



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

10th September 2021

Jean Combrant

RE: THE HEALTH & CARE BILL

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of your concerns regarding the *Health & Care Bill*. I have read your comments on this issue with interest.

The unprecedented threat of the COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us all how vital our health and care system is. I want to assure you that the NHS will always be free at the point of use, and any proposed reforms will aim to continue to improve the quality of these services and patient outcomes.

As we build back better from this pandemic, it is right and necessary that our health and care services are at the forefront. The pandemic has underlined not only the dedication and skill of those in this sector, but also the necessity of a broader, more integrated, health and care system. I welcome the intention to develop more joined up, integrated care between the NHS, local government and other key partners, including the voluntary and community sector, which will be vital in tackling the factors that affect the long-term sustainability of patient services. The Bill will make permanent some of the innovations we have seen as a result of the pandemic. I understand that these proposed reforms will also include proper accountability mechanisms and give patients and the public the confidence that they are receiving the best care from their healthcare system.

Indeed, the Bill includes proposals to give local people, local clinicians and NHS organisations, more control over the way health and care services are delivered. However, in a democracy, the public and Parliament, rightly, expect to be able to hold to account the decision-makers who oversee the health system and the performance of the NHS, so I welcome measures in the Bill to allow for this. Importantly, I am assured that individual clinical decisions are explicitly exempt from the scope of the powers for the Secretary of State.

The new Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) will be given a range of powers and duties under the *Health & Care Bill* and will oversee the local NHS in their area. This will help to improve care and integration between health and social care locally. They are statutory bodies controlled by NHS England and I welcome the ability, set out in the Bill, of local NHS leaders to propose their own constitutions for choosing members of the ICBs. This means that ICBs could include companies that provide major local NHS services. ICBs must also include NHS leaders, GPs, council leaders and independent non-executives. I have been assured that meetings will be held in public and decisions must be transparent. Any conflicts of interest will have to be declared and managed.



It is irresponsible scaremongering to suggest that these Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) are being used to support privatisation, or cuts to NHS funding. The NHS will always be free at the point of use, and I believe these reforms will continue to improve the quality of NHS services and outcomes for patients. Ensuring every part of England is covered by an ICS is a key way of promoting local collaboration.

More broadly, the measures set out in this Bill deliver on the NHS's own proposals for reform in its long-term plan. These proposals have been developed in consultation with key stakeholders in this sector, and I am encouraged by the preliminary positive feedback received. In particular, the comments from the Chief Executive of NHS England, who has said that this Bill "*will support our health and care services to be more integrated and innovative so the NHS can thrive in the decades to come*", are reassuring.

Separately, I wholeheartedly support the Government's commitment to recruit 50,000 more nurses, 6,000 new GPs, and 6,000 more primary care professionals, in addition to the 7,500 further nurse associates and 20,000 primary care professionals that have previously been announced. These commitments are vital to ensuring our NHS is fit for the long-term. I understand that progress is already being made in this area, with more than 6,500 more doctors, almost 10,600 more nurses and over 18,700 more health support workers compared with a year ago.

I am happy to say that there are approximately 70,000 nurses and midwives in training, including 29,740 who began courses this academic year, which amounts to an increase of 26 percent on last year. Additionally, the introduction of the new Nursing Degree Apprenticeship and Nursing Associate roles will significantly bolster the nursing workforce in the short-term, as we continue to build an NHS workforce for the future.

Finally, the *NHS Long Term Plan* focuses on retaining staff by ensuring that they are well supported and able to develop their own careers; this ethos will underpin all planning for the NHS workforce.

I hope that this reassures you of the Government's ongoing commitment to a properly funded health care system that works efficiently and proactively to improve patient services for all.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes,

**TOM PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**