



# Joint Committee on Human Rights

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Rt. Hon Harriet Harman MP, Chair

The Rt. Hon Matt Hancock MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria Street  
London, SW1H 0EU

23 May 2019

Dear Matt,

## **Re. Conditions in detention for people with learning disabilities or autism**

I am writing in response to the Panorama documentary that was aired on BBC1 yesterday, which revealed appalling abuse of vulnerable adults at Whorlton Hall. Evidence submitted to the Joint Committee on Human Rights's ongoing inquiry into the treatment of children and young people with learning disabilities and/or autism reinforces that this abuse is not isolated but systemic. Eight years on from the Winterbourne View scandal, and in a country that values human rights, this is intolerable.

Coming straight on the back of reports from the Children's Commissioner and the Care Quality Commission, the documentary raises serious questions about why abuse continues to go undetected by the authorities. Families and self-advocates we have heard from are desperately concerned. Yet their concerns are treated as hostile and they are treated as a problem.

In your response to the CQC report you have accepted its recommendations in full, including undertaking to review every case of seclusion and long term segregation and to ensure that people have access to specialist independent advocacy to support them and their families. This is welcome; nonetheless I note that existing rights to regular reviews of care and access to independent advocacy are clearly not being enforced. Human rights must be enforceable.

The JCHR is holding the final evidence session of its inquiry into this matter on 5th June and we hope to report before the summer recess. We will be looking for swift action on our recommendations and on those from the reports you have already accepted. The time for rhetoric has come to an end, it is time to act.

Yours sincerely,

**Rt. Hon Harriet Harman MP**  
**Chair, Joint Committee on Human Rights**