



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

5th May 2023

Jean Comblent

RE: MENCAP CAMPAIGN (LEARNING DISABILITIES AND AUTISM)

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of your concerns about MENCAP's campaign on inpatient units for people with learning disabilities and autism. I have read your comments with interest.

I absolutely agree that patient safety and care for those with autism and learning disabilities should be to the highest standard, and I am deeply concerned at the abuse that patients in Winterbourne and other hospitals faced.

Since 2015, the number of people in inpatient care has reduced by almost a fifth, which is welcome progress. The 'NHS Long Term Plan' proposed key changes to inpatient units for those with learning disabilities and autism. This includes commitments to reduce the number of admissions and decrease the amount of time spent in these units by 2024. I was also pleased to see these commitments renewed in the *Autism Strategy* (published in 2021). This will enable more people to receive personalised care in the community, closer to home, and reduce preventable admissions to inpatient services.

I fully share your concern that people with autism are still being admitted to these units. The *Autism Strategy* committed to improving the identification and diagnosis of autism, when patients are admitted into inpatient care.

Changes are also being brought forward to the *Mental Health Act 1983* to ensure that autistic people are only admitted to inpatient mental health settings if absolutely necessary. These changes would mean that autism alone is no longer a lawful basis for ongoing detention in inpatient care, and would enable people in inpatient care to be discharged as soon as they are well enough to leave.


A draft *Mental Health Bill*, which contains these proposals, has recently completed pre-legislative scrutiny by backbench MPs. The Government is considering the recommendations made by MPs and will introduce the Bill when parliamentary time allows.

Finally, the Government remains committed to significantly reducing the number of people with a learning disability and autistic people in mental health hospitals. However, I recognise that there is much more to be done to reach the target set for March 2024.

In the meantime, I know that the Government is working with NHS England to implement the findings of the action plan, including work to check that people with a learning disability and autistic people in mental health inpatient care settings, have received a safe and wellbeing review.



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**