

Diana Johnson MP

Hull North's Voice in Parliament
Labour MP for Hull North

The Rt. Hon. John Bercow MP
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Dear

I am writing to apply for an Emergency Debate in the House on a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, under Standing Order No. 24 – namely, the need for an independent public inquiry into the contaminated blood scandal.

As you acknowledged in response to a Point of Order I made on Tuesday 4th July, there have been a number recent and very important developments in the campaign for justice for those affected by NHS-supplied contaminated blood products. These developments show there is an urgent need for the House to debate these issues in an Emergency Debate. I will briefly detail a number of developments both before and since I raised my Point of Order.

On 25th April 2017, in his final speech to the House of Commons, the Rt Hon Member for Leigh made a powerful speech, in which he set out allegations of alleged criminal conduct by public officials during the scandal. If the Government did not set up a Hillsborough-style public inquiry by the time the House rose for the Summer Recess on 20th July, he committed to referring the cases to the police. In her response to his speech, the then- Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, Nicola Blackwood MP, asked him to submit his dossier of evidence to the Health Secretary, and assured the House that he would “give them his highest priority” (25th April 2017; Col 1085).

Since his speech, further evidence of alleged criminal behaviour has emerged. A BBC Panorama investigation on 17th May 2017 set out further concerns about the role played by Government officials at the time during the scandal. On 4th July, a number of national newspapers revealed newly-unearthed evidence alleging that

officials knew as early as 1980 that blood factor concentrate was infecting 50 people a year with Hepatitis C, yet they carried on treating haemophilia patients with these products for another five years. At the same time, some 300 families of victims with haemophilia lodged a High Court challenge suing the Government for their conduct during the scandal.

In the past week alone, further events have underlined the need for an Emergency Debate. On Friday 7th July, the Westminster leaders of all six non-Government parties in the House of Commons, including the Democratic Unionist Party, wrote a joint letter to the Prime Minister, urging her to commit to a Hillsborough-style inquiry. This is an extremely significant development, which now raises the prospect that if the matter of a public inquiry were put to a vote in the House, it would attract the support of the majority of MPs. Over the weekend, the Rt. Hon. Andy Burnham reaffirmed his commitment to refer cases of alleged criminality to the police; and confirmed that he has an appointment with the police to refer the evidence on 26th July.

We are fast approaching the Summer Recess deadline, yet neither Members of Parliament nor our affected constituents have been able to get answers from the Government to our pressing questions. The Secretary of State for Health does not appear to have considered the dossier, as promised by the Under-Secretary of State for Health 25th April. Furthermore, whilst both the Prime Minister (5th July 2017' Col 1167) and the Leader of the House of Commons (6th July 2017; Col 1351) have responded to questions from Hon. Members about the scandal since I made my Point of Order, their comments have raised more questions than they have answered. Both referred to the current financial support for those affected by the scandal as "compensation" – yet these support schemes are *ex gratia* in nature, and previous Government Ministers have consistently maintained that the payments are not compensation. Neither addressed questions over whether the Government would now proceed with a public inquiry into the scandal. Far from putting this matter to rest, their answers underline the need for an Emergency Debate.

Alongside a cross-party group of members from the APPG on Haemophilia and Contaminated Blood, I believe that the Health Secretary must urgently respond to these concerns before the Summer Recess. There is also widespread agreement amongst the community of people affected by the scandal that he must do so – on 10th May, over 500 individuals wrote to the Prime Minister calling for such an investigation, yet neither the Prime Minister nor the Health Secretary have provided them with an official response.

An Emergency Debate would give him the opportunity to address these concerns before the Summer Recess. I know it would be attended by MPs from all parties and would attract widespread interest both in the affected community, and amongst the wider public who agree with the calls for justice for those affected by this tragedy. I therefore hope you will give this application your serious consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Diana Johnson
Labour Member of Parliament for Hull North and Co-Chair of the All-Party
Parliamentary Group on Haemophilia and Contaminated Blood