



Petitions Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 7614 Email petitionscommittee@parliament.uk

Website www.parliament.uk/petitions-committee

To all Committee Chairs

House of Commons

21 April 2020

Dear Chair

I am writing to all Committee Chairs in relation to the coronavirus outbreak because of the unprecedented number of e-petitions we are receiving on this issue, which combined have received over 3,000,000 signatures and continue to grow.

I know many of your own Committees are already undertaking their own work looking at the impact of, and the Government's response to, the coronavirus outbreak, and I wanted to highlight the many e-petitions we have received about coronavirus, some of which are likely to be of interest to your Committee. I also wanted to explore opportunities for us to collaborate on some of the issues raised by these petitions.

In normal times, we get in touch with the relevant departmental select committee teams when we receive a Government response to a petition, and when we schedule a Westminster Hall debate on an e-petition. We also alert petitioners to relevant activity by other committees if they have looked at an issue raised by a petition. We are continuing to inform committee teams about Government responses, and bring relevant committee activity to the attention of petitioners, although because of the suspension of sittings in Westminster Hall there are currently no e-petition debates taking place.

Because of the number of e-petitions we have received in relation to coronavirus, and the fact it is not possible for us to schedule debates on these, we have already held a virtual evidence session on the Government's response to coronavirus with representatives from several departments, and written to ministers asking for answers to other questions. Many of the questions we asked at our session and in correspondence were informed by a digital survey which was sent to everyone who had signed a petition relating to coronavirus, asking the public what questions they most wanted answers to, and received over 30,000 responses.

We were delighted to have colleagues from the Work and Pensions Committee join us at our virtual evidence session, and support from other teams, and my Committee team has been in touch with relevant departmental select committees to make sure you have seen the transcript of this and any exchanges of correspondence with the departments you are responsible for scrutinising.

The transcript and video of our virtual evidence session are available here: <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/326/petitions-committee/news/145767/committee-question-deputy-chief-medical-officer-and-ministers-on-coronavirus-response/>

And all correspondence with ministers about the Government's response is available here:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/326/petitions-committee/publications/3/correspondence/>

We have also been supporting Committees conducting their own work into coronavirus, where this would benefit from the input of people who have signed e-petitions. We have already facilitated a number of Committees who wanted contributions from the public, by circulating calls for evidence, surveys and other requests for information to people who have signed relevant petitions, and we are happy to do this for other Committees where this would be helpful. The Petitions Committee team can provide your teams with advice on what's worked well and how best to target contact with petitioners without overwhelming Committees with submissions.

All live petitions relating to coronavirus can be found on our website here: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions?state=open&topic=covid-19>.

Government responses, where these have been received, are available on each petition's page. You may find, as we have, that petitions can highlight issues that may have been overlooked by Government and Parliament in this fast-moving situation.

If Committees are planning evidence sessions on issues that have been raised in e-petitions, Members of my Committee are also open to invitations to guest at these to represent petitioners, if that would be helpful. Where we undertake inquiries and public engagement, we will also seek to include other relevant Committees as much as possible.

I hope you find the above information useful, and the proposals constructive, and if you would like to work with my Committee on the above please let me know, or have your Committee team contact the Petitions Committee team.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Catherine'. The script is cursive and fluid, with a large initial 'C'.

Catherine McKinnell MP
Chair of the Petitions Committee