

P-05-960 Fund the funeral costs of all NHS staff who die from or with Covid-19, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 19.01.21

Dear Petitions Committee

Thank you once again for taking your time to consider this petition. I'm restating the core premise of the petition because I'm so disappointed with the minister's response of the 11th of January which I read as dismissive.

As you may remember I started this petition in April 2020 in response to being asked to contribute to the Crowdfunder for the funeral of someone working for the NHS who died from COVID-19. Of course many of us supported the family with their funeral costs (as most people would) but recognised this was a terrible way to manage in a pandemic. The members of the petition committee have made it clear repeatedly (May, July, September and November) that they recognise that the cost of a funeral is urgent and significant for many families. Although the UK government have agreed a compensation payment of £60,000 this does not remove the urgent financial pressure from the family at a time of great upset and sadness. As a society we owe a debt of gratitude that cannot be measured to those members of staff who have returned to work day in day out, during a pandemic to protect our health.

This petition has been supported by all of the panel on every consideration, because this is a question of basic humanity. For the minister to write that support would not be 'timely' reflects poorly on his office given the timeline of the petition, it appears as if the minister is content to run down the clock on this issue to save some money. The petition committee asked the minister to justify his statements that providing funds for funeral costs for NHS staff was not a balanced cost and would add additional burden to NHS employers. I find the lack of any substantive answer to the question on the basis of the costs calculation intensely disrespectful. It is disrespectful to the families of NHS staff who lose their lives, disrespectful to those of us who created and signed the petition, disrespectful to the petitions committee and indeed disrespectful to the entire petition process.

Whenever someone says that something is too expensive what they mean is that they're not prepared to pay that price. So the question here is what price are we asking NHS staff to pay and what price The Welsh Government? We have asked specifically to see costings but have not been offered any. The Welsh Government has set up and run other funding schemes during the course of the pandemic so they will have costings. As stated with the original submission, a funding scheme exists for the funeral costs of military service personnel and for the child burial scheme and we know that there is a UK national fund for NHS staff meaning that the process of identifying who works with the NHS must already be in place. It must therefore be possible to put a figure on what the minister considers unworkable. If a family

member dies suddenly and you don't have enough to pay for a funeral that is certainly unworkable.

I ask the petition committee to agree with my conclusion that the minister for health and social services has concluded that paying for the funeral costs for NHS staff is not worth it. I therefore called on the committee to either take this to a debate in the Senedd or to appeal to Mark Drakeford to take an overview on this process and provide clear and evidence based response, or better still simply put resources in place for the funerals.

The Welsh Government has the petitions procedure for the very reason of allowing constituents to share their concerns. I believe the vast majority of people in Wales, like the petitions committee themselves, would see funding the costs of funerals for NHS staff who died in the pandemic as entirely reasonable. It falls to Vaughan Gethin to justify why he considers this too expensive if necessary during a discussion in the Senedd. We can do better than this.

Yours sincerely

Jane Henderson on behalf of the petitioners