



PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01677

Name of petitioner

Dr Sarah Glynn on behalf of Scottish Unemployed Workers' Network

Petition title

Make more money available to mitigate welfare cuts

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to make more money available to mitigate the impact of UK Government welfare cuts through reassessing spending priorities and bringing in more progressive taxation.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

We have made submissions to the Scottish Government consultations on the new Social Security Bill.

We have also written directly to all SNP, Labour, Green and Liberal Democrat MSPs, especially raising concerns about people affected by the change from DLA to PIP; and written separately to Jeane Freeman, MSP, Minister for Social Security.

We have raised issues in person with our local MSPs, Shona Robison and Joe Fitzpatrick

The need for more help with benefits has also been raised by others, including charities, churches and welfare rights workers, and this will only be possible with more funding.

Petition background information

We have seen the huge difference made by existing mitigation policies such as the payment of Bedroom Tax and the help provided by the Scottish Welfare Fund. The situation is much worse south of the border. But that is not enough. Thousands of people are still struggling, and unless funding is increased any improvement in one area becomes a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul. The Scottish Government have dismissed widely-supported calls for an extra £5 on Child Benefit, and they have turned down our call for additional support through the Scottish Welfare Fund for people who have lost out in the transfer from DLA to PIP as they wait for the new Scottish disability benefit to be brought in. Even without this, demands on the Scottish Welfare Fund are set to increase considerably as Universal Credit is rolled out to more and more areas, and there is also insufficient money for everyone hit by the Benefit Cap to get help via Discretionary Housing Payments. These are all crucial areas and the focus of vital campaigns, and underlying all is the need for more money.

Our government has a political and moral duty to help the poorest in our society, and it can do this by taking more taxes from those with the biggest incomes and land-holdings. As if the human case were not enough, spending more on social security also makes sound financial sense as failure to provide help at this stage has major financial as well as human consequences.

As welfare activists and campaigners, with a regular stall outside the jobcentre and further interaction with those at the sharp end of welfare 'reform' through phone and internet, we are only too aware of what is happening and the urgent need for more help. We also keep a vigilant watch on what is happening in other places and the fears that have been raised about future changes. We can see the urgency of the different calls that have been raised for more help in different areas – for children, for the disabled (including people in the ESA WRAG group and its Universal Credit equivalent who have lost £30 a week, and people who have lost out in the transfer from DLA to PIP.), for carers, for people waiting for Universal Credit, for people affected by the benefit cap, for people losing out on Universal Credit for their third child. We recognise the importance of all these needs and don't want to see them being forced to compete against each other for the small sums currently available. We don't believe this is necessary, nor even financially prudent. We have seen directly how the lack of relatively small sums of money at a crucial time can have major knock-on effects on individuals and families that, as well as being personally damaging, result in much greater demands on the public purse through social and health services. The huge growth of mental health problems linked to welfare 'reform' is a case in point. (See 'Government welfare cuts blamed for 50% surge in mental health issues among unemployed', Independent 16 July 2017.)

The sort of severe rationing that we are currently looking at is not necessary because we can access the money to do something about it. We can start by recognising welfare for the priority it is, but we know that with the cuts to the block grant that will not be enough. However the Scottish Government is now able to make changes to the tax system to raise more money from those with the highest incomes. And it could also introduce more progressive local taxation through introducing a Land Value Tax. There is growing recognition of the need for the Scottish Government to back up its caring social rhetoric with more progressive action. This has been demonstrated by the 38Degrees petition in response to the First Minister's proposal for an 'open conversation' on tax increases, and has been repeatedly raised in the Scottish Parliament by the Scottish Greens. Even with the limited devolution that we have, and without full welfare powers or full tax powers, we do have the ability to make more of a difference, and we have the moral duty to use it.

Unique web address

<http://www.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/mitigatelfarecuts>

Related information for petition

Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

YES

How many signatures have you collected so far?

0

Closing date for collecting signatures online

23 / 11 / 2017

Comments to stimulate online discussion

If you have time, as well as signing -

Please add your own thoughts about areas of particular concern and what the Scottish Government could do to help.

Please include your own experiences at the sharp end of welfare reform or in working with those who have been affected (including experience of social security systems elsewhere).