

The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Department of Health and Social Care 39 Victoria Street London SW1H OEU

22nd July 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

This week marks the end of many restrictions in England. Since March 2020, nearly one million babies have been born across the UK. Given everything that science tells us about the critical importance of the earliest years of life, our babies and toddlers must now be a priority for Government as we recover from the pandemic.

On 17th May, Jo Churchill stated that no assessment has been made of the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the development of children aged 2 years and under. But the evidence, and our experience, tells us that the pandemic has been difficult for many families, with impacts on a range of factors that significantly contribute to child development such as maternal mental health; parental conflict and domestic abuse; poverty, and access to stimulating activities including early learning and childcare.

As lockdown lifts, many of the challenges for families will continue. Indeed, some challengessuch as anxiety and isolation amongst pregnant women - may increase. And with many services still not operating at normal levels and many routine contacts having been missed, a worrying number of babies remain invisible to public services and the challenges facing them and their families remain unseen and unaddressed.

More than £3bn has been spent on mitigating the impact of the pandemic on older children, but nothing on those under two.

We very much hope that, as Secretary of State, you can end the "baby blindspot" in Government policy. Urgent action is needed now to address the impacts of the pandemic on babies and their families, and to ensure all our children have the best start in life.

We have included with this letter a set of Evidence Briefs that describe the moral, social and economic case for investing in the first 1001 days, and how action in this life stage is related to many other later physical and mental health outcomes.

Urgent action is now needed to ensure that babies' health, wellbeing and safety is prioritised. The Government must act on its commitment to "ensuring that children have the best start in life". The Best Start for Life document sets out a compelling vision, but ambitious investment and legislative changes are now needed to ensure that every family has access to a quality offer of services in their local area.





As Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, we hope that you will value and invest in support for families in the first 1001 days as a key way to improve the nations' health and wellbeing. There are three things that you can do right now to make a significant difference:

- 1. The upcoming Spending Review provides an important opportunity to invest public funds where they can make the biggest difference. It is time to put a stop to the chronic disinvestment in public health and children's services. We hope you can secure a good settlement for public health, alongside new investment in the workforce development and service provision needed to deliver the Best Start for Life vision.
- 2. The Health and Care Bill provides an opportunity to set out clear expectations that local partners will cooperate in order to improve outcomes and reducing inequalities for children in the first 1001 days and beyond. We look forward to working with you to ensure that new statutory duties in the Bill make sure that babies and children are prioritised in the new health and social care structures.
- 3. Over recent years, Public Health England has not had the powers, resources or mandate to intervene when local authorities disinvest in critical services like health visiting and fail to deliver even the most basic checks for our babies and young children. The creation of the new Office for Health Promotion provides an opportunity to change this, and we ask that you ensure that the Office can intervene when a local area is not delivering the Healthy Child Programme or is experiencing poor, declining, or unequal outcomes in the first 1001 days, providing additional support and resources where needed.

Giving our babies the best start in life can improve health and wellbeing for decades to come and have impacts on future generations. It may be early in your tenure as health secretary but, engaging in this agenda is a fantastic way to create a lasting legacy.

We look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Yours sincerely,

Imran Hussain

Jane Barlow

Director of Policy and Campaigns Action for Children

Jane Barlow President **AiMH**

Marcus Green

CEO

Action on Pre-eclampsia

Kathleen Roche-Nagi

K Robert G

Managing Director Approachable Parenting



Dr Nick Waggett

Chief Executive

The Association of Child Psychotherapists

katie Gunn

Katie Gunn

Director

Baby & Toddler Reflex™

Rebecca Browne Bambinos & Me

Alison Baum OBE

CEO and Founder **Best Beginnings**

Ayala Ochert

Director

Better Breastfeeding

Nani D Naomi Delap

Director

Birth Companions

Inge Nickell

Director

The Brazelton Centre UK

Shereen Fisher

The Breastfeeding Network

) come

Diane Ashby

Deputising CEO

The British Psychological Society

Clare Law

Director

Centre for Early Child Development

Sir Norman Lamb

Chair

The Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition

Anna Hodgson

AHodgson

CEO/Charity Director

Clear Sky Children's Charity

Crystal Miles

IAIM International Trainer Connected Babies

Viv Allen

Founder and CEO DorPIP



Kircki Hansard

Kicki Hansard

CFO

The Doula Association

Melian Mansfield

Melian Mansfield MBE

Chair

Early Childhood Forum

Anja Bailey

Director of Development and External Affairs Family Action

K. Imes

Katherine Jones

Joint CEO: Head of Strategy Fatherhood Institute

Anna-Louise Van Der Merwe

Trust Director

The Foundation Years Trust

Janue Brokbank

Janice Brockbank

Chair

Good Enough Start

Professor Helen L Ball

Director

Durham Infancy & Sleep Centre (DISC) & Baby Sleep Information Source (BASIS)

Beatrice Merrick

Chief Executive Early Education

Sarah Darton

Chief Executive Family Links

Amanda McIntyre

Arrando nº8

CEO

The For Baby's Sake Trust

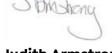
Dr Sacha Powell

Chief Executive Officer Froebel Trust

Peter Grigg

Chief Executive Home-Start UK





Judith Armstrong

CEO

Home-Start Sutton

Couraine Likingman

Lauraine Leigh Klugman

Arts Psychotherapist West Berks. Reg. Health and Care Professions Council

Zoe Faulkner IBLCE

Chair

Lactation Consultants of Great Britain

Evelien Docherty

Interim CEO Make Birth Better

Mark Rowland

CEO

The Mental Health Foundation

Anne Fennell

A. Temel

Chair

Mothers at Home Matter

Angela McConville

Chief Executive

NCT

Quan Mation

Alison Morton

Executive Director
Institute of Health Visiting

Bev Morgan

CEO

Koala North West

Jenny Ward

Chief Executive Lullaby Trust

3. Slater

Emily Slater

CEO

Maternal Mental Health Alliance (MMHA)

Rosemary A S Mackenzie

Chief Executive Officer Mellow Parenting

W. Josh

Miriam Donaghy

CEO

MumsAid

Sir Peter Wanless

CEO

NSPCC



Clare Stead

CEO

Oliiki Limited

Verity Glasgow

Co-director OnePlusOne

Dympna Cunnane

CEO

Our Time

Celia Suppiah

CEO

Parents 1st UK

Karen Burgess

Chief Executive & Founder

Petals

Dr Karen Boardman

Liboardman

Chair

TACTYC

Penny Mansfield

Co-director

OnePlusOne

Dr Jackie Musgrave

Programme Lead for Early Childhood and

Education Studies (Primary)

The Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies, The Open University

H. Callaghan.

Helen Callaghan

CEO, Clinical Director

OXPIP

Keith Reed

CEO

Parent-Infant Foundation

Dr Rebecca Johnson

Solihull Approach Development Manager

Pip Pinhorn

Manager

Toyhouse

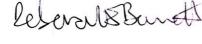


Matt Buttery

Chief Executive Officer Triple P UK

Obi Amadi

Director, Community Practitioners' and Health Visitors' Association Unite/CPHVA



Debbie Barnett MBE

Chair UKAMB (UK Association of Milk Banks)

Karen Wint

Karen Wint

Chief Executive Women's Health & Family Services (WHFS)

Helen Gray MPhil IBCLC

Joint Coordinator World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi) UK

Alex Florschutz

CEO Zero2 Expo



Nikki Roberts

Acting CEO Twins Trust

Evri Anagnostara

Chair

Unite/Mental Health Nurses Association

George Hosking OBE

CEO and Research Director **WAVE Trust**

Lydia Keyte

Chair

What About The Children?

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Clare Meynell RM (Rtd) IBCLC

Joint Coordinator World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi) UK