

Written evidence from Miss Siobhan McLaughlin (DBB0007)

When my partner John was no longer able to work because of his health issues. He had terminal lung, liver and spleen cancer. He had no option but to claim benefits for us. I say us because of the way of the benefits system, this system classed us then as a married couple.

The day John died, our benefits stopped too.

Caring for 4 children who were in shock, organising and going through John's funeral, I foolishly left it a week before going to the social security office to reapply for benefits now in my name. Foolish because I know now, no claim regardless of circumstances is quick and my rent is now in arrears.

For my children not to have grown up in an environment where they would think life on benefits was a normal way of life. As soon as I was mentally able, I returned to work.

My position as a Special Educational Needs classroom assistant didn't and doesn't unfortunately warrant a large wage. I, therefore, took on an evening position of cleaning in a school as well as working every weekend housekeeping in a local hotel.

To have allowed my children to have a mum now not reliant on benefits what price have they paid for such pride?

I was no longer there for them returning from school with their home nice and warm, dinner cooking, helping My youngest, who after all was still in primary school, with her homework.

Resentment was building between my eldest son and my eldest daughter, whose turn is it to heat the dinner up, who's doing the dishes. The family around the dinner table talking, sharing our day, laughing, having banter, being close and feeling loved was long gone. Instead, it was now just a house with my children turning against me because I was no longer there for them.

They'd already lost their dad, now to pay the rent and bills they had also lost me.

It wasn't even that my wages from the 3 jobs brought about an improvement in lifestyle, where an ice cream for four children from the ice cream van is classed as a luxury item. There was just no way either of my youngest would ever be able to enjoy and take part in the school trips that Their elder siblings had loved.

My children, through absolutely no fault of their own, have had to struggle, since their dad died.

It is fantastic the government are finally righting the wrongs and allowing children, like mine, born out of wedlock to be in receipt of Bereavement Support Payment. Even backdating it to the Supreme Court ruling in 2018.

Of my four children, what impact will this have on them?

My youngest daughter, still in her last year of primary school when her dad died has now completed her secondary education after finishing her A levels in the summer.

7 years.

With money being a factor she turned down her place in Dundee University to study English Lit. She is now working to hopefully allow her to go next year instead.

At nearly 25, my eldest daughter is starting her Veterinary Nursing Degree in Dumfries. Between studying to achieve this she took on two jobs. She's now had to have a job lined up to allow her to be in uni, fortunately, it's between her classes and assignments.

My eldest son had to drop out of the University of Ulster in Londonderry because of anxiety and depression brought on by taking on responsibilities when he was struggling with his grief. He would love to return to his studies and finish his business studies degree.

My youngest son is struggling to find his purpose, he feels irrelevant.

I look at our lives and wonder if my children had been eligible for the Support Payment just how different would their lives have been?

The reality of grey and cold to the what-if of technicolour and sunshine?

After winning our case in The High Court in 2016 I feel so strongly that my children deserve to have their payments pushed back to 2014, when not only their dad died but also the life and stability they knew too.

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