

## **PE1683/N**

Twins Trust submission of 15 September 2020

I am writing regarding the upcoming hearing of petition PE1683 on Thursday the 17<sup>th</sup> of September which will be part of an evidence session with the Minister for Children and Young People.

In the Minister's previous response dated 10<sup>th</sup> October 2019 on support for multiple birth families, the minister states:

*“None of the support mechanisms operating currently treat multiple births as a criterion for targeted support, and the Scottish Government has not carried out research to assess specifically the impact of multiple births”*

Whilst we appreciate the Scottish government is undertaking a huge amount of work to reduce child poverty as a whole, it is disappointing to see this fails to recognise the unique challenges faced by multiple birth parents. Continuing to offer support mechanisms that can only be accessed once a family is living in poverty is short sighted and would refer to the original petition narrative and the presentation / questions at the committee meeting about the impact a multiple birth has on a family.

You cannot compare the effects of having a multiple birth to a singleton. A mother who is carrying twins, triplets or more is at an immediate physical disadvantage as their pregnancy is categorised as high risk. Furthermore, multiple birth families face significantly greater challenges, both physically, emotionally and financially.

Treating all births as equal fails to address these challenges. A clear example of this is child benefit. Every first birth has a higher rate of child benefit payment and every second birth has a lower rate of child benefit payment.

The rationale for having a higher payment for your first born child and reduced payment for subsequent children is that you are already in possession of expensive items such as a pushchair and a cot. Whilst holds true for most parents of singletons, this is rarely the case for multiple birth families who face two, three (or more) lots of these costs at the same time. This is often sufficient to place a family in poverty and thus reliant on the state for support.

Surely we can all agree that multiple births cannot be directly compared to having a single child, then having a subsequent child further down the line. As most families plan to have one child at a time, those having multiples often struggle, having to double or even triple the costs all at once, whether that be paying for nursery fees or having to buy shoes. A way of combatting that stress would be to reconsider child benefit payments in line with its original policy intention.

## **RETURNING TO WORK**

Many of our families would love to return to the workplace following their maternity leave and give back to the economy, however for many this is unrealistic as the cost of childcare outweighs their salary. Some have also had to give up their work.

Here is what mum of 3, Jennifer Black has reported;

“Hi Helen,

I started to fill out your survey but our situation is more complex than the answers allow.

*“We have a daughter and then twins who are 3.5 years younger. When I went back to my job after maternity I very soon had to resign as after school club at my daughter's school was withdrawn, and we were spending more on nursery than I was earning.*

*I have managed to keep working as a freelancer but only through sheer will power. I work in the evenings and during 'rest time' at lunchtime. It is very tiring and I have no pension, benefits etc. I do it as it does provide us with helpful income, but also to keep my foot in the door, to help me not to lose my confidence and so that our twins can still have a little bit of the lovely nursery experience their older sister had.”*

*“Yes, we were struggling with having to buy two of everything and the pandemic caused me to lose my job meaning the cost of having to buy twice as much was profound!”*

Twins Trust recently undertook a shallow dive survey of multiple birth parents in Scotland to explore how having twins has affected them financially. Within 24 hours 114 multiple birth parents responded:

- 35% of all respondents have been unable to return to work as they cannot afford childcare
- 39% of all respondents have only been able to return to work due to childcare help from extended family
- 26% percent have returned to work

To gain even more insight into the financial hardship faced by our families we asked how many of them have had to use a food bank. Alarmingly 7.3% of all respondents have had to use a food bank during the covid-19 pandemic

*“Yes after my extremely premature twins spent 3 months in neonatal care and my partner had to take extended unpaid leave then return to work before the babies even reached their due date. Then covid hit and he was furloughed on reduced pay with no top ups offered by his employer.”*