

# **PE2101/D: Provide Defibrillators for all Primary and Secondary Schools in Scotland**

## **Rodger Hill written submission, 1 May 2025**

I am writing in support of this petition, having previously visited the pupils at Troqueer Primary, with Finlay Carson MSP for Galloway and West Dumfries.

Our son, David Hill, died of a cardiac arrest, without warning on the 19<sup>th</sup> March 2022 on a rugby pitch. Following his cardiac arrest, David received CPR and was treated with an onsite defibrillator to no avail. Sadly, David's case is not unique and there are on average 3,140 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests each year in Scotland, with a 30-day survival rate of only 9.7%<sup>1</sup>. It is estimated that every minute of delay in bystander action reduces the likelihood of survival after an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest OHCA by 10%.

In order to improve health outcomes and survival statistics, the Scottish Government published the Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest Strategy 2021-2026<sup>2</sup>, with specific aims and outcomes.

While we can't change what happened to David, we can work to improve outcomes for other young people. My wife Lesley (David's step-mother) and I established the DH9 Foundation, a charity in memory of David, which has the explicit goal of improving the cardiac health of young people under the age of 35. Since we established the DH9 Foundation in late 2024, we have facilitated the installation of 42 defibrillators in Dumfries & Galloway schools and local community organisations, provided free CPR and defibrillator training across our region and continued to fund free cardiac screenings for young people through the charity Cardiac Risk in the Young (CRY). DH9 Foundation is also working closely with SaveAlife Scotland (SALFS) and Dumfries & Galloway Council as part of the rollout of a CARE Zone (Cardiac Arrest Rescue Zone) collaborative.

Whilst this is positive progress in Dumfries and Galloway, it is merely a drop in the ocean as far as what is needed across Scotland. I am of the view that CPR and defibrillator training should be a compulsory element in every child's education, in line with the previous commitment of the Scottish Government. Schools are the beating hearts of our communities. It is also my view that every school in Scotland, which for 195 days per year operate as significant population centres, should have a defibrillator onsite and available, to the school population and the local community.

In response to this petition, the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health stated that "decisions on the installation and maintenance of defibrillators in schools is a matter for Local Authorities to consider at the local level". Subsequent responses from Ms Minto to this Committee on this matter have repeated this view. I feel that this argument is flawed.

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<sup>1</sup> Scotland's Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest Report 2019-2022  
<https://www.scottishambulance.com/media/tugb2r1r/cardiacreportv5.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest: Strategy 2021 to 2026  
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-out-hospital-cardiac-arrest-strategy-2021-2026/>

Indeed, the Committee on 25 September 2024 agreed to write to the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health to highlight the UK Government's provision of defibrillators to all schools in England and to ask whether the Scottish Government will provide direct funding for primary and secondary schools to purchase and install defibrillators.

I recently asked all Scottish local authorities, by FOI, for details of which of their schools had defibrillators and if they did, whether they were available to the public to use if required. The returns show that out of 2446 schools, only 893 have AEDs onsite (of which 711 are available to the public).

A few local authorities have equipped all their schools with a defibrillator. More usually, schools fundraise to buy their own defibrillator. However, this approach is very inequitable. People from more deprived areas in Scotland are almost twice as likely to have an OHCA and are 60% less likely to survive to leave hospital than those from less deprived areas. Around 11% of the population of Scotland live in a rural area and are 32% less likely to survive to leave hospital after OHCA than those living in urban areas. Placing a public access defibrillator on every school in Scotland would go a long way to achieving the OHCA Strategy outcomes. Combining this approach with a mandatory requirement that every child in Scotland's schools receives CPR and defibrillator training biennially, could significantly improve health outcomes across the country.

I am keenly aware of the many competing demands on the Scottish Government's budget. Essentially, I believe that two actions from the Scottish Government could make significant improvements in health outcomes from OHCA's:

- A renewed commitment, working with COSLA and ADES, that CPR will be taught to every child in Scotland's schools biennially. In doing so we will vastly increase the number of CPR ready citizens and make our nation, one where a confident, active bystander is the first response to an OHCA, buying arrestees critical time.
- The provision of grant funding in the region of £2Million to local authorities to place a public access defibrillator on every school that does not have one. The aim would be that a defibrillator was sited only 2 minutes away from Scotland's 700,000 school children and 75,000 school staff, which would also be available to the local community. The installation and long-term maintenance would be the responsibility of individual local authorities.

Agreement to these two actions would show a clear commitment of the Scottish Government to improving health outcomes for the whole of Scotland's population and would be a significant and fitting legacy to David. These actions would align Scotland with England<sup>3</sup>, Wales<sup>4</sup> and Northern Ireland<sup>5</sup>, where all publicly funded schools have access to funding for defibrillators.

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<sup>3</sup> Defibrillators: All state schools now have lifesaving equipment  
<https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2023/07/defibrillators-all-state-schools-now-have-lifesaving-equipment/>

<sup>4</sup> New funding to increase defibrillator access in Wales  
<https://www.gov.wales/new-funding-increase-defibrillator-access-wales>

<sup>5</sup> A Life-Saving Investment: Defibrillators to be provided to all schools in Northern Ireland.

I believe that such measures will have broad cross-party support in the Scottish Parliament, as demonstrated by the recommendation of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee and from my discussions with elected representatives.