



Petitions Committee

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Mr Speaker
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

20 May 2020

Dear Mr Speaker,

In light of the decision of the Government not to bring forward any extension to the hybrid proceedings in the House of Commons, and their expectation that Members should therefore be returning to Westminster, I am writing regarding the arrangements for debates scheduled by the Petitions Committee.

Since the House agreed not to undertake business in Westminster Hall on 19th March, it has not been possible for petitions that have each received more than 100,000 signatures to be debated by MPs. There are currently 22 petitions, which combined have received many millions of signatures, that have yet to be debated. In the two months since debates were suspended, my Committee has been able to conduct online evidence sessions with petitioners, experts and Ministers, and has conducted a range of digital public engagement, receiving the views of tens of thousands of people. However, the people who have started and signed these petitions did so with the expectation of these being debated and their issues put directly to Ministers.

The Leader of the House has repeatedly argued that we must be in Westminster to conduct effective scrutiny. If we are expected to be in Westminster, then it is only right that millions of petitioners should be able to see us debating the issues that matter to them. I am therefore asking that as part of the work to reopen the House in a safe, social-distanced way, urgent consideration is given to how Westminster Hall or another forum can be opened up for petitions debates as soon as possible.

I am writing in similar terms to the Leader of the House.

Best wishes,

Catherine McKinnell MP
Chair of the Petitions Committee