2 \(2023\)](#)

² [The Preventable Harm Project](#)

³ [Fresh DWP fears after Kendall helps launch report that calls for 'duty to engage' and cuts to disability benefits – Disability News Service](#)



“Comments by new work and pensions secretary Liz Kendall, and her support for a controversial report, suggests she wants to increase pressure on disabled people to move off benefits and into work, while disregarding risks to their health.

Kendall announced this week that she wanted the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to move from being “a department for welfare” to becoming “a genuine department for work”. ...

The report focuses strongly on the need to push more people with long-term health conditions into work and includes a controversial recommendation for DWP to introduce a “duty to engage” with employment support.

This would mean disabled people who currently do not have to engage with the department and its work coaches – for health or disability-related reasons – would be forced to do so. ...

Despite its calls to force more disabled people into work – and to cut benefits – the report completely ignores the serious safeguarding issues within the DWP, including those linked to the work capability assessment (WCA) process and universal credit and associated with efforts to pressure disabled people into work or work-related activity.

Kendall and her party have themselves repeatedly ignored the DWP safeguarding issues in the lead-up to the election, and since they won power. ...

Disability News Service (DNS) established yesterday (Wednesday) that not a single disabled people’s organisation is listed as a contributor to the commission’s work, and that none of its 12 commissioners self-describes as a disabled person in their profiles on the commission website. ...

DNS pointed out to the council yesterday that [countless deaths](#) have been linked to DWP’s actions over the last 14 years, including suicides of universal credit claimants and those forced through the WCA process.

But despite the report calling for reform of the WCA and for “more regular reviews of work capability” through the “duty to engage”, there is no mention of the potential risks to disabled claimants. ...

Labour’s Debbie Abrahams warned fellow MPs that there were many disabled people “for whom the possibility of working is unrealistic” and she said that “disabled people have been absolutely battered by consecutive Conservative governments”.

She said: “We need to ensure that the right to adequate social protection and social security is in place, and we know that is not the case at the moment. We must do better, not just in changing the culture of the Department for Work and Pensions, but in recognising the extra costs, the fear and the poverty disabled people face and feel, because otherwise I fear that we will be seeing more deaths of disabled claimants”.³ *Disability News Service, 25th July 2024*

³ [Fresh DWP fears after Kendall helps launch report that calls for ‘duty to engage’ and cuts to disability benefits – Disability News Service](#)

Furthermore, comments found in Labour Party posters are cause for serious concern claiming, for example: “If you have a health condition or disability but don’t want to be written off, we will offer you a pathway back to work”. Not only is this another example of thinly veiled intimidation by the DWP towards those in greatest need, it is also another demonstration that DWP Ministers seem incapable of comprehending that there are many very serious chronic health conditions that means the sufferer will never be able to work; regardless of endless DWP ill conceived commentary and demonstrated brutality towards those in greatest need. Once again, we have examples of DWP Ministers demonstrating a catastrophic indifference to human need, with social policies adopted using a fiscal priority whilst disregarding the health, wellbeing and, often, the survival of those in greatest need as this identified “institutional violence”⁴ continues to target the chronically ill and disabled community.



⁴ Violent bureaucracy: A critical analysis of the British public employment service. Jamie Redman and Del Roy Fletcher, Sheffield Hallum University, England [Critical Social Policy 2022, Vol. 42\(2\): 306-326](#)



Furthermore, I offer access to evidence provided for the Work and Pensions Committee inquiry regarding how vulnerable claimants can be better safeguarded,⁵ which is now ongoing with the newly appointed Committee. At some point it is hoped that DWP Ministers stop the relentless persecution of the chronically ill and disabled community which is directly linked to suicides⁶ and, finally, the DWP could acknowledge that there are many for whom paid employment is an unrealistic expectation.

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mo Stewart', written in a cursive style.

Mo Stewart

Fellow, Centre for Welfare Reform
Research Lead, Preventable Harm Project



“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”
Martin Luther-King Jr

Author [*'Cash Not Care: the planned demolition of the UK welfare state'*](#)

Producer [*The Preventable Harm Project*](#)

Editor [*Influences and Consequences*](#)

⁵ [Written evidence to the Work and Pensions Committee, October 2023: SVC0025](#)

⁶ [The Department for Work and Pensions: Deaths, cover-up, and a toxic 30-year legacy – Disability News Service](#)

Copied to:

Debbie Abrahams MP – Chair, Work and Pensions Committee

Layla Moran MP – Chair, Health and Social Care Committee