

The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

Monday 2nd December 2013

Dear Prime Minister,

This week we wrote to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions setting out the devastating impact on disabled people, their families and carers as a result of the 'spare room' cuts to Housing Benefit.

In that letter, we expressed our frustration at repeated reports that 'disabled people are exempt'. They are not. As we had warned, the Government's discretionary fund of temporary support for disabled people is inadequate and completely inappropriate for those with long-term housing needs. Far from being exempt or protected, day after day we are seeing the evidence that disabled people and their families are amongst the hardest hit by this policy.

We are writing to you as we were deeply disappointed by your remarks in the House of Commons on Wednesday 27th November which stated that disabled people are exempt.

In response to a question about the impact on disabled people of these changes, you stated:

“Obviously, what we have done is to exempt disabled people who need an extra room.¹”

This follows a similar statement you made in Parliament in March:

“People with severely disabled children are exempt and people who need round-the-clock care are exempt.²”

And a further statement in July:

“When it comes to the spare room subsidy, anyone who needs to have a carer sleeping in another bedroom is exempt from it.³”

None of these situations reflect the reality of the Government's policy.

We are now even more concerned that the effects the policy is having on disabled people and their families are not understood in Government.

The policy offers only two very limited exemptions for disabled people – for some disabled children who cannot share with siblings and for disabled tenants or their partners who need a room for someone who does not live with them to come in to provide overnight care.

This means that most disabled people and carers are not exempt, including:

¹ 27 Nov 2013 : Column 254

² 6 Mar 2013 : Column 949

³ 10 July 2013 : Column 356

- Disabled, seriously or terminally ill people who need round the clock care and who cannot share a room with their partners because of disrupted sleep or the need for hospital beds or medical equipment through the night.
- Parents of disabled children who need an extra room so that one of them can sleep whilst the other provides overnight care.
- Families of disabled children who need overnight care workers to stay to give them a break from providing care throughout the night (the 'overnight care' exemption mentioned above only applies to tenants and their partners - not to disabled children).
- Disabled and ill people whose extra accommodation is needed for home adaptations or equipment, including dialysis machines, oxygen tanks, hoists and wheelchairs.

All of these groups are being told this essential accommodation is 'spare' and are facing an average bill of £700 a year as a result.

When senior Government figures state that these families are exempt when they are not, our organisations have to respond to the false hope this generates. We receive the relieved calls and messages from families who are struggling to pay their rent shortfall, and it falls to us to tell those families that they are, in fact, subject to these cuts and are not exempt.

The Government has responded that discretionary relief is available, but we laid out our evidence about the failures of the Government's discretionary fund in our letter to the Secretary of State.

To you, we repeat our call for urgent exemptions including those which you have described, but which sadly are not currently part of Government policy.

You said on Wednesday that this policy reflects a fundamental question of fairness. Surely, if disabled people, those with serious and terminal illnesses and carers caring for their loved ones need additional accommodation, they should not be told this space is 'spare' and forced to pay or apply again and again for insufficient, temporary support just to stay in their own homes.

Yours sincerely,

Heléna Herklots, Chief Executive, **Carers UK**

Liz Sayce OBE, Chief Executive, **Disability Rights UK**

Janine Tregelles, Chief Executive, **Royal Mencap Society**

Lesley-Anne Alexander CBE, Chief Executive, **Royal National Institute of Blind People**

Deborah Jack, Chief Executive, **NAT (National AIDS Trust)**

Paul Jenkins, Chief Executive, **Rethink Mental Illness**

Alison Garnham, Chief Executive, **Child Poverty Action Group**

Sally Light, Chief Executive, **Motor Neurone Disease Association**

Gillian Morbey OBE, Chief Executive, **Sense**

Richard Leaman, Chief Executive, **Guide Dogs**

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Paul Soames, Chief Executive, **Contact a Family**

Jane Harris, Managing Director, Campaigns and Engagement, **Leonard Cheshire Disability**

Sonya Chowdhury, Chief Executive Officer, **Action for M.E.**

Robert Meadowcroft, Chief Executive, **Muscular Dystrophy Campaign**

Paul Lenihan MBE, Chief Executive, **Action Duchenne**

Beatrice Barleon, Campaign Manager, **Every Disabled Child Matters**

Teresa Catto-Smith, Founder, **Autism in Scotland**

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