



Petitions Committee

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Rt Hon Jacob Rees-Mogg MP
Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons

9 July 2020

Dear Jacob,

I am grateful for the time in the House of Commons Chamber that the Government granted to the Petitions Committee on 25 June. As you will have seen, the two debates we scheduled, on pay and reward for NHS and care workers and support for UK industries, were over-subscribed and subject to very short time limits. This is testament to the importance of the issues being raised by petitioners and of the interest from Members in debating them.

When the House returns in September, it will have been almost 6 months since we have been able to schedule petitions for debate in Westminster Hall. During this period we will have completed two inquiries—on parental leave and Covid-19 and on refunding student fees—and started a third on tackling online abuse. We have also conducted a wide range of public engagement on petitions and Government responses to these.

Next week, on Wednesday 15 July, we will be holding our first ‘e-petition session’ in which Members from across the House will be invited to participate in our evidence session as we question the Government on the easing of Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. Innovations like this are currently the only way we can guarantee petitioners’ concerns can be heard, but they are no substitute for the Westminster Hall debates that the public expect for petitions that secure over 100,000 signatures. There are currently 28 petitions awaiting debate, including several from the last Parliament, and it is essential to the public’s trust in the petitions system, and Parliament, that these petitions are given a chance for debate at the earliest opportunity.

I am grateful to the work of everyone who has ensured that the House and its Committees can meet and scrutinise the work of Government, but petitioners cannot continue wait indefinitely for opportunities for proper debate. I would be grateful if you could provide an update on plans to reopen Westminster Hall, and confirm that if this is not possible by the time the House returns in September the Government will find more chamber time that my Committee can use for petitions debates, in order to represent the views of the many

millions of petitioners who are still waiting for their concerns to be heard in Parliament.

I am copying this letter to Mr Speaker.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Catherine". The script is cursive and fluid, with a large initial 'C'.

Catherine McKinnell MP
Chair of the Petitions Committee