

15th October 2024

Dear Wes Streeting MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

We, the undersigned organisations and individuals with an interest in trans healthcare, are writing to you today to express our deep lack of confidence in the Cass Review, and our concerns over the Department of Health and Social Care's continued insistence on further degrading the healthcare offer for trans people by implementing and extending its recommendations.

Trustworthy government reviews of the evidence base for a particularly controversial policy, especially in the medical field, do not look like the Cass Review. They have a clear mandate and problem to solve which are raised by those directly affected, not by newspaper columnists or ideologues. They do not exclude members of the patient cohort and those with long-term experience in the field from being part of their team or consider professional or lived experience "bias". They ensure there is transparency and meritocracy in the appointment of key personnel. They consult openly and in an ongoing fashion with patients and organisations representing them. They do not assume that the treatments in question and anyone involved with them are part of an ideological conspiracy. They are clear and consistent about the evidentiary standards being used to judge any given concerns. They are careful not to give credence to unevidenced theories. They accurately represent the views of those they have engaged with. When problems arise or mistakes are made, they engage with the impacted communities. When strong critiques are made by other experts internationally, these are discussed and engaged with rather than ducked and declared unacceptable to mention. None of these can be said of the Cass Review.

Instead, we have suffered the absurd spectacle of a review which despite finding crushingly long waiting times, drawn out assessment procedures, and strong indicators of long-term accuracy in the targeting of treatment, its recommendations seek to undermine trans people's care by fearmongering about the number of young people who seek it and using unreliable methodologies and evidence thresholds to misrepresent the efficacy of puberty blockers and hormone treatments. The research evidence, which is effectively hidden from the general reader in appendices, does not support the conclusions extrapolated from it by the Review and is so

methodologically problematic as to be inadequate for policymaking. The <u>technical failings of the Cass Review</u>^[1] have been extensively documented. There is real concern, therefore, that the Review promotes an inherently flawed approach to determining the efficacy and safety of clinical support for trans healthcare'.

In this context, it is worrying that Baroness Cass has found it necessary to deny her colleagues' accusations of bias against trans lives and trans culture [2], especially since other concerns about her leadership of the Review have been expressed, including:

- The selection of Baroness Cass without consideration of any other candidates;
- The secrecy surrounding the commissioning of the Cass Review by the Conservative Secretary of State for Health, and refusal to answer Freedom of Information Act Requests regarding this;
- Lack of transparency in the commissioning of qualitative and quantitative research for the Cass Review, with a trans-led, multi-university research team receiving no response to their bid, and NHS England subsequently refusing to answer Freedom of Information Act Requests regarding this;
- The explicit exclusion of any trans people from involvement in the Governance
 Assurance Group, on the basis of potential bias, in clear contravention of the NHS
 principle of 'nothing about us without us';
- The inclusion of spurious and misleading theories with no supporting evidence [3];
- Ignoring trans people when seeking to access private medical records of adults protected by the Gender Recognition Act 2004, leading to widespread fear for citizen's rights to privacy;
- Intimations by then Minister for Women and Equalities Minister Kemi Badenoch that biased individuals were selected and appointed specifically to enable the Cass Review to occur^[4];
- Dismissal of and refusal to answer to <u>criticisms from experts domestically and internationally</u>^{[5][6]}, or explain why other <u>government evidence reviews of the same treatments have reached opposite conclusions</u>^[7].

You did not commission the Cass Review, and need not have been held responsible for all of these mistakes. However, you have repeatedly committed, in public and private, to the

implementation of the Cass Review's recommendations. This is incompatible with your stated goal, communicated to LGBTQ+ organisations in a meeting with yourself and DHSC officials on 30th July, of rebuilding trust between the government and the LGBTQ+ community. This trust has been shattered in the past decade in no small part by the way in which the Cass Review was conducted. While you and the government are committed to defending and implementing the recommendations arising from the Cass Review, it is very difficult to see how trust can be rebuilt, enabling positive, collaborative engagement with your department to improve the situation for trans people in the UK.

This does not need to be the case. In accordance with your stated goal of rebuilding trust with the LGBTQ+ community, we call upon you to:

- 1. Establish transparency for the Cass Review by publishing details of the process by which it was commissioned, its governance structure was decided, and Hilary Cass was selected as Chair.
- Suspend the implementation of the Cass Review's recommendations immediately, including removing the current prohibitions on prescription of GnRH analogues ('puberty blockers') for trans children until the accuracy of the Review's findings can be established, whilst ensuring that trans children and young people have access to support.
- 3. Support the British Medical Association's ongoing review of the Review's methodology and conclusions by publicly rebuking actors who insinuate that criticism of the Cass Review is sinister and worthy of censorship, or that support for gender-affirming care for young people is suspect.

We look forward to receiving your assurances on these matters.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Belcher OBE, Managing Director, TransActual

Andrea Brookes, Political Lead, Beaumont Society and Vice Chair, Newbury Pride

Jen Yockney MBE, BiPhoria

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Erin Hale, Trans Active

Jack Earley-Fagg, TransBareAll

Marlowe Mitchell, TransPrideLeeds

Shiv Kay, TransLeeds

Steph Richards, TransLucent.org.uk

Jane Fae, Chair, Trans Media Watch

Jacob Stokoe, CEO, Transparent Change

Sabrina Jones, Chair, Trans Pride Bristol (on behalf of the entire organisation)

Jenny-Anne Bishop OBE, Chairperson, Unique Transgender Network - North Wales

New Road Parents Support Group

Trans Healthcare Action Ireland

Trans Masculine Support & Advice UK

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Sage Brice, Assistant Professor, Durham University

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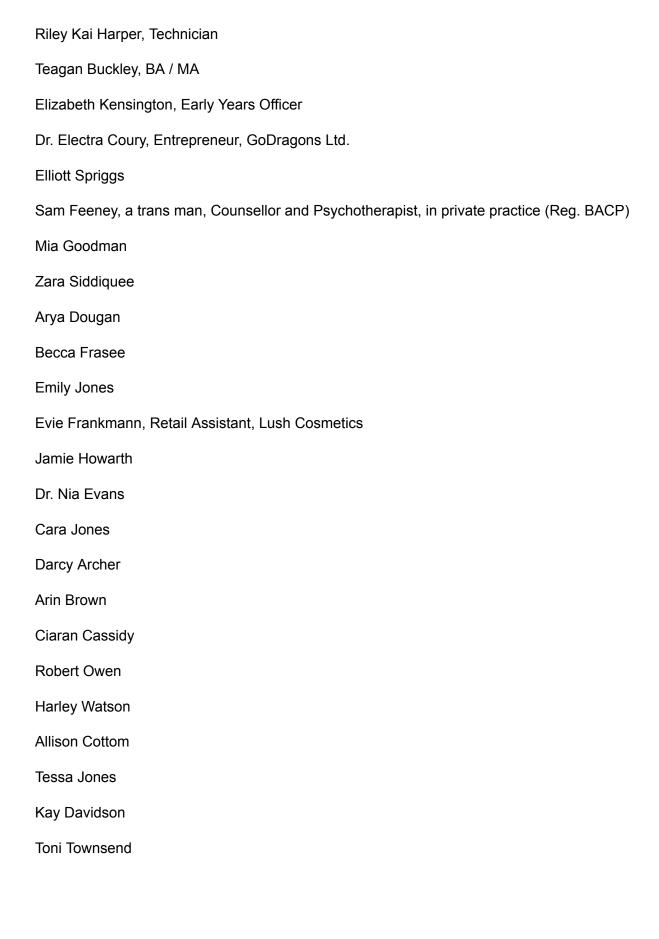
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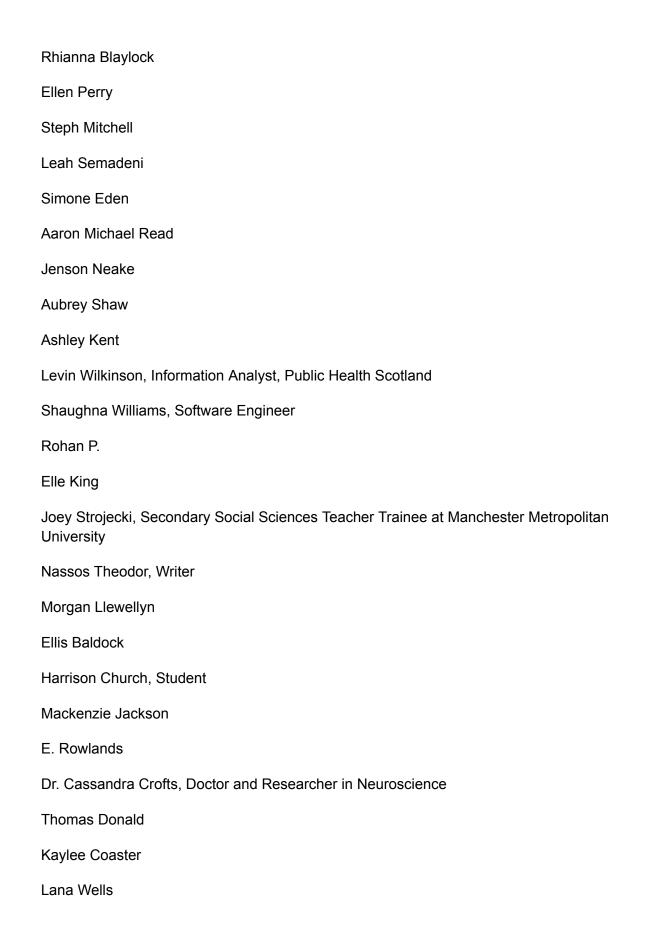
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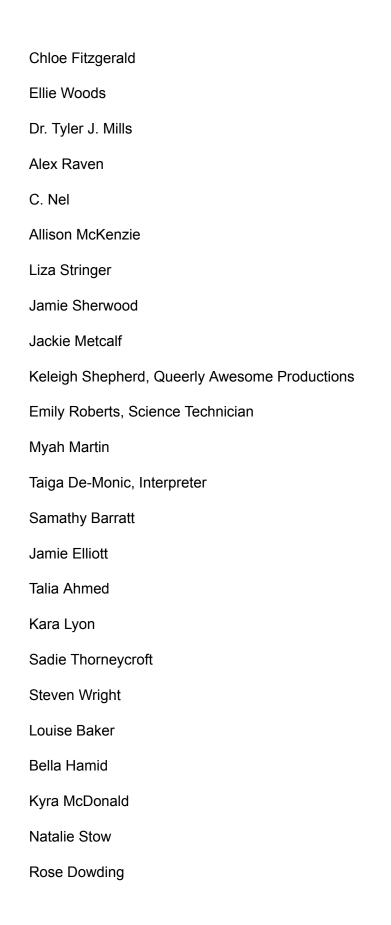
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[1] https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/documents/integrity-project_cass-response.pdf

[2]

https://novaramedia.com/2024/08/08/the-governments-impartial-trans-healthcare-reviewer-wasnt-so-impartial-colleagues-claim/

 $[3] \\ \underline{\text{https://transactual.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/TransActual-Briefing-on-Cass-Review.pdf}}$

- [4] https://x.com/KemiBadenoch/status/1799509912143151611
- $\begin{tabular}{ll} [5] & $ttps://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/documents/integrity-project_cass-response.pdf \end{tabular}$

[6]

https://ruthpearce.net/2024/04/16/whats-wrong-with-the-cass-review-a-round-up-of-commentary-and-evidence/

[7]

 $\underline{\text{https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-09-06/gender-affirming-care-still-safe-effective-and-reversible-review/1}}\\ \underline{\text{04322428}}$