



*Protecting human rights
in childbirth*

Registered address:
Birthrights
Union House
111 New Union Street
Coventry CV1 2NT
0300 400 30 400

Sent by email

16th November 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

We write to you from the human rights in childbirth charity, Birthrights, to urge you to accept the Health and Social Care committee's recommendation to invest an additional £200-£350m per year in maternity services, and to direct NHS England and Improvement to urgently publish a retention plan for midwives and other maternity staff.

Today Birthrights launches its #SpeakUpSpeakOut campaign, with a brand-new short film featuring the real birth stories of three women who received poor care. The aim of the campaign is to encourage women and birthing people to tell maternity services about their experience – good or bad – so that services can learn and improve.

However, we launch this campaign against a backdrop of the worst staffing pressures maternity services have seen for many years. An [NHS Digital report](#) found that the number of midwives working in May had fallen by 300 in 2 months. And a [recent survey](#) by the Royal College of Midwives found that 57% of participants were thinking of leaving the NHS in the next year. On Sunday 21st November, March for Midwives vigils will take place across the country to draw attention to this crisis and demand action.

The ongoing inquiry into Shrewsbury and Telford, the criminal prosecution of East Kent by the CQC, and the recently announced inquiry into maternity services in Nottingham are just the most recent investigations to highlight safety issues in

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Patron: Nadine Montgomery

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maternity care. However, there is little hope of learning from the findings and creating a safe maternity culture, when many units are fire-fighting just to staff the next shift.

Whilst we appreciate that there are pressures right across the NHS just now, around 59% of the value of new clinical negligence claims (£4.2bn in 2020/21) is attributable to poor maternity care. Aside from the heartbreaking impact that negligence has on families, the NHS simply cannot afford more mistakes.

Last week, the latest [MBRRACE report](#) was published, showing that Black women are still four times more likely to die than white women around the period of birth – a statistic that has not altered in over a decade. Birthrights' inquiry into Racial Injustice in Maternity Care is currently analysing evidence from hundreds of Black, Brown and mixed ethnicity women and birthing people about their experiences and the impacts of systemic racism on their care. Emerging themes, backed up by testimony from healthcare professionals, include feeling unsafe, their concerns being ignored or dismissed, denial of pain relief due to racial stereotypes, and pervasive microaggressions causing harm or distress. There is urgent work to be done to shift the dial on inequality in maternity care. This work will not be achieved without adequate capacity in the system.

Safe and rights respecting maternity care is underpinned by adequately resourced services. The Government response to the Health and Social Care Committee's inquiry into the safety of maternity services stated that the Government was considering the recommendation to invest £200-£350m a year in maternity services. We ask the Government to accept this recommendation without delay to fund recruitment, training and retention.

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Today we are calling on women and birthing people to speak up and speak out about their maternity experience. What they have to say may be hard to hear. We know that so many individual staff are doing their best to give safe and personalised care against the odds. We urge the Government to give these staff hope that they will be empowered, supported and resourced to give women and birthing people the care that they came into the profession to provide.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Amy Gibbs
Chief Executive Officer - Birthrights

Cc

NHSE & I

Jeremy Hunt - Chair of Health and Social Care committee

Baroness Julia Cumberlege - Chair of Stakeholder Council to the Maternity Transformation Programme