



Work and Pensions Committee

House of Commons | London | SW1A 0AA

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From the Chair

5 September 2018

Justin Tomlinson
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Family Support, Housing and Child
Maintenance
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London SW1H 9NA

Dear Justin,

Support for the bereaved

In March 2016, the then Work and Pensions Committee recommended that “the Bereavement Support Payment be extended to cohabiting couples with dependent children”. We noted that a case in Northern Ireland might force the DWP to change its position, and urged the Department to act rather than waiting for a challenge in the courts.¹ Regrettably, the Government chose not to accept that recommendation.

It is quite incredible that the Government continues to resist righting this profound and ongoing injustice, even in the light of a ruling from the Supreme Court.

There is now a need for the Government to act quickly, to provide certainty for bereaved families. The Childhood Bereavement Network estimates that, with each day of delay, another five grieving parents and their children will be denied the support to which they should be entitled. Your undertaking to keep the House updated is of course welcome, but it does not provide any reassurance that the Government is treating this matter with the urgency it deserves.

I would be very grateful for answers to the following questions:

1. Will you now set a specific date for providing an update, to bereaved families and to the House?

¹ Work and Pensions Committee, Ninth Report of Session 2015-16, *Support for the bereaved*, para 87

2. In the meantime, what guidance will the Government be giving to bereaved families, to support them during this period of uncertainty?

This judgment relates to the Widowed Parent's Allowance (WPA). Nevertheless, it does seem to establish a principle that bereaved children should not be disadvantaged because their parents were not married.

3. Will the Government now consider changes to the eligibility criteria for Bereavement Support Payment, as our predecessor Committee recommended in 2016?

I would be grateful for a reply to this letter as soon as possible, and no later than 12 September.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank Field', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Frank Field MP
Chair