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23 March 2016

The Rt Hon Stephen Crabb, MP,  
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions,  
Department of Work and Pensions,  
Caxton House,  
Tothill,  
SW1H 9NA

Dear Mr Crabb,

Congratulations on your appointment to the post of Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, which we believe to be a vital one, having an enormous impact on the lives of some of the most disadvantaged people in our country.

As fellow Christians, people brought up in the Christian faith and those inspired by the life of Jesus, we are writing to ask that at the approach of Easter – a time for renewal and new life – you reflect upon the impact of current welfare policies. We would request that you carefully consider the best way forward. We welcome the fact that in your first speech as Secretary of State you expressed the wish to enter into dialogue with disabled people and groups. We hope that in that spirit of openness you will hear our concerns.

We are very pleased to see that your first action in office has been to reverse the cuts to Personal Independence Payments (PIP). We ask that you go even further. Previous changes in PIP have led to people losing benefits, despite having high levels of need. For example, altering the mobility criteria to the ability to walk no more than 20 metres from 50 metres, has led to thousands losing Motability cars and left many housebound. (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-35476904>)

On Employment and Support Allowance, we note that you recently voted for the £30 per week cut for all new claimants in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG). We feel it is not compassionate to expect a person struggling with a disability or health condition to live on £73 per week for what may be several years, so we would ask you to show compassion by reversing the ESA cut. We understand from a recent article that you may believe, in common with many MPs, that people in WRAG are able to work. We would like to point out that the WRAG is, in fact, for people who cannot currently work, but may be able to return to work at some point in the future.

In addition, we continue to be extremely concerned about the impact of benefit sanctions on the health of sick and disabled people, particularly those with mental health problems (<http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/resources/rethinksanctions/>) and learning disabilities. It surely cannot be compassionate to leave people with no income to even buy food, simply for

missing a Jobcentre appointment. It is distressing to us that individuals and families are forced to turn to foodbanks to survive following a benefit sanction.

We also remain concerned by the so-called 'bedroom tax' (spare room subsidy), which disproportionately penalises disabled people. You are no doubt aware that your department has been involved in protracted court action in order to compel your constituent Paul Rutherford, who cares for his severely disabled grandson, (<http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/government-loses-bedroom-tax-case-10794477>) to pay the 'bedroom tax.' We would ask that your department acts with compassion by dropping this case and by abolishing the levy.

We would also ask you to immediately examine the way your department has in the past responded to letters from coroners regarding the deaths of benefit claimants, particularly the Rule 43 'prevention of future deaths' process (<http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-dismissed-coroners-concerns-over-wca-suicide-link-document-reveals/>) as relating to the death of Stephen Carre.

When Mr Duncan Smith resigned he suggested that welfare reform and cuts to benefits for working age people had gone too far. We agree, and believe that now is the time to take stock and begin to adopt a different approach. Between us, we have many ideas about how this might be achieved and would like to meet you to discuss these proposals alongside some of the sick and disabled people with whom we work.

As Christians, we are inspired by the words of James (2:15-16): *"If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled' without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?"*

We continue to believe that a supportive welfare state is an expression of Christian justice and compassion and that a nation should be judged on how well it treats those who require extra support. We also believe that as a wealthy country, we can afford the support necessary for everyone to live a dignified life. At the moment, we believe the social security system is failing to provide such support to some of the people who most need it, but we believe that by working together we could change that.

We would, above all, ask you to think of benefit claimants as being no different to you or a member of your family, and to ensure that all policies are devised and implemented in a way that offers them the respect and compassion you would wish for yourself or a loved one.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. We look forward to your response, and hope you will agree to our request for a meeting.

We remain your sisters and brothers in Christ,

- Simon Barrow, co-director; Jonathan Bartley, co-director; Virginia Moffatt, chief operating officer (Ekklesia think tank)
- Dr Simon Duffy (director, Centre for Welfare Reform)
- Most Rev Barry Morgan, Archbishop of Wales, Church in Wales
- Rt Rev Pete Broadbent, Bishop of Willesden, Church of England
- Rt Rev Alistair Magowan, Bishop of Ludlow, Church of England
- Rt Rev Tony Robinson, Bishop of Wakefield, Church of England
- Rt Rev Alan Wilson, Bishop of Buckingham, Church of England
- Rev Peter McDonald, leader, Iona Community
- Frank Cottrell-Boyce, author and screenwriter

- Sir Tom Devine, OBE, academic historian
- John Eade, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Roehampton
- David Lodge, author and former Professor of English at Birmingham University
- Moira Potier de la Morandiere, consultant clinical and forensic psychologist
- Professor Hilary Russell, European Institute for Urban Affairs, Liverpool John Moores University
- Harry Leslie Smith, campaigner and author
- Francis Ballin, Cardiff Justice and Peace Commission
- Anne Booth, children's author
- Rev Kate Bottley, vicar of Blythe and Scrooby with Rainshill
- Bernadette Callaghan, retired teacher
- Suzanne Collins, St Monica's Appleton Justice and Peace Group
- Denise Cottrell-Boyce
- Rev Mike Croft, St Catherine's, Wakefield
- Henrietta Cullinan, London Catholic Worker, Ekklesia administrator
- Brian Davies, Birmingham Justice and Peace Commission
- Paul Donovan, writer and journalist
- Rev Kevin Duffy, deacon, Corpus Christi Roman Catholic Church, Rainford
- Fr Rob Esdaile, Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Thames Ditton
- Rev Giles Fraser, St Mary's, Newington
- Pat Gaffney, general secretary, Pax Christi UK
- Rev Ray Gaston, Vicar SS Chad and St Mark Wolverhampton and Tutor Queens Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education, Birmingham
- Rev Dr John Gillibrand, Church in Wales, author
- Mary Glennon, retired teacher
- Catherine Hale, independent researcher
- Dr Harry Hagopian, international lawyer
- Mary Hallam, retired teacher
- Barbara Heaven
- Rev Dr Keith Hebden, Pioneer Minister and Seeking Justice Adviser in the Mansfield Deanery
- Savitri Hensman, author and equalities specialist
- Symon Hill, author, journalist and lecturer
- Stephen Hoyland, Ignatian Outreach
- Fr Chris Hughes, chair, Hexham and Newcastle Diocesan Justice and Peace Coordinating Council
- Barbara Hungin, chair, Middlesbrough Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission
- Matt Jeziorski, education officer, Pax Christi UK
- Rev Vaughan Jones, Harecourt United Reformed Church
- Tony McNicholl, coordinator, Wrexham Diocese Faith, Justice and Peace Network
- Vincent Manning, chair, Catholics for AIDS Prevention and Support
- Tanya Marlow, founder of Compassionate Britain
- Bernadette Meaden, writer and Ekklesia associate
- Annie Merry
- Paul Northup, creative director, Greenbelt
- Ann Peacey, National Justice and Peace Network
- Fr Nick Postlethwaite, CP, Catholic priest
- Frank Regan, writer on Christian faith in dialogue with culture and politics
- Christopher Rawsthorne, retired headmaster

- Josephine Rawsthorne, retired teacher
- Jennifer Rowlands, Luton Borough Council
- John Sargent, national leader, L'Arche UK
- Jill Segger, Associate Director, Ekklesia; Quaker
- Tony Sheen, Westminster Justice and Peace
- Denise Sheen, parishioner, St George's Church, Enfield
- Ellen Teague, Columban Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation
- Marian Thompson, editor, Mouthpeace, Justice and Peace newsletter, Liverpool and Shrewsbury Roman Catholic Dioceses
- John Usher, Pax Christi, Liverpool
- Rev Dr Simon Woodman, Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church
- Union of Catholic Mothers