

Greens, Disabled People Against Cuts and bereaved mother call for inquiry into deaths of benefit claimants



10 February 2017

The Green Party, Disabled People Against Cuts and a mother whose son died after his benefits were cut have called on the Government to launch an independent inquiry into the deaths of benefit claimants.

An letter [1] to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Damian Green MP, calls on the Department for Work and Pensions to launch an independent inquiry into the methods used to assess benefit claimants and their entitlements, to determine “whether these procedures are fair and proper or if they are, in fact, contributing to the deaths of claimants”.

The Green Party has also compiled a dossier listing 50 people who died while claiming benefits. The dossier includes the death of Mark Wood, whose mother Jill Gant co-signed the letter to Damian Green.

Wood starved to death in 2013, aged 44. A doctor had said Wood, who had Asperger’s syndrome, obsessive compulsive disorder and mental health problems, was completely unfit to work. Yet despite this Wood was found fit for work and his benefits were cut, forcing him to survive on about £40 per week. Four months later he was found dead, weighing just 35kg. [2]

Jonathan Bartley, co-leader of the Green Party, said:

“It is unacceptable that in the fifth richest country in the world people are starving to death, like Mark Wood, or taking their own lives, as Michael O’Sullivan did, because their benefits have been cut. The social security system should be an ally, not an enemy of those who need help.

“Britain is a caring nation. We should be proud to look after each other and take every measure possible to ensure people receive the support they need – starting with an independent inquiry into the deaths of benefit claimants.”

Mags Lewis, disabled spokesperson for the Green Party, said:

“We urgently need an independent inquiry into the deaths of people receiving benefits to find out if the methods used by the Department of Work and Pensions to assess claimants are fair or if they are, in fact, contributing to the deaths of some of claimants.

“Until this has taken place it is impossible to feel confident that lessons have been learned from the tragic loss of those who have already died while claiming benefits – or that others will be kept safe in the future.”

Linda Burnip, co-founder of Disabled People Against Cuts, said:

" As the UK Government has been found guilty by the UN of committing grave and systematic violations of disabled people's human rights we feel a public inquiry into deaths which have been linked to the discredited Work Capability Assessment regime must urgently be initiated by the government and Department for Work and Pensions."

Jill Gant, mother of Mark Wood, who starved to death four months after his benefits were cut off in 2013, said:

"I believe an enquiry is absolutely essential because the Work Capability Assessment is not fit for purpose for the most vulnerable, particularly those with mental health problems, like my son Mark who died of starvation aged 44 because his benefits were stopped."

Notes:

1.

The Green Party
The Biscuit Factory
Room 202, A Block
100 Clements Road
London
SE16 4DG

The Rt Honourable Damian Green MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9NA

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to ask you to launch an independent inquiry into the deaths of people receiving benefits. Such an inquiry should be tasked with examining the methods used to assess claimants and their entitlements. It should determine whether these procedures are fair and proper or if they are, in fact, contributing to the deaths of some of claimants – who have the highest support needs which should be met by society.

As the evidence continues to mount that this is the case, The Green Party has compiled a dossier highlighting the stories of fifty individuals who died since 2008, and where there is good reason to believe their treatment at the hands of your department has been a factor in their deaths.

Treatment such as the suspension of benefits to David Clapson who went on to die just three weeks later from diabetic ketoacidosis, after the fridge used to store his insulin stopped working when he couldn't afford to top up his electricity card. Many of these fifty examples cases coroners, in their verdicts, have expressed grave concern about the methods employed by your

department.

We want to ensure that all pertinent questions have been asked, and that any relevant lessons have been learned. At present it is impossible to feel confident this is the case.

The more time passes without an inquiry, the longer concerns will remain and questions will hang over the procedures used by your department to handle benefits. We urge you to use your power to end that uncertainty.

Yours sincerely,

Jonathan Bartley, co-leader of the Green Party

Mags Lewis, disability spokesperson for the Green Party

Linda Burnip, co-founder of Disabled People Against Cuts

Jill Gant, mother of Mark Wood, who starved to death four months after his benefits were cut off in 2013.

2.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/mark-wood-sweet-and-gentle-44-year-old-man-with-mental-health-problems-starved-to-death-after-9161749.html>

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