

Room 430 Parliament Buildings Belfast BT4 3XX

Our ref: CC/25/219

The Rt Hon Liz Kendall MP Secretary of State Department for Work and Pensions Caxton House Tothill Street London SW1H 9NA

25 June 2025

Dear Secretary of State

The Northern Ireland Assembly's Committee for Communities, the Scottish Parliament's Social Justice and Social Security Committee and the Equality and Social Justice Committee at Senedd Cymru have agreed to write jointly to you regarding changes to the incapacity and disability benefits system and the associated Pathways to Work Green Paper.

Set against an economic backdrop that is already extremely challenging for disabled people and/or people with health conditions, the anticipated changes have led to significant concerns. Those affected and other stakeholders in each of our jurisdictions fear that the challenges faced entering or returning to the workplace will only worsen in the coming months and years. For many, the benefits they receive are not symptomatic of a 'broken' system but make a significant contribution to their health and well-being and enable them to actively participate in the workplace.

The Committees are agreed that inadequate consultation and engagement by the UK Government with stakeholders and the devolved institutions has contributed to this sense of concern. Limited in-person consultation at just nine events, and only in major cities, is also restricting further the opportunity to hear from the many people who fear their ability to enter or return to the workplace will be adversely affected by the UK Government's approach to reform. In addition, the lack of robust data and jurisdiction-specific impact assessments presents significant challenges for our three committees to effectively scrutinise potential impacts. As the elected members who make up the three committees, we are well placed to assess demographic and historical contexts and to ensure dialogue is constructive and reform is meaningful and positive. However, we remain constrained by the lack of quality information.

Our committees fully support the stated ambition that 'no one should be consigned to a life on benefits just because they have a health condition or a disability, especially when they're able to and want to work with the right support in place'. However, in order to contribute meaningfully to the reform process, committees and citizens must be fully informed and offered every opportunity for meaningful engagement.

The Assembly's Committee for Communities, the Scottish Parliament's Social Justice and Social Security Committee and the Equality and Social Justice Committee of Senedd Cymru have considered and approved the text of this letter.

Yours sincerely

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**Colm Gildernew MLA** Chairperson of the Committee for Communities

cc: Jenny Rathbone MS, Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee, Senedd Cymru

Collette Stevenson MSP, Convener, Social Justice and Social Security Committee, Scottish Parliament