

Written evidence submitted by Carers UK (PMB 16)

Context

1. Carers UK is a national membership charity of carers – we work to represent and support the 6.5 million people in the UK who provide unpaid care for ill, older or disabled relatives or friend.
2. As a charity pressing for better rights and recognition for carers we, as an organisation, have significant experience of supporting Private Members' Bills in Parliament. Indeed, Private Members' Bills have been enormously important in building carers' rights. Until the Care Act 2014 came into force, the rights of carers in the social care system existed only in private members' legislation brought forward by backbench Parliamentarians and the rights of adult carers for disabled children who do not have parental responsibility still exist because of this legislation.
 - Carers (Recognition & Services) Act 1995 promoted by Malcolm Wicks MP.
 - Carers & Disabled Children Act 2000 promoted by Tom Pendry MP.
 - Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004 promoted by Dr Hywel Francis, MP.
3. Given that Private Members' Bills have been so important for carers' rights, Carers UK believes Private Members Bills should be recognised as an important legislative measure for change.

Park the Charges Campaign

4. The Hospital Parking Charges (Exemption for Carers) Bill 2015-16 was tabled by Julie Cooper MP. This was a Private Members Bill which had its Second Reading on 30 October 2015.

Our support for the Bill consisted of:

- A dedicated page on our website for carers and carers organisations affected by hospital parking charges to sign up to show their support for the Bill and to share their stories of how hospital parking charges have affected them.
- We encouraged carers and the public to write to their MPs with information about the Bill to ask them to attend the debate and support the Bill.

- We issued a press release with a quote from Julie Cooper MP to highlight the issues presented in the Bill in order to gain public support for the Bill. The main news story consisted of recently published HSCIC data to demonstrate an increase in the percentage of hospitals charging patients and visitors to park and an increase in the cost of parking itself.
 - Production of briefing materials for Members of Parliament to provide evidence of support for the Bill, including; best practice case studies, evidence from carers, and analysis about the impact of the charges on carers.
 - Following the debate and a change in guidance was announced by the Minister which Carers UK welcomed. A draft letter resource was produced for carers to amend as they saw fit and to send to their local NHS Trust to make them aware of the new parking guidance issued by the Government following the debate.
5. The 'Park the Charges' campaign itself was supported by over 2,000 carers and organisations including charities such as Alzheimer's Society, MS Society, Leonard Cheshire Disability and Contact a Family.

Our experience

6. Based on evidence from carers, Carers UK has long argued that hospital parking charges place an unfair burden on those caring for ill, older or disabled friends and family members and asked for a 'carer friendly hospitals scheme' including free or discounted hospital car parking for carers in our 2015 Manifesto¹.
7. Carers UK's own research indicated that hospital parking charges are a significant issue for carers, both financially in terms of the huge costs of parking putting a strain on household finances, and emotionally, with carers telling us about the stress and anxiety of running back to purchase a ticket while loved ones were seriously ill in hospital.
8. Introducing free parking in hospitals has been proposed by a number of MPs from various political parties. A Government Minister, Robert Halfon MP ran a major campaign against hospital parking charges in 2014. In the same year a Backbench Business Debate was tabled by Jackie Doyle-Price, Conservative MP for Thurrock, who also argued against the charges. In 2009, then Labour Health Secretary Andy Burnham MP promised to scrap parking charges and launched a consultation. Despite such campaigns from across the House on the

¹ Carers UK (2015) Carers Manifesto

issue, there was little to suggest the Government was actively looking at taking action on hospital parking charges.

9. Within this context we welcomed Julie Cooper MP's decision to develop a Private Members Bill on hospital parking charges for carers. As Julie Cooper MP was placed 6th in the ballot, it was likely that the Bill would receive a Second Reading Debate. While we hoped to encourage enough MPs were present to vote, and were hopeful of this given previous cross party support for the measure included in the Bill, we were aware that there was a strong chance that not enough MPs would turn up and that the Bill would be 'talked out'.
10. Acknowledging this possibility, Carers UK felt that supporting the Bill was still valuable given the opportunity for Parliamentarians to debate an issue that is of significant importance to many carers and the Bill provided an opportunity to raise awareness of this important issue with Government officials and Ministers who could take the opportunity to thoroughly review policy on this matter as well as the public more widely.

Bill debate and outcomes

11. The quality of the debate on the Bill and the impact of its provisions was affected by parliamentary tactics such as 'talking out' of a Bill.
12. This meant that those MPs who were not in favour of the Bill made long speeches that sought to take up the maximum amount of time. In contrast, those in favour of the Bill were forced to make short speeches, so as not to take up more time. The constriction of such speeches hindered the quality of the debate by not allowing MPs in favour of the Bill the opportunity to fully address concerns put forward by those opposing the Bill.
13. It was the Care Minister Alistair Burt who eventually 'talked out the Bill' acknowledging his role in preventing the legislation going forward by stating:

"The reason why I am carrying on speaking is that I am not going to leave it to any of my colleagues to do the procedural business of talking the Bill out; that must fall to me."

(Hansard, 30 Oct 2015: Column 686)

Conclusion

14. While Carers UK was disappointed that the Bill did not pass, we welcomed the concessions made by Government in response to the Bill to provide additional

guidance to hospitals to include carers in parking concessions. The Private Members Bill process was therefore valuable to carers in this instance.

15. Lastly, it is important that whatever changes are proposed should consider the opportunity provided for backbench MPs to bring forward legislation on important societal issues which in our experience has been a positive one for carers.

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