

P-05-960 Fund the funeral costs of all NHS staff who die from or with Covid-19, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 10.11.20

Dear Petitions Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the minister's statement regarding our petition to pay for the funeral costs for NHS staff who die from COVID-19. The minister notes his gratitude to the dedicated and hardworking staff but his decision nonetheless concludes that that he does not want to support the scheme due to cost, time and eligibility criteria.

As petitioners were asking the petition committee reject this response and if necessary to ask for a disclosure of the options that were considered in modelling the costs and possibilities of this scheme. Whilst we would not presume to tell the Welsh Government how to manage their grant support it has always been in our minds that an obvious possibility would be an administrative scheme run via funeral homes. Where the family's declare that their loved one was NHS staff and provide evidence such as staff payroll number so that the funeral homes can make a single application for a one off fixed payment towards the costs. If the money was a clear fixed sum it would allow families to make decisions about the funeral and free them from the administrative burden and financial worries at their most extreme vulnerable moment.

We would like to dispute the ministers conclusions in the following areas:

- The minister says that funeral costs vary significantly. They do but we were not asking for full costs of any funeral to be paid, but simply a contribution that would reflect an average cost of a funeral in Wales today. We put a statement on the average costs within our petition. We would not be looking to The Welsh Government to provide a blank cheque but to make a guarantee of a payment that would allow a decent funeral. The cost of this could indeed be in line with money provided to service personnel as included in the notes to the first hearing of this petition.
- The minister states that the identification of NHS staff is problematic. As petitioners we had envisaged an approach to this scheme which was not by Local Authority identification of those affected. When we considered it we thought that it should be available via funeral homes who would apply to the scheme to offset costs. I'm quite sure that families would be in no doubt as to whether their loved one worked for the NHS and would easily be able to provide information such as a staff number to a funeral parlour which could be used as the basis for support. By making this a single payment of a fixed amount the administration should not be exceptional.
- Eligibility for other frontline workers is of course an important consideration and one which has been raised by the members of the petition committee and which we as petitioners are tremendously supportive of. However because the parameters of this would be difficult to establish we had kept our petition clear and focussed on staff working for the NHS. This therefore entirely addresses the minister's point. However, because it would be good to extend the scheme our proposal would be the best way to set up and test such a scheme in practice starting with NHS staff and possibly extending it once the system is in place. It would be beneficial to add other front line key workers however this is not a reason not to support the burial costs of NHS staff. If the minister is struggling to find parameters to work with then the eligibility rules for the £60,000 grant would seem the obvious place to start.
- The minister claims that it would take a long time to set up the scheme. With all political decisions regarding money and possesses we the petitioners believe that this is an issue of priorities. The Welsh Government has provided very welcome business support during the pandemic glance which have been established, claimed and paid in the time allowed (<https://businesswales.gov.wales/coronavirus-advice/>) . It is a testament to the Welsh

Government that they have been able to do such a thing and therefore they could also apply the considerable focus, commitment and expertise already demonstrated to supporting NHS families. Retrospective reimbursement would require additional administrative requirements and again our assumption that this would be to a capped figure which would make the process considerably easier. We the petitioners do not know the number of NHS staff who have died of COVID-19 in Wales although we believe it to be fewer than 100. We assume the Welsh Government does have access to this information and therefore the exposure of the Welsh government to administrative work would be relatively small. It is hardly an argument that we won't support you now because we did not before. Everyone knows this is an exceptional time. What matters is that we make the right decisions today.

- The final point that the minister makes is that he considered the balance of resources and that a 60,000 pound life insurance scheme that has already been made available. The 60,000 pounds is indeed welcome but as we have made the case previously, this money will be needed across many aspects of people's lives and will take time to come through. The support we seek is immediate, targeted and simple to remove a tiny but significant challenge in the lives of families who have given so much: money they don't have to turn to crowd sourcing to raise. The £60,000 is excellent but we all know it can never reimburse the families for what they have lost. This petition addresses the immediate, agonising and awful time of losing someone and we aim to provide simple immediate and unqualified support. AS THEY DID by going to work to care for us.

We all know that politics requires difficult choices but so does working in the NHS during a pandemic. We have said to NHS staff that we want them to go back into hospitals during the second wave of the pandemic with all the stress, risk and responsibility that this entails. I would hope no further NHS staff member nor care worker would die from COVID-19 and that, of course would be the best outcome. Until that is the case, it seems a small ask in comparison for the Welsh Government to put aside the relatively small administrative and financial resource is necessary to provide families with alleviation in the worst of situations. NHS staff are making choices that are genuinely difficult: it is time that Wales and the Welsh people showed that they supported those staff taking these risks and making those choice.

I would encourage the members of the petitions committee not to let this matter close. Please do not to accept that this scheme has been fully explored and please ask for more evidence that the scheme has been fully considered considering the practical implications and implementation. This is not about what is possible this is about what choices we make. You have all spoken in the meetings about the basic good sense and humanity of this proposals please keep this matter on the agenda.

Yours sincerely

Jane Henderson on behalf of the petitioners