

P-05-964 Extend covid-19 financial support and paid leave to vulnerable and pregnant NHS wales bank workers, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 18.06.20

Dear Petitions committee,

I am writing to you to provide comments to support my petition to “Extend covid-19 financial support and paid leave to vulnerable and pregnant NHS wales bank workers”. Please let this email act as comments and support of this petition. I ask you to bear in mind that the NHS bank workers are nurses, hcas, doctors, midwives and carers who make up an estimated 8%-10% of the workforce & work directly for our NHS (as opposed to agency bank workers, who are employed privately at greater expense and are eligible for furlough support), many have worked for the NHS for years to find themselves out of contract and working for the bank as their sole income and if you or a loved one has ever found themselves being treated by the NHS in Wales, you will have been treated at some point by an NHS Wales bank worker.

Since writing this petition I can now confidently say that medically vulnerable and pregnant NHS bank workers in Wales are not granted any financial support where they cannot work due to medical conditions that before Covid-19 and lockdown would not have effected their ability to work, this includes those in shielded categories or where risk assessments dictate they cannot work; This is both due to replies I have, through politicians, received from health minister Vaughan Gething MS (please find attached) and through hearing from NHS bank nurses, midwives, HCA's et al. across Wales who are being deeply effected by this and facing great financial hardship. I also state that this petition and its cause is as important as ever, especially for those NHS wales bank workers in shielding categories, who for the past 3 months have received no financial support or income and face with the extension of shielding in Wales no prospect of income for themselves and their families until August. Not only have they had to endure financial hardship, but they also face having years of service to the NHS ignored by NHS wales and being discriminated against during this crisis due to medical conditions that previously would not hinder their ability to work, all whilst hearing the claps for the NHS who they are meant to represent.

Whilst private sector atypical workers, medically vulnerable or not, are eligible for the national furlough scheme whether they work for a healthcare agency, McDonalds, a sex shop or any other private business, the self employed have been supported through financial support schemes and grants, contracted NHS wales workers have been given financial support beyond the scope of their contracts in full paid leave and many healthboards in England have given medically vulnerable and pregnant NHS bank workers full paid leave based on average earnings, in Wales NHS bank workers get no financial support from NHS wales and are not eligible for any financial support schemes. The only thing that sets them apart from private atypical workers on 80% of their wages, and medically vulnerable or pregnant NHS England workers, is that they work for the NHS in Wales. I believe action needs to be taken now to remedy this issue.

Additional background:

The original background and cause for this petition is a personal one to myself although it will not have a direct impact on mine or my families predicament now. My partner has been in the third trimester of pregnancy from the onset of the coronavirus lockdown, has had open heart surgery in the past and works for the NHS bank, at a hospital for a Welsh health board. My partner for the past 5 years has worked for NHS Wales and having had her contract come to an end 3 years ago, following the closure of the ward she worked on, has found herself as many others working solely on the NHS bank at her healthboard in Wales, as her sole income.

At the onset of the Coronavirus crisis when it was first announced that pregnant women would be placed in a vulnerable category towards the end of march, my partner had shifts booked in advance until June and was advised by occupational health at her health board that she should stay at home and was also advised that she would be paid for all her shifts she had booked (around 60% of her usual earnings). 4 weeks later at the beginning of the easter holidays my partner was informed that this would not be honoured and it was her "choice" to return to work, she was also informed there were many others that has been wrongly promised financial support and it was her "choice" to work as per the terms of NHS wales bank. If she did not "choose" to work my partner would not be eligible for any financial support. Since easter Sunday my partner has worked in an alternative office role for NHS Wales, working when both her medically vulnerable or pregnant contracted counterparts in Wales have been granted paid leave and many medically vulnerable or pregnant NHS England bank workers have been given paid leave from the onset of the coronavirus crisis (we have both friends and family working for English healthboards). During much of the time she has been working during this crisis at over 28 weeks gestation, The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists guidelines for NHS employers for much of this time has stated that pregnant workers over 28 weeks gestation should stay at home, along with this many of the contracted office workers for the NHS in wales along with politicians that were neither in 3rd trimester pregnancy or have medical vulnerabilities were given either paid leave or told to work from home. My partners pregnancy was also deemed a high risk pregnancy and was consultant lead. Whilst my partner has been fortunate in she has not gotten ill, has successfully given birth via C-section and has been able to still provide an income and enjoy the opportunity to help her colleagues during this crisis, many have not been as fortunate and cannot work.

Please view additional documents for context. I hope you look favourably upon this petition and I look forward to hearing back from you soon.

Kind regards,
David Clarke

Important information- Please find a link below to the guidance for English NHS health boards in regards to self-isolation and with reference to NHS bank workers:

<https://www.nhsemployers.org/covid19/staff-terms-and-conditions/self-isolation>

Please use this as a reference point to the different treatment of NHS bank workers in Wales compared to in England. If many of those NHS bank workers in Wales denied financial support due to self isolation as a result of being medically/clinically vulnerable or shielding worked for health boards in England, they would have been paid based on shifts booked and/or based on average earnings from the previous financial year.