

SNP false claims over WASPI exposed

Over 2.5 million women born in the 1950s have had their state pension age changed without fair notification, leaving many in poverty. Scottish Labour believes these women deserve both recognition for the injustice they have suffered, and compensation for their losses. Around 253,000 Scottish women have been affected by this change, as highlighted by the Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI) campaign.

In February this year, Jeane Freeman, the SNP social security minister, told the Scottish Parliament that the Scottish Government could not provide assistance to WASPI women. The image below is what Ms Freeman said in the chamber:

To Jackie Baillie, I say that I am not prepared to let the Tory Government off the hook but, even if I was, section 28 of the [Scotland Act 2016](#), on exceptions to reserved areas, says that top-up does not include pensions assistance or assistance

However, a Freedom of Information request to the Department for Work and Pensions reveals this to be false. The image below is from a letter to Jeane Freeman from the UK Government Pensions Minister.

The substantial new welfare powers that the Scottish Parliament has provides you with options to support people affected by changes to the State Pension, including supporting women affected by increases in State Pension age, should you so wish. Of course, this is entirely a matter for the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament to decide.

One such option, however, could be for you to legislate to introduce new discretionary payments using section 26 the Scotland Act 2016 (exception 7 to Section F1 of Schedule 5 to the Scotland Act 1998). This power was introduced to give you the widest possible scope to help meet the short-term needs of people in Scotland, which could include those who are affected by changes to the State Pension. In respect of which, there is no prescribed definition of 'short-term', and this will be substantially for the Scottish Parliament to determine.

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LABOUR WILL USE THE POWERS OF THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

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Scottish Labour

Now, our economy spokesperson Jackie Baillie MSP has written to Jeane Freeman asking for her to apologise and act to help the WASPI Women. The contents of the letter are below.

Dear Jeane,

Discretionary payments under Section 26 of the Scotland Act

I am writing following the publication of the Freedom of Information requests which prove that the Scottish Government has the powers to provide financial assistance to the WASPI women.

As you will be aware, thousands of women born in the 1950s have been left facing real financial difficulty because of the lack of notice given by the Tory government about changes to the state pension.

Ahead of the 2016 Holyrood election Labour campaigned to use the social security powers of the Scottish Parliament to support some of the WASPI women who were losing out because of the Tories.

You have repeatedly stated, including to parliament in February, that the provisions in the Scotland Act do not allow for assistance for the WASPI women.

It has now been proven beyond doubt that this is simply not the case. I am writing to you today urging you to apologise for misleading the Scottish Parliament and, more importantly, the WASPI women over the powers of the Scottish Government in this area.

The new powers delivered by the 2016 Scotland Act should be an opportunity to deliver radical policies in Scotland – instead of simply pursuing another

grievance agenda with the UK government. You have the power to act. The question therefore, is not whether you can, but whether you will?

A public apology on this will be an important statement that this government will finally focus on embracing the new powers rather than misrepresenting them.

Yours sincerely,

Jackie Baillie MSP