



Work and Pensions Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 8976 Email workpencom@parliament.uk

From the Chair

Will Quince MP

Minister for Welfare Delivery

April 2020

Dear Will,

As you know, last month the High Court in England found that the conditions for Bereavement Support Payment are incompatible with human rights law, because payments are not made to bereaved partners who were living with but not married to, or in a civil partnership with, their partner. We were pleased to hear that the DWP will not appeal the High Court judgement.

The previous Work and Pensions Committee looked into DWP's support for the bereaved in 2017, with a follow up inquiry in 2019. You will remember that, in 2019, the previous Committee recommended that the Department run a consultation on options for reform to both Widowed Parent's Allowance and Bereavement Support Payment. That recommendation followed the evidence you gave our predecessor Committee about the complexity of making the necessary changes while avoiding unintended negative consequences.

Following the announcement that DWP have accepted the High Court judgement, might you please let the Committee know:

- 1) What changes will you now make to Bereavement Support Payment to bring it into compliance with human rights law? Given the enormous pressure the Department is currently under, when do you expect to be able to make progress with this work?
- 2) Will you also now respond to the similar 2018 Supreme Court judgement on Widowed Parent's Allowance?
- 3) Will the Department backdate payments for people who have missed out on bereavement benefits because they were cohabiting?
- 4) How will the Department involve key stakeholders—including charities, support organisations and bereaved people themselves—in your consideration of how the rules should be changed?
- 5) When can the Committee expect a response to our predecessor's 2019 report which gave detailed recommendations to improve bereavement support for claimants? In particular, do you now plan to consult on how the court's ruling should be implemented, as that report recommended?

I look forward to your reply, recognising that the impact on DWP of the coronavirus outbreak may well mean that you are not able to reply as quickly as usual



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With all best wishes,

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stephen Timms".

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP

Chair, Work and Pensions Committee



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