



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Mr Mark Polin,
Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board
Ysbyty Gwynedd
Penrhosgarnedd
Bangor
Gwynedd
LL57 2PW

22nd September

Dear Mark,

Re: Campaign Against Lone Births

For many women, going through pregnancy and labour can be an already traumatic and difficult time. Yet, their experiences are undoubtedly worsened when they are forced to go through this period of their life alone – without their partner, a trusted family member or a close friend available to support them.

Consequently, it is right that both the UK and Welsh Government have recognised the importance of allowing women to be accompanied during pregnancy appointments and labour, noting the positive impacts it has on infant bonding and for improving the birth outcomes for women. I am pleased that both Governments have rightly changed the guidance issued to local Health Boards and hospitals and are now permitting a visitor to attend during labour and antenatal scans - preventing any further distress for pregnant women and their families.

While I am glad to see that many Health Boards, like Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) have followed this guidance and are now allowing visitors to attend antenatal scans, I am worried that this does not go far enough to support and comfort pregnant woman at a very vulnerable and worrying time.

Currently, guidance on BCUHB's website still limits the opportunities for women to benefit from having a birth partner present, with partners only allowed to attend during 'active labour' and having to leave soon after the baby is born. Moreover, for procedures such as an Induction of Labour or a Caesarean, pregnant women are expected to arrive to the hospital alone – leaving pregnant women scared and isolated.



I am disappointed that BCUHB are still placing restrictions on women and their families, despite the UK Government issuing firm guidance that women should have a supportive person with them for all scans and during every stage of labour – not just ‘active labour’. The Rt. Hon Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Health, has explicitly supported this and stated that partners should be present for “each stage of pregnancy” so that people “can get the support they need”.

While health and social care is a devolved matter, this is an issue which goes beyond party politics and government policy, it is about ensuring that women feel safe and supported regardless of where they live.

Therefore, I urge BCUHB to follow this Government’s guidance and change their policy, so that pregnant women are permitted to have a partner with them for all scans and for all stages of labour.

It should not be a postcode lottery as to whether women are supported throughout their pregnancy, and women in Delyn should not have to suffer for living over the border in Wales.

It is right that we end the trauma of lone births. Women do not deserve to face real tragedy such as the news of a miscarriage, on their own. The Make Birth Better Campaign has stated that 9 in 10 women say their maternity choices have been changed due to the coronavirus crisis meaning many women have been forced to give birth without their partners, leaving women feeling “devasted”, “powerless” and “frightened”.

At present, this campaign has been raised at the highest level, with my colleague Alicia Kearns MP bringing this campaign to Parliament. The call to end lone births has received support from several pregnancy advocacy groups such as Pregnant Then Screwed as well as the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon. Boris Johnson MP. In addition, a Change petition calling for partners to be allowed for the entirety of labour and birth in all hospitals has also received strong levels of support from the public, with signatures currently over 425,000.

While I understand that current Covid-19 restrictions prevent any visitors at Wrexham Maelor Hospital, I hope that birth partners will be allowed promptly and without limit at other hospital facilities throughout North Wales in order for women to be protected throughout the whole of their pregnancy – rather than restricted to only being present during ‘active labour’.

At a time of heightened worry for many families, it is only right that all Health Boards take a consistent approach and do all they can to limit further stress by loosening restrictions so women can be accompanied by a birth partner in hospitals for all scans and at all stages of labour. I strongly encourage BCUHB to consider changing their visitor policy and allowing pregnant women to be supported fully, just as they deserve.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Rob Roberts', written over a white background.

Rob Roberts MP
Member of Parliament for Delyn