



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

RR/KS/VG

Vaughan Gething MS
Minister for Health and Social Services
Welsh Parliament,
Cardiff Bay,
Cardiff,
CF99 1SN

20 October 2020

Dear Minister Gething,

Re: Campaign on Preventing Lone Births

For many parents, this pandemic has caused extra worry and uncertainty during key family moments such as children starting school or moving to university. For new and expectant mothers, who are already feeling vulnerable, this concern has been heightened by having to go through their experiences of pregnancy and labour alone - without their partner, a trusted family member or a close friend available to support them.

Consequently, I am glad that the Welsh Government updated its guidance in July to allow women to be accompanied by one birthing partner during some stages of labour and at birth, as well as at specific antenatal appointments. This is overwhelmingly the right decision for both the health of women and their new-borns, with evidence showing that having a partner present helps improve the birth outcome and also allows for better infant bonding with both parents. When sadly pregnancies and labour are not successful, it also prevents women having to face further distress and potentially traumatic experiences on their own, without support from their families.

However, I must urge the Welsh Government to reconsider their current position regarding maternity visitor policy, which puts expectant mother's mental health at risk and puts further strain on many new families. At present, Welsh Government policy only allows one birthing partner to accompany women during 'active labour' and at birth - still leaving women to go through early scans and stages of pregnancy alone as well as excluding partners from offering comfort and care after the birth.



Welsh Government guidance regarding hospital visiting during coronavirus states that it “person-centred” and “flexible”. However, by placing restrictions on women and their families and denying pregnant women the support they need, Welsh Government policy is currently the very opposite – it is bureaucratic, overly harsh and unfair.

Therefore, I ask that the Welsh Government review their position and allow pregnant women to have a partner with them for all scans and through every stage of labour.

While I understand that that restrictions have been put in place to manage the spread of coronavirus, the guidance does not consider how any small risks can be mitigated to make it safer for women to be accompanied by a partner of their choice. For example, through social distancing, wearing of PPE and face masks or forming a social bubble with their birthing partner.

In comparison, women in England, following support from the UK Government, are able to benefit from having a supportive person with them for all scans and throughout the entirety of labour – not just during ‘active labour’. Moreover, in guidance updated in September, NHS Trusts in England are now able to reintroduce up to two birth partners in all labour and birth settings so women can feel fully supported.

It should not be a postcode lottery as to whether women are supported throughout their pregnancy - mental health and the health of pregnant women should be a priority for every Government in every country.

At present, women in Delyn and across Wales are being let down and are having to go through this period of their lives scared and alone – when it should normally be an exciting and happy time for a family. 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”. In order to end this trauma of lone births, restrictive visitor policy must be eased.

While it is important that guidance can be adapted if the risk posed by Coronavirus is too severe, as seen as with the added restrictions on visitors at Wrexham Maelor during a recent Coronavirus outbreak, it is only right that guidance is reviewed when the risk of coronavirus is low. As the level of risk can be managed in the majority of pregnancy cases in hospital settings, visitor policy for pregnancy and labour should reflect that and allow women to have a partner present at every stage.

This is not a call for a return to “business as normal” with regards to hospital visiting, is it calling for the Welsh Government to be compassionate and allow pregnant women to have support during what can be a worrying and often difficult experience.



In times such as these, we should be doing all we can to limit further uncertainty and isolation for families, yet current Welsh Government guidance create unnecessary stress for new mothers and their partners. I strongly encourage the Welsh Government to consider easing restrictions on maternity visitor policy and ensure it is applied equally and fairly by all Health Boards, giving all pregnant women the opportunity to be accompanied by a birth partner in hospitals for all scans and throughout the entirety of labour.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Rob Roberts'.

Rob Roberts MP
Member of Parliament for Delyn