Advocacy on Disability Welfare Cuts: Addressing Key Concerns

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SUMMARY

This document contains arguments against proposed disability welfare cuts. It examines the issue from multiple perspectives: the moral imperative to uphold human dignity; the personal and societal impact of benefit reductions; the legal obligations under both domestic and international frameworks; and the economic rationale for supporting rather than cutting disability benefits.

Drawing on evidence from government reports, academic studies, and recent judicial decisions, the analysis demonstrates that the current policies and associated rhetoric not only undermine the financial and physical well-being of disabled individuals but also jeopardise broader social and fiscal stability.

The paper concludes with a call for any reforms to be made in dialogue with disabled people and organisations and emphasising that any changes must prioritise human well-being alongside fiscal prudence.

INTRODUCTION

My concerns are not solely a discussion of policy; they are fundamentally about the people who rely on disability benefits to live with independence and dignity. The proposed cuts to these benefits will exacerbate poverty among disabled individuals and diminish their quality of life. I am one of the many human faces behind the statistics, and it is crucial that we consider the real-life impact of cuts to disability benefits.

In the following sections, I set forth a comprehensive case against such cuts, outlining the detrimental effects on individuals and society at large.

OVERVIEW OF DISABILITY CUTS AND DISCRIMINATION

Over the past 14 years, successive governments have pursued a policy agenda that has become increasingly hostile towards disabled individuals. Budget cuts, changes to eligibility criteria, and administrative hurdles have progressively made it harder for disabled people to access the support they need. Repeated welfare reforms have disproportionately affected disabled individuals, leading to rises in poverty, homelessness, and deteriorating mental and physical health. An outline of some of the notable cuts to disability benefits since 2010 is included in the Appendix.

Reports from disability advocacy groups and international bodies—including the United Nations—have condemned the UK government’s treatment of disabled people as a violation of their human rights. Many of these policies have been accompanied by misleading rhetoric suggesting that disabled benefit recipients are fraudulent or undeserving, further fuelling discrimination and social exclusion. The cumulative impact of these policies has led to increased reliance on food banks, worsening health outcomes, and, in some cases, even premature deaths due to a lack of support.

A recent parliamentary report (Committee of Public Accounts, 2025) has highlighted that disability benefit claimants now face wait times for telephone support that are up to ten times longer than for other benefit groups, while rising underpayments have left many in severe financial hardship. These delays not only hinder access to vital support but further deepen the vulnerability of disabled individuals.

After a personal testimony, the discussions are based around Moral arguments; Needs arguments; Legal arguments; and Economic arguments.

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

I have personally encountered issues with disability benefit assessments, delays, and the impact of cuts. The mandatory switch to Universal Credit this month has resulted in the loss of Severe Disability Allowance, leaving me in a precarious financial situation.

The stress of repeated incidents with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) led to my hospital admission following a mini stroke. The anxiety surrounding these cuts, as well as the hostile rhetoric from government figures, has had a significant impact on my mental and physical health.

I have experienced first-hand the delays in processing claims and the degrading nature of assessments, which often misrepresent the reality of my condition. Every single reassessment for either the former DLA or the current PIP has resulted in the need to go to appeals tribunals only for the original decision to be overturned after up to 18 months of waiting. It may be argued that "the process worked" and I got the due back payments, but at what cost in the meantime physically, mentally and financially to myself, and the many individuals caught up in this system? These policies have not only affected my well-being but have also made daily living and financial stability increasingly difficult.

The continued uncertainty and hostile environment towards disabled individuals have exacerbated my mental health struggles. Many disabled people, like myself, feel trapped in a cycle of fear, unable to plan for the future. These cuts are not simply numbers on a budget sheet; they are life-altering policies that risk pushing vulnerable people into crisis.

In addition, the DWP's shift to a digital-first system has compounded these challenges. Many disabled claimants lack reliable internet access or the necessary digital literacy to navigate a predominantly online application process. Recent coverage in *The Guardian* has emphasised that this digital transformation has significantly increased the complexity of applying for benefits, further delaying support for those in need.

Just this month I have been one of those on the legacy ESA system that has been "migrated" over to the new Universal Credit ESA system. I am still waiting for the first payment at the end of February 2025, with no word as to how much I will get or indeed any other information whatsoever.

Not only am I being held in this limbo, but the DWP fail to point out that the new ESA as more stringent conditions, and that the severe disability premium I got previously, worth around £3500 per year, is not part of the new Universal Credit ESA. The department and it spokes people say, "no one will lose money on successful migration to Universal Credit from ESA" as there is "transitional payment", but that is only half the facts in the situation and covers over the devastating reality: The amount in *cash terms* is protected, but it will not rise in *real terms*. As the real terms amount of Universal Credit is uprated by inflation each year, this will be taken out of the transitional payments until eventually all of it is gone. This means that over time, former Support Group members will effectively lose £3,500 in today's money due to inflation adjustments eroding transitional payments. Frankly this is horrifying to me, devastating in fact, and leading to chronic stress and anxiety about my future financial situation.

On top of this is the rhetoric around being made to look for work or even forced by financial situations in to work. I have various chronic fluctuating conditions. There is no realistic prospect of me finding work, being employable, or even being able to retain work, let alone being able to live and function. For those of us disabled like this, just living day to day is work.

Finally, those who are in situations like me feel that the hostile environment towards us coming from government, the media, is feeding the public distrust of anyone who is on benefits. It seems to be copying the way things were 14 years ago under the Conservative government, and worse. That when we make for ourselves decent lives within our capacities, that is used against us. The role of government and the DWP regarding disability and vulnerable people needs to be addressed. They need to stop harassing disabled people, support them properly in consultation with us, and enable us to live in society with dignity and worth; a worth that is because of our intrinsic worth, not dependant on our economic output.

MORAL ARGUMENT

Respect for Human Dignity and Combating Harmful Rhetoric

Harmful Rhetoric. Remarks by public officials—for example, Liz Kendall’s assertion that individuals are “taking the mickey” (BBC News, 2025) and stressing the need to end this behaviour as part of broader reforms to tackle the “sick note culture" (The Sun, 2025)—serve to stigmatise and marginalise disabled citizens.

Comments by leaders such under the previous Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, referred to the cessation of the “sick note culture,” perpetuate negative stereotypes, portraying disabled individuals as burdens rather than as persons in need of support.

Macho Rhetoric. For Sir Keir to concur with the statement that he possessed “the balls” (The Sun, 2025) to reduce disability benefits and would act “ruthlessly” exemplifies an approach to welfare policy that is both coarse and lacking sensitivity. Such macho rhetoric reduces complex and deeply impactful issues to a display of bravado, trivialising the profound hardships faced by disabled individuals. This language not only undermines the dignity of those affected but also reveals a prioritisation of political posturing over evidence-based, empathetic policymaking. [1] It also impacts the emotional and mental state of disabled people, increasing sense of fear and alienation.

Impact of Stigma. Government portrayals of disabled people foster discrimination, equating it to other forms of prejudice such as racism or sexism.

Mental Health and Suicide Risk. Numerous studies have linked welfare reforms to adverse mental health outcomes. A 2015 study published in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, found that Work Capability Assessments were significantly associated with increases in mental distress and suicides among claimants. Similarly, a 2017 UN report has criticised existing disability policies for exacerbating mental health challenges among vulnerable groups.

Recent remarks by certain ministers and MPs in 2025 have raised serious concerns among mental health advocates and professionals. In various public statements, officials have employed dismissive and derogatory language when addressing mental health issues, implying that some individuals exaggerate their conditions or use them as an excuse to avoid work. For example, comments suggesting that claimants are "taking the mickey" not only trivialise the profound challenges faced by those with mental health conditions but also perpetuate stigma and undermine the legitimacy of mental health as a serious public health

[1] See The Guardian, “As Labour touts more brutal cuts to benefits, how is this different from life under the Tories?” (Feb 5, 2025), available at https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/feb/05/labour-cuts-benefits-tories-vulnerable. This article critically examines Labour’s proposed benefit cuts, drawing comparisons with previous Conservative policies and highlighting concerns over the impact on vulnerable populations.

concern. Critics warn that such rhetoric risks eroding public confidence in mental health services, potentially influencing policy decisions that fail to provide adequate support for vulnerable populations. [2] This undermining stance, they argue, may lead to reduced funding and weakened protections at a time when robust mental health care is most needed.

Call for Fairness. It is imperative to move away from harmful stereotypes towards a fair, transparent, and supportive system that upholds the dignity of disabled individuals.

NEEDS ARGUMENT

Understanding Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Its Necessity

Purpose of PIP. Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is designed to mitigate the additional costs incurred by individuals with long-term health conditions or disabilities, thereby supporting individuals in leading full and independent lives, and equitable and active participation in society.

Eligibility and Support. PIP is available to individuals who face difficulties with everyday tasks or mobility due to physical or mental health conditions. It is non-means-tested, ensuring that support is provided based on need rather than financial status.

Historical Context. The transition from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to PIP has been controversial. Thousands of disabled claimants lost extra financial support—particularly the Severe Disability Premium—when DLA was replaced by PIP and Universal

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[2] MIND (7 Feb 2025) wrote in a post on their Facebook page: *"Last night, Work and Pensions Secretary Liz Kendall suggested some people are "taking the mickey" by claiming benefits instead of working. Given many on disability benefits have mental health problems, comments like this trivialise the realities of mental illness. It's deeply disheartening. Many want to work but need support to get better first – support that isn't there. Right now, 2 million people are stuck on NHS mental health waiting lists. If the UK government truly wants to help people back into work, tackling these waiting lists should be the priority. But the latest NHS England planning guidance sets out no plans to do so. The second priority needs to be offering the kind of support that helps people with mental health problems find and stay in work. We'll keep challenging this harmful rhetoric and pushing for real solutions so that those of us with mental health problems get the support we need."* (MIND, 2025)

Credit. This shift has significantly reduced the level of assistance available to those with high extra costs.

Case Studies. PIP is often misrepresented as a benefit solely for those who are unemployed, many working disabled people depend on it to cover critical expenses, including transportation, assistive technologies, and personal care services, which in turn facilitate their ability to remain employed, and contribute further to society even through volunteering.

LEGAL ARGUMENT

Obligations Under International and UK Law

International Commitments. The United Kingdom, as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (United Nations, n.d.), is obligated to take "all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures" to progressively realise the rights enshrined in the Convention (see CRPD, Article 4) that will protect and promote the rights of disabled individuals. This largely understood include a continuous duty to enhance the rights and provisions afforded to disabled persons, ensuring that domestic law and practice evolve in step with the Convention's standards.[3]

Domestic Legal Framework. Under the provisions of the Equality Act 2010, the government is mandated to ensure that disabled individuals are not subjected to discrimination and are afforded equal access to opportunities and support. (Equality Act 2010 (c.15, Part 2, Chapter 2, Section 13), n.d.)

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[3] A useful legal source is the Equality and Human Rights Commission's guide on the CRPD, which states that, while the Convention does not create "new" rights per se, it imposes a duty on States Parties to ensure that existing rights are fully and progressively realized through appropriate legal, policy, and administrative measures (Equality and Human Rights Commission, "Guide to using the CRPD to effect change") (CRPD)

This interpretation is also supported by academic commentary such as (Kanter, 2019) who argues that the CRPD requires States to adopt a progressive approach in eliminating barriers and improving disability rights provisions.

Legal Precedents. Recently, a High Court ruling found that the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) consultation on proposed cuts to incapacity benefits, set up by the previous government but continued under the new Labor government, was both misleading and unlawful. The court held that the DWP had failed to reveal that the primary driver behind the proposed cuts—reducing expenditure—was cost-saving. This omission meant that the consultation did not provide claimants or stakeholders with a full and accurate picture of the potential impact, which would have seen over 424,000 claimants lose up to £416 per month. (The Guardian, 2025)

ECONOMIC BENEFITS ARGUMENT

Economic Advantages of Supporting Disabled Individuals

Cost-Effectiveness of Support. Investing in adequate support for disabled individuals leads to better health outcomes, reducing long-term healthcare costs. Studies indicate that cutting benefits can result in higher NHS expenditure as the health of vulnerable people deteriorates.

It should be noted that the Public Accounts Committee found that there were significant benefit underpayments in 2023-24 that were most pronounced in disability benefits, with Disability Living Allowance underpayments at 11.1% (£750 million) and Personal Independence Payment underpayments at 4.0% (£870 million) (Committee of Public Accounts, 2025).

Economic Contribution. Enabling disabled individuals to work can boost the economy through increased tax contributions and a reduction in welfare dependency. Recent analysis by Pro Bono Economics, commissioned by anti-poverty charity Z2K, demonstrates that disability benefits such as PIP are not an economic drain but rather a significant fiscal asset. The report *More than Money: The Lifelong Wellbeing Impact of Disability*

Benefits (January 2025)[4] finds that the improvement in wellbeing among disabled benefit recipients is valued at approximately £12,300 per person annually. When scaled across the 3.5 million claimants, this translates to an estimated £42 billion in annual economic benefits—substantially outweighing the £28 billion cost of administering these benefits. The research suggests that by alleviating financial hardship and enhancing mental wellbeing and social inclusion, disability benefits spur greater economic participation and productivity. Consequently, any moves to tighten eligibility or restrict access risk undermining these broader, long-term economic gains. Their analysis finds that the economic value of disability benefits is not understood by ministers, urging them to reconsider any planned cuts.

Fiscal Risks of Cuts. Recent analysis from the Welfare Trends Report (Office for Budget Responsibility, 2024) indicates that while the forecast for incapacity benefits spending as a share of GDP is expected to stabilise after 2024–25, there is a risk that any proposed cuts to disability benefits might trigger unexpected increases in caseloads, thereby placing additional fiscal pressure on the system. This underscores the need for careful in assumptions around disability benefits policy.

CONCLUSION

Disability benefits are not merely financial handouts; they constitute essential investments in human dignity, independence, and economic productivity. Reducing these benefits would not only undermine the rights and well-being of disabled individuals but would also have broader negative implications for societal and fiscal stability. Consequently, it is imperative that any reform of the welfare system be implemented through a process of

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[4] *More than Money: The Lifelong Wellbeing Impact of Disability Benefits* (January 2025) accessed at: https://www.probonoeconomics.com/more-than-money-the-life-long-wellbeing-impact-of-disability-benefits with further discussion at https://www.epilepsy.org.uk/news/better-access-to-disability-benefits-could-boost-the-economy-report

consultation with disabled individuals and their representative organisations, with human well-being remaining at the forefront of fiscal decision-making.

A society that truly values the contributions, dignity, and rights of all its members—including those with disabilities—is one that is just, equitable, and prosperous. It is incumbent upon policymakers to eschew superficial cost-cutting measures and instead collaborate to develop a benefits system that provides robust support for the vulnerable, both in the short term and in the long term.

In my view, the evidence presented here makes it indisputably clear: disability benefit cuts are not only morally indefensible but also economically short-sighted and legally questionable. The devastating impact of these policies—exacerbating poverty, worsening health outcomes, and stripping away dignity—cannot be ignored.

I urge you, as my elected representative, to take a stand. Disabled people deserve policies that empower, not punish. I call on you to:

1. **Publicly reject any further cuts to disability benefits** and advocate for a fair, needs-based welfare system.
2. **Challenge the harmful rhetoric used against disabled people**, ensuring political discourse fosters respect and dignity.
3. **Push for urgent reform of assessment and appeals processes**, ending unnecessary distress and delays that force disabled individuals into prolonged hardship.
4. **Demand accountability from the DWP** to improve transparency, efficiency, and fairness in benefit administration.
5. **Support investment in disabled people's futures**—through proper financial support, accessible employment opportunities, and comprehensive social care.

A just society does not balance its books on the backs of its most vulnerable. I ask you to raise these concerns in Parliament, engage with disability advocacy groups, and work towards a system that upholds the dignity, rights, and well-being of disabled citizens.

Peter Nicholls, *February 2025*

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APPENDIX A

KEY BENEFIT CUTS AND REFORMS SINCE 2010

Since 2010, successive Conservative governments in the UK have implemented significant changes to housing benefits and disability assessments, resulting in substantial challenges for disabled individuals. These reforms encompass alterations to housing support and the assessment regimes for disability benefits. These reforms have led to increased financial hardship, housing instability, and heightened scrutiny of disabled claimants, contributing to a climate of adversity for those reliant on welfare support.

Housing Benefit Reforms[5]

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Adjustments

2011 Reduction. The LHA rate, which determines housing benefit for private renters, was reduced from the 50th percentile of local rents to the 30th percentile. This change meant that housing benefit would only cover the cheapest 30% of rental properties in a given area. This combined with many years of freezes to this rate, including from 2024 under the current government at a time of significant rises in rents is leading to increased financial strain for many recipients.

Age Threshold Increase. The age at which single individuals could claim housing benefit for a self-contained one-bedroom flat was raised from 25 to 35 years. Consequently, individuals under 35 were only eligible for the shared accommodation rate, often insufficient for securing appropriate housing.

5 **House of Commons Library:** Research Briefing. The rent safety net: changes since 2010. Published Tuesday, 17 August 2021. https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn05638/

Spare Room Subsidy ("Bedroom Tax"). Implemented in 2013, this policy reduced housing benefit for social housing tenants deemed to have spare bedrooms. Affected households faced a reduction of 14% for one spare bedroom and 25% for two or more, leading to significant financial challenges for many, including disabled individuals requiring additional space for medical equipment.

Benefit Cap Implementation

Introduced in 2013, the benefit cap limited the total amount of welfare support a household could receive. Initially set at £26,000 per year, it was later reduced to £20,000 (£23,000 in London). This cap disproportionately affected larger families and those in high-rent areas, often leading to rent arrears and homelessness.

Assessment Regime Changes

Work Capability Assessment (WCA)

Introduced in 2008, the WCA was used to determine eligibility for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). From 2010, the assessment was applied more stringently, leading to many claimants being declared fit for work despite significant health issues.

Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

Replacing Disability Living Allowance (DLA) in 2013 for working-age individuals, PIP introduced stricter assessment criteria. Many claimants faced reduced support or lost their benefits entirely due to the more rigorous evaluations. [6]

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6 Office for Budget Responsibility. (2023, Nov). *Welfare spending: disability benefits.* Retrieved from Office for Budget Responsibility: https://obr.uk/forecasts-in-depth/tax-by-tax-spend-by-spend/welfare-spending-disability-benefits/

Consequences of Policies and Rhetoric[7]

The combination of these policy changes and negative rhetoric has led to several adverse outcomes for disabled individuals:

Increased Poverty. Austerity measures have resulted in significant income reductions for disabled people, with some families losing up to £10,000 annually.

Deterioration in Mental and Physical Health. The stress and financial strain from benefit cuts and sanctions have exacerbated health issues among disabled individuals. Studies have linked austerity measures to tens of thousands of excess deaths since 2010.

Erosion of Trust in the Welfare System. The perceived punitive nature of assessments and sanctions has led to a breakdown in trust between disabled individuals and the welfare system, discouraging some from seeking the support they need.

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7 Trades Union Congress. (2023, May). Benefit levels in the UK; TUC consultation response - 24 May 2023. Retrieved from TUC: https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/benefit-levels-uk

APPENDIX B

BRIEFING: UN FINDINGS ON UK WELFARE BENEFITS

Key Issues & Recommendations for Policy Change [8]

(Based on UN Concluding Observations – E/C.12/GBR/CO/7, February 2025)

Summary

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) has issued a critical report on the UK's welfare system (Sections 21-49). It warns that rising living costs, inadequate benefits, and deepening inequality are leaving the most vulnerable without essential support. The Committee expresses serious concern that further welfare cuts, combined with high inflation and rising housing costs, will exacerbate poverty, food insecurity, and homelessness (Sections 21, 23, 41). The government is urged to take immediate steps to reverse harmful welfare reforms, increase benefits in line with inflation, and protect low-income households from financial hardship.

Key Issues Identified

Welfare Reforms Have Increased Poverty

- Benefit cuts and delays (e.g. Universal Credit five-week wait) leave families without essential income.
- The two-child limit and benefit cap are driving low-income families into severe hardship.
- Food bank use has surged, as benefits fail to cover basic living costs.

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8 URL: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/804708?ln=en&v=pdf

Cost of Living Crisis is Pushing Families to Breaking Point

- Welfare payments are not keeping pace with inflation, leaving claimants unable to afford rent, food, and heating.
- Food and energy poverty have worsened, with rising numbers unable to pay essential bills.
- Disabled people, single-parent households, and ethnic minorities face the greatest financial strain.

Disability Benefits Are Inadequate

- Personal Independence Payments & Employment Support Allowance do not cover additional costs faced by disabled people.
- Assessments remain too restrictive, leading to unnecessary appeals and loss of support.

Housing & Homelessness Crisis

- Soaring private rents & a lack of social housing are forcing families into substandard accommodation.
- Housing benefits are not keeping pace with costs, leaving tenants at risk of eviction.
- Homelessness is rising, particularly among single mothers and people in insecure work.

Austerity Measures Have Widened Inequality

- Cuts to local authority budgets & social services have reduced essential support.

- Tax policies are failing to protect low-income households, with freezes on income tax thresholds worsening financial pressures.

Recommendations

1. Reverse Harmful Welfare Reforms (Section 41(a))

- Scrap the two-child limit, benefit cap, and Universal Credit five-week wait.
- Improve disability benefit assessments to reflect actual costs of living.

2. Ensure Benefits Meet Basic Living Costs (Section 21(c))

- Index all benefits to inflation and ensure they provide a liveable income.
- Increase unemployment benefits & asylum seeker support to realistic levels.

Protect Claimants from Systemic Barriers (Sections 41(b), 23(a))

- End digital-only claims and ensure accessible alternatives for all claimants.
- Strengthen due process to prevent unjust benefit suspensions.

Invest in Social Housing & Prevent Homelessness (Sections 47-49)

- Increase social housing supply and support councils in tackling homelessness.
- Strengthen tenant protections to prevent evictions and unfair rent hikes.

Reassess Fiscal Policy to Protect Social Spending (Sections 21, 23, 41)

- End the income tax threshold freeze and review corporate tax fairness.
- Prioritise welfare, housing, and essential services over further austerity.