

20th May 2020

Dear Mr Speaker,

cc: House of Commons Commission

As parliament considers returning to Westminster, we urge you to ensure all citizens can continue to be represented in parliament through ensuring no MP is unable to participate due to health or caring commitments that have arisen as a direct result of the ongoing coronavirus crisis.

We welcome the introduction of hybrid parliament to ensure the continuation of parliamentary scrutiny during lockdown. This is critical to a healthy, legitimate democracy. We also recognise the importance of restoring all forms of parliamentary scrutiny including Westminster hall debates and interventions as well as enabling the participation of more MPs in debates, and the challenges in doing so whilst maintaining a safe workspace for all concerned.

As social distancing measures are reduced in a phased manner this summer, we are concerned that there is a risk of creating two tiers of MPs- those who are able to attend and those who mostly cannot given the ongoing challenges of lockdown and their own personal circumstances. Given what is known about the nature of this virus, and who is a high risk, it is likely that this will mean those MPs who are BAME MPs, older MPs or MPs who are pregnant will be disproportionately restricted.

Government advice also recognises that those with caring responsibilities, those with childcare responsibilities, those who rely on public transport, and those who are shielding, may not be able to return to the workplace. Not only must parliament lead by example by acknowledging how these issues affect all those who work in Westminster and promoting working remotely where possible, it must also make provision for those who would be breaching public health advice by returning to parliament, or are unable to do so due to caring responsibilities. A rapid return to a physical parliament also has consequences for staff who face these same challenges as well as MPs. The working environment for them must also be carefully considered and would require a thorough risk assessment.

It is important that the advantages and disadvantages of the hybrid model for parliament, or any other remote working practices for parliament, are documented for the historical record, monitored and fully evaluated in order to assess the effectiveness of enabling equal participation, particularly in relation to gender and diversity. Even in times of crisis, we must aim towards the highest standards in public office and robust parliamentary procedure, and we cannot do that without ensuring equal and diverse participation.

The current public health advice is 'work from home where possible'. The past few weeks have shown us that it is possible to facilitate parliamentary work remotely and that this can be used to ensure those who otherwise would not be able to attend Westminster can represent their constituents in debates. We urge you to consider how best to expand on the lessons from the use of this technology to address concerns engagement of all parliamentarians in debate and in doing so ensure that robust parliamentary scrutiny continues in line with public health advice in a way which means all MPs can participate equally.

Kind regards,

Stella Creasy MP
Caroline Nokes MP
Helen Pankhurst, Convener, Centenary
Action Group
Anne McLaughlin MP
Paula Barker MP
Apsana Begum MP
Hannah Bardell MP
Neil Gray MP
John McNally MP
Mhairi Black MP
Stuart McDonald MP
Alison Thewliss MP
Marion Fellows MP
Tommy Sheppard MP
John Nicolson MP
Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP
Deidre Brock MP
Alistair Carmichael MP
Layla Moran MP

Wendy Chamberlain MP
Sarah Olney MP
Christine Jardine MP
Daisy Cooper MP
Caroline Lucas MP
Joanna Cherry MP
Tonia Antoniazzi MP
Diana Johnson MP
Kirsten Oswald MP
Steven Bonnar MP
Dr Philippa Whitford MP
Yvonne Forvargue MP
Rupa Huq MP
Chris Law MP
Owen Thompson MP
Carol Monaghan MP
Allan Dorans MP
Angela Crawley MP
Amelia Womack, Deputy Leader of the
Green Party