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The Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP
Minister of State for Social Security and Disability
The Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9NA

via email

Dear Sir Stephen

Many congratulations on the success of the Labour Party at the general election and on your appointment as a Minister at the DWP (Department for Work and Pensions).

In the recent past one of your former colleagues made statements which were cause for serious concern to the chronically ill and disabled community, demonstrating his lack of awareness of the clinical needs of chronically ill disability benefit claimants placed in the Support Group following a WCA (Work Capability Assessment) which, by definition, means that they are so ill that they are not required or expected to search for employment.¹

In a major policy speech, Jonathan Ashworth said that only 25 of those in the support group of employment and support allowance (ESA) return to work every year, which was a 'monumental waste of the talents of British people'.

But he also appeared to blame those in the ESA support group for this 'huge economic cost' which 'undermines economic growth' and 'leaves the taxpayer with an increased health-related benefit bill'.

This echoes comments by [Conservative](#) and [Labour](#) politicians that repeatedly scapegoated disabled claimants for the country's economic problems in post-2010 austerity years.

There was no mention by Ashworth of the links between back-to-work pressure placed on disabled people by the DWP over the last decade and the [deaths of disabled claimants](#).¹

Given your recent experience as Chair of the Work and Pensions Select Committee from January 2020 to May 2024, you are alert to the identified preventable harm created by

¹ Labour government will push for jobs for 'not fit for work' group, says Ashworth
[Disability News Service, 12th January 2023](#)



successive administrations negatively impacting on the health, wellbeing and survival of many of those in greatest need, as demonstrated in my detailed submission to the Committee in October 2023.²

The addition of relentless hostile government rhetoric adopted by the Coalition administration (2010-15) (Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018) to intimidate disability benefit claimants to remove the past psychological security of the welfare state, when aided by hostile banner headlines in the tabloid press (Sumpter, 2011), coincided with an increase of 213% in prosecuted disability hate crimes for the duration of the Coalition administration's term in office (Wheeler, 2015; Reilly 2021). Hence, '*... in the area of poverty-related policy, the evidence points to the conclusion that the driving force has not been economic but rather a commitment to radical social re-engineering*' (Alston, 2018). This identified '*radical social re-engineering*' was necessary in advance of the future planned demolition of the UK welfare state (Stewart, 2016).²

Therefore, you will appreciate that recent claims by the new Labour Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has caused great concerns within the disabled community, as she wasted no time repeating very similar claims as used by the outgoing Conservative party when seemingly continuing with the '*DWP claimant-blaming*' rhetoric, which is not only deeply disturbing and offensive but is also based on ideology and is totally untrue.³ It's past time to change the relentless political rhetoric attacking those in greatest need.⁴

In its first six days of government, after a crushing general election victory, Labour had mentioned disabled people just once in more than 19,000 words across 28 speeches and press releases, and that brief reference focused on disabled children. But on the seventh day, just after midnight, work and pensions secretary [Liz Kendall announced](#) that rising levels of economic inactivity were 'unacceptable' and 'immediate action' must be taken, stressing the record 2.8 million people who were out of work due to 'long-term sickness'.

Although the language used was not as hostile as that used by the last Conservative government, Kendall still said this morning (Thursday) that economic inactivity was 'holding Britain back' and was 'bad for people, bad for business, and it's bad for growth'.

The early response this morning from [at least some disabled people](#) was that she was 'blaming those too ill to work for holding Britain back'.³

² Inquiry into safeguarding vulnerable claimants: evidence provided for the Work & Pensions Committee [Written-evidence-to-WPSC-safeguarding-vulnerable-claimants.pdf \(mostewartresearch.co.uk\)](#) October 2023

³ Six days and 19,000 words into a new government, and just one mention of disability... then DWP claimant-blaming begins again [Six days and 19,000 words into a new government, and just one mention of disability... then DWP claimant-blaming begins again – Disability News Service](#) 11th July 2024

⁴ The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms. [Justice, Power and Resistance 6\(2\): 217-228](#)



I note with great interest your stated intention to ensure that *'disabled people's views and voices are at the heart of all we do'*.⁵ May I therefore respectfully suggest that you alert the Secretary of State to your intentions as, if she continues with her thinly veiled attacks on those in greatest need, the chronically ill and disabled community who have suffered so much in the past 14 years will be no better off under the new Labour government when compared with the increasingly hostile rhetoric of the outgoing Conservative administration.⁶

The prime minister has been accused of whipping up hostility towards disabled people, and demonising and scapegoating claimants of disability benefits, with a new series of 'chilling' reforms that will weaken the social security net.⁶

I have yet to hear of any DWP Minister in any administration apologise for the identified public health crisis⁴ created by successive social policy reforms, or to acknowledge the preventable harm⁷ created by successive administrations who relentlessly intimidate those in greatest need who now live in fear of the DWP. This, Minister, is shameful.

Now that [disability benefit fraud is zero](#), a lot of people hope that you can influence colleagues at the DWP and that this relentless, hostile political rhetoric will be brought to an end.

Many thanks for your time and I wish you well as DWP Minister.

Yours, most sincerely

Mo Stewart

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Author ['Cash Not Care: the planned demolition of the UK welfare state'](#)

Producer [The Preventable Harm Project](#)

Editor [Influences and Consequences](#)

Copied to: Alison McGovern MP, Baroness Sherlock OBE, Dr Marie Tidball MP, John Pring, *Disability News Service*

⁴ The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms. [Justice, Power and Resistance 6\(2\): 217-228](#)

⁵ New disability minister pledges to put disabled people's voices at the heart of government's work
[Disability News Service](#) 18th July 2024

⁶ Sunak's 'chilling, threatening' speech on benefits 'demonised disabled people'
[Disability News Service](#) 25th April 2024

⁷ [The Preventable Harm Project](#)