

Welfare Reform Bill lobbying briefing



Purpose: **To brief Macmillan campaigners on lobbying Liberal Democrat MPs on the Welfare Reform Bill**

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What stage is the Welfare Reform Bill at?

The Welfare Reform Bill is now in its final stages in the House of Lords. The Lords have made changes to the Bill that Macmillan supports. The Bill will return to the House of Commons in early February when MPs will have the chance to vote on the changes made by the Lords.

What are we asking Liberal Democrat MPs to do?

Earlier this month the Lords voted in favour of an amendment rejecting a government plan to time limit Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) to one year. This would have had a profound impact on many people with cancer.

We are asking Liberal Democrat MPs to follow the lead set by their colleagues in the House of Lords. We want them to vote in favour of clauses that will ensure that people with cancer receive ESA for as long as they need it. We are also calling on MPs to ensure all sick and disabled people have longer than one year before they lose vital support.

Why are we asking Liberal Democrat MPs to do this?

Currently people with cancer can claim ESA payments for as long as their illness stops them from working. The government wants to change this. It is proposing to introduce a one year time-limit to contributory ESA. After one year, contributory ESA would be means-tested. The government's own estimates show that 94% of claimants need ESA for longer than a year. The means-test is so tough that a cancer patient could lose all their benefit if their partner earns more than just £7,500 per year.

Macmillan strongly opposes this proposal. One year simply isn't long enough for many people to recover from cancer. The serious physical and psychological side effects of cancer can last for many months, even years, after treatment has finished. It is crucial that patients are not pushed into poverty or forced to return to work before they are ready. It is also unfair to deprive people who have paid into the system all their lives of a vital benefit they desperately need.

Key messages to get across to Liberal Democrats

Time limiting ESA for cancer patients to just one year is wrong. One year simply isn't long enough for many people to recover from cancer

If MPs reverse the Lords' decision, Macmillan estimates that up to 7,000 cancer patients will lose up to £94 per week

Introducing an ESA time limit for cancer patients would save only a small amount of money and force some of the most vulnerable people in society into poverty

Case study

Stephen Townsend started claiming ESA in March 2011. His partner earns roughly £160 per week. Under the Bill he will lose his ESA in April 2012: *“I can’t believe the Government is planning to take away all my ESA after just 12 months because my wife works more than 24 hours a week. I had renal cancer and have had a kidney removed. I’m still in a lot of pain. Without my ESA we would find it difficult to get by. I have worked all my life and paid into the system but this doesn’t seem to mean anything.”*

What action is Macmillan asking campaigners to take?

With Liberal Democrat support there is a good chance that we can defeat government plans to time limit ESA for people with cancer. Labour MPs have already agreed to oppose time limiting for people with cancer.

We’re asking campaigners who live in Liberal Democrat constituencies to lobby their MPs as soon as possible. We expect the Welfare Reform Bill to be debated in the House of Commons in early February so we don’t have much time.

Here are five ways to lobby your MP:

1. **Speak to them at your local constituency surgery.** This is a great way of getting your message across to your MP in person. Most surgeries take place on Fridays or Saturdays. You can phone your MP’s constituency office to find out when and where it is and to book an appointment if necessary.
2. **Phone their House of Commons office.** You might not always be able to speak directly to your MP, but their staff will make sure that your concerns are passed on.
3. **Email them.** This is a quick and easy way of getting your points across to your MP. But don’t forget, MPs receive hundreds of emails a day, so keep to the point and make it clear that you are a constituent.
4. **Write to them at the House of Commons.** This is still one of the best ways of making your feelings known to your MP
5. **Tweet them.** Many MPs now have Twitter accounts. You can find a list of those that do at <http://tweetminster.co.uk/>

Contact details for MPs can be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/>. For more information about our welfare reform campaign visit www.macmillan.org.uk/welfare

Lobbying tips

Here are a few things to bear in mind when you’re lobbying your MP.

1. **Keep to the point and be as brief as possible.** MPs and their offices can be extremely busy. The quicker you can get your point across the better.
2. **Use statistics and personal experiences to strengthen your argument.** Don’t forget one key statistic is often better than one hundred words. And personal stories underlining the importance of benefit payments to people affected by cancer can help to hammer home the human impact of the proposed welfare reforms.
3. **Make it clear what it is you want your MP to do.** Your argument won’t have an impact if you don’t say what action you want taken.
4. **There’s strength in numbers.** If you know other people who share your concerns, then why not get them to join you in taking action. The more support you have the stronger your message will be.

...And finally, your work is really important to the campaign, so don’t forget to let us know what action you’ve taken.