

Witness Name: Richard Newton

Statement No.: WITN6897002

Exhibits: WITN6897003 - 15

Dated: 27 February 2025

## **INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY**

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### **SECOND WRITTEN STATEMENT OF RICHARD NEWTON**

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 14 January 2025.

I, Richard Newton, will say as follows:

#### **Section 1. Introduction**

1. I am a Co-Chair and Administrator of the Tainted Blood campaign group: TB - Affected Siblings & Children (representing relations of both infected living and deceased, Haemophilia and Whole Blood Transfusions) along with my Co-Chair, Ronan Fitzgerald. I was initially part of TB - Siblings which formed in May 2024 off the parent TB Group, which widened quickly by merging with the TB - Children in around August 2024 after I was approached by Ronan and it was very apparent that there were many similarities in our suffering and this was how we formed. Our group has grown rapidly and now have about 430 members.
2. By way of background I was previously a member of Tainted Blood as my older brother Mark was infected with HIV and died on 27 January 1989 aged 24 when I was 11 years old. I have spoken to journalists and been interviewed on TV to

explain the situation of siblings who have lost a brother or sister, such as my ITV News Tyne Tees interview on 18 January 2024, and fundamentally, Sky News – UK Tonight on the 20 May 2024 a special program following the final report of the inquiry.

3. I would like to explain why our group formed and what we are trying to achieve. After the publication of the Final Report on 20 May 2024 I was contacted by so many people; about 40 or 50 siblings reached out to us initially, all of them felt neglected and hurt. I cannot describe the rage that I felt in regard to the scheme on how it treated siblings. I felt so angry and furious that I couldn't work, I couldn't sleep. I couldn't describe how I was feeling. The tension in my body was awful after all of the campaigning of all of the groups. It felt very hurtful and very abusive (and I've been abused so I know how it feels). This carried on for five to six weeks. I went to my therapist to get some help, as after 30 years of governmental neglect followed by seven years of waiting I felt like I had been ignored, my trauma completely unrecognised.
4. I reached out to the blood community to get some help about siblings but the Infected Blood Community did not feel supportive. I felt they thought *'well they've got their help and are living, so what's the issue?'*. I then spoke to an infected person who said *'you've been affected more than us because you've all lost someone where we necessarily haven't'*. Ronan Fitzgerald a campaigner in another group reached out to me, a child of an infected victim feeling the same as myself. In six weeks our group grew from 50 to 400 members and it was very clear that there were many siblings and children who needed support and help, all feeling so insignificant and neglected by the compensation scheme.
5. We mainly communicate by Facebook posts although some people choose to email me or Ronan directly. There's still stigma; some people still feel so much stigma in our group and others still feel embarrassed by their situation; I'm aware of a lady in our group who has joined under an alias and has come up with some good ideas and approached us for support.

6. It is very stressful and very time consuming. It is a lot of letter-writing to our MPs (we encouraged people to write to MPs). I had already written a 17-page letter on 8 July 2024 to Sir Robert, to which they haven't replied. I forwarded this letter to Nick Thomas-Symonds on 7 November, which I exhibit on a redacted basis due to its personal nature at WITN6897003. I received a reply on the 18 December 2024, which felt like a generic response and didn't answer any of my concerns; it felt like more lip service, except to state the change for siblings to be included. This after Sir Brian's intervention on this matter. I exhibit this letter at WITN6897004.
7. I didn't realise how the role of an administrator was so time intensive and it would be so time consuming. Being the administrator of a group, you feel like you are a '*guardian*'. People rely on you to keep them updated by communication and to be an advocate for their situation. It is an incredibly responsible role, that I never thought I would be in.

## **Section 2. External Support and/or Assistance provided to me/my organisation**

8. It is very important to stress that we have had no legal support or access to resources. We had no assistance. All I've had is conversations with Collins Solicitors who have been incredibly supportive. The issue is whether Collins were going to be paid as they can't carry on just working for free.
9. We had to become detectives and researchers and lawyers by ourselves. It was very time consuming and very stressful. I have been looking at the Fatal Accidents Act and have contacted APIL. I don't need to know about estates for myself, but I ended up researching them because people in our Group needed to know about them, as just one example of helping people beyond what our own interests have been.
10. As a group we wanted our legal representatives Collins Solicitors with us at all our meetings. Danielle Holliday, Collins attended our first meeting with the IBCA on 26 September 2024, however, she was not sent the Teams link from IBCA for the second meeting on 8 October 2024 and was so not able to join the

meeting. Whether it was paid or not, we felt that it was imperative that Collins were kept abreast of everything.

### **Section 3. Extent of my/our Involvement in decision making**

11. One of our main issues is that I do not feel our group has been involved at all in any of the decision making. I thought that this would be like a mediation situation, with a two-way conversation when we would be asked for our views and opinions and it would lead to a change in the situation. Instead, it feels like we are being dictated to by one person (the government) who chose what questions to answer and we are only being included to give lip service to stated position that they are consulting the community.
12. So far our group have been invited to two meetings with the IBCA; a pre-meeting with IBCA on 26 September 2024 and a meeting with Sir Robert and David Foley on 8 October 2024. I then had a meeting with Nick Thomas-Symonds, on 18 December 2024, Ronan attended a meeting with James Quinault, Director-General at the Cabinet Office on 17 January 2025 and I have just attended further meeting with Nick Thomas-Symonds on 30 January 2025. In addition, Ronan and myself had signed up to help with building the IBCA IT system and we have had a remote meeting with their Digital Team on 2 December 2024.
13. Our group wrote to the IBCA and Cabinet Office on 2 September 2024 with a letter drafted in consultation, which I exhibit at WITN6897005 with our then, 200 members, requesting a meeting and formal recognition of our group but initially we were ignored. We didn't receive a response, so we emailed again on 12 September and cc'd Sir Kier Starmer, advising that we had reached out to the media companies and press agencies complaining about siblings and children not being heard. I was interviewed by Sky TV on 14 September 2024 and on the back of this interview, the IBCA took notice and realised we wouldn't go away and I feel that kick-started everything.

14. We were contacted by the IBCA and had a '*pre-meeting*' with the IBCA Engagement Team on 26 September. It's important to add that, of our members there at the meeting, four of the five administrators couldn't apply to the Scheme and we were not even sure if Ronan would be eligible due to the date of his Mum's infection. This was important because the people in front of us could affect the scheme.
15. We were not sure who we should be dealing with. I exhibit my email chain at WITN6897006 with IBCA Cabinet Office enquiries dated 26 September, including my email to the IBCA 20 September, asking who our queries during the meeting on 26 September would be passed on to and asking for a meeting with this person or department away from other group meetings.
16. We sent the IBCA Engagement Team an agenda for the meeting on 26 September which I exhibit at WITN6897007, and the minutes of this meeting at WITN6897008. During the meeting on 26 September they were trying to go through the application's aspects but I told them that none of us could apply, and they kept on asking us questions.
17. Then we had a meeting with Sir Robert on 8 October. I thought that this meeting was very important because of the recommendations in his report. We thought we were having a meeting with the decision makers as Sir Robert was included but I think it was just a fact-finding meeting. We sent through a detailed document '*Call for the urgent revision of proposed Legislation for Affected Persons and Supplementary Route of the Infected Blood Compensation Framework*' before the meeting about the issues that we wanted to raise which I exhibit at WITN6897009.
18. During this meeting Sir Robert compared us to '*victims of car crashes*'; these comments were disgusting and derogatory. He lost my respect after this as there was no way he had read my statement that Sir Brian had in the Inquiry or that he could comprehend the evidence collated in the Inquiry or grasp an understanding of the Infected Blood community. He would know that we can't be compared to car crash victims – how can he? Car crash victims haven't

been lied to and ignored by successive governments for decades, gas lit, told to go away, told by every conceivable government agency that *'they'* (as in government) had done nothing wrong. They haven't been left alone, without support from NHS, Education authorities and most people in authority not caring about you. Stigmatised by decades of abuse from the very people who are meant to be taking care of you. It was disgusting; how dare he?

19. Also, during this meeting Sir Robert asked us how we would have done it, i.e. the compensation scheme, again clearly demonstrating he had not read our "*key points*" document provided to him before this meeting took place. We raised this with him and asked him why he didn't ask us months ago?

20. During the meeting 8 October, we raised the line Nick Thomas-Symonds gave in letters was generic. We had encouraged our members to write to their MPs, who then contacted Nick Thomas-Symonds, who sent back a standard response which we found insulting. He would tag on a line about *'siblings'* and *'care awards'*; he continuously repeated that statement in everything that he said. He forgets I'm a core person in a group of 430 people. When they all received a response, it was the same response that everyone was getting from their MPs.

21. I exhibit the minutes from the meeting 8 October at WITN6897010 and key questions we were not able to raise this meeting as we ran out of time at WITN6897011.

22. After my meeting with Sir Robert, for about a week I was enraged even more and had a rollercoaster of emotions. I just couldn't understand his comparison. For us there was no recognition of the cause of death for siblings. How can you not pay someone more money because they've lost someone? I couldn't understand this thought process and it felt like he had written up the rules on the back of a fag packet. There was no consideration or empathy in the scheme.

23. There was a lack of parity and severe discrimination. We know there is friction in the Community between Hep C and HIV victims. To us, this doesn't apply; it doesn't matter the weapon of destruction; it is irrelevant as *'death is death'* and



*'loss is loss'*. These are all of the points that we raised in the meeting, and we never received a response, we never received an answer regarding what was occurring. We are still waiting for replies to our questions.

24. I was back in therapy and was told to balance my life better as Infected Blood was all consuming. My work was suffering, my personal life was suffering and I suffered from a lack of sleep; I kept on going onto my phone and was looking at it answering Facebook queries for about 8-12 hours every day easily in the first couple of months. I went on holiday for a week at the end of September and I told my partner that I wouldn't look or anything, but I couldn't help myself and still felt compelled to answer Facebook posts for about 1 hour a day, as group members needed support, as did I.

25. Ronan and I then had a meeting with the IBCA Digital Team on 2 December 2024. I didn't take any minutes, but I put a synopsis on the group. I asked the IBCA how many affected people there are and they estimated between 100,000 to 300,000 people. Again, how can they not know all of this? They have access to the births, deaths and marriage register so why could they not do an AI search? They also have all the information from IBSS, they had information of the roughly 7,500 living infected and estates who are registered on schemes. They anticipated there would be about 10,000 infected people in total. Even we've discussed that if you double the 10,000 to give you roughly 20,000 affected parents, and add an average of 10,000 partners, and in the 1980s parents had roughly 2.4 children, so an average of 24,000 affected children and 2.4 children minus one infected child is 1.4 siblings so that is on average 14,000 siblings, so let's say there's another 68,000 affected family members. So, I don't know where they got these figures 100,000 to 300,000 affected people from as they are mind-blowingly different from our figure. They couldn't answer these questions, so we alluded to the fact that we believed that they were giving a larger figure to justify offering less money to people. I put a synopsis on the group which I exhibit at WITN6897012.

26. We then had a meeting with Nick Thomas-Symonds on 18 December with seven other campaign groups but I was told the day before that I only had 4

minutes to speak. How am I supposed to do that? How am I supposed to represent the concerns of all of the people in my group. It's disgusting. It's not engagement. They're listening to the questions they want to answer and ignoring the questions that they don't want to answer completely. So, for us, we didn't want to be in a group with widows because we might upset them with our reasoning. I'm not saying they don't deserve the money but what I'm saying is we do to. We have been asking for an individual meeting since September. Other members have had it. Now I feel like the government are actively ignoring us. I exhibit the minutes of our meeting at WITN6897013.

27. My Co-Chair Ronan then had a meeting with James Quinault, Director-General at the Cabinet Office on 17 January 2025 and exhibit the minutes of this at WITN6897014 and the update from the Cabinet Office following this group of meetings at WITN6897015.

28. My most recent meeting with Nick Thomas-Symonds has just taken place on 30 January. I felt the Minister tried to be more engaging but he just gave standard rehearsed answers and I did not feel he was answering the specific questions put to him. He also said once the second regulations become legislation, they will provide answers to the things they didn't include in the legislation. I asked where the 300,000 figure for affected people had come from and I believe he said that he should be able to find this information in the 'scrolls' but I am not quite clear what he said or what this means. Again our biggest complaint is that we as a group are not represented and I believe Collins should be in all our meetings.

#### **Section 4. My/our principal concerns**

29. Between June and November 2024 it has been so hard to know who Sir Robert is working for. He wears different hats and it seems he changes his hats so frequently. He was a Cabinet Office reporter one minute and the next minute he seems to have taken on a purely administrative role and was working for the IBCA. He is unable to answer our questions and refers them back to the Cabinet Office. This makes us feel like we get swept under the table as they have not



provided any feedback or engaged with us directly. This is not engagement, not mediation and no compromises whatsoever have been made. This is, *'I'll tell you what I want you to hear'* and that's it. I would liken this to abuse. Coercive control, this is illegal in a family dynamic, but perfectly fine for the government to use this tactic.

30. We set out our principal concerns about the compensation in our document submitted to the IBCA before our meeting 8 October and I raised them again in my meeting with Nick Thomas-Symonds on 30 January, namely: First victims have had no legal help other than that provided free of charge by Collins Solicitors. Secondly there should be equal recognition for Affected Estates and families, including wider families and the estates of Affected parents and other affected individuals. Thirdly lack of parity in compensation between partners and others in equally significant relationships. Fourthly the absence of additional payments to bereaved relatives. Fifthly access to supplementary routes for all relatives who can demonstrate extenuating circumstances. Finally, when will meaningful consultation begin?

#### **Section 5. Impact on our organisation**

31. Since August last year we have grown to over 430 members but the number of administrators in our group has fallen. Unfortunately, as in any large group, there have been disagreements and misunderstandings within the group and they message me to sort it out; it's been very difficult, alongside working and personal life commitments.
32. It has also been very stressful for me campaigning, running my own business and having a relationship, as the campaigning has taken over our lives since the group was set up in August. This is the last thing I need going on in my life but I can't let it go. After such a horrifying and damning, yet very welcome report from Sir Brian, the very last thing victims thought they would be doing was campaigning themselves and fighting again to be heard. This is an insult to the hard work and dedication that Sir Brian and his team put into the Inquiry.

33. When someone engages with you, it should be a two-way conversation. When someone comes to you with questions, you should go away and come back and try to answer the questions. The IBCA will come back and only answer two or three questions. And they are civil servants; they're supposed to be responsible. They're putting the government spin on, and simply repeating the line they have been told to take? Like how they used the sibling line.
34. As mentioned earlier in paragraph 20 of my witness statement, we had encouraged members to write to their MP's. However, Nick Thomas-Symonds' generic response quoting the '*sibling line*' that '*the details of the Scheme are not to dismiss or deny the suffering of siblings*' rings hollow, as he goes on to say in his reply dated 5 November 2024 to Dr Neil Hudson MP, that if his constituent, Louise Huxley, was not eligible for compensation as a sibling she may be eligible as a carer, as set out on page 8 of my exhibit WITN6897010. So while Nick Thomas-Symonds says that he recognises our suffering, he is not doing anything about it. I believe it is insulting for a person to say they recognise our trauma but will not offer compensation and his comment feels condescending; as if we are being dismissed and denied.
35. Because we felt unheard, this has led us to repeat our stories continuously in every meeting we have had with government officials, effectively retraumatising ourselves over and over which is something Sir Brian did not want to happen. Unfortunately, when you are not being listened to this is what we felt we needed to do. How can our decades of trauma not be recognised, how can there be a hierarchy of grief? It was clear Sir Brian had recommended that existing laws should not be considered due to the complexity of the scandal and the passage of time.
36. The copy-and-paste '*sibling line*' response stressed people out even further. They were not individualising responses, and it showed they weren't listening to people; they weren't responding to emails and calls and they weren't engaging with people. If someone comes to me with an issue, I explain what is going on and if we can't do something, I'll explain that to them and why. They did not do this – it feels like they're gaslighting again.

37. I used to send emails to the Cabinet Office but the only time I got a response is when I emailed Nick Thomas-Symonds or I cc'd in Collins and Sir Brian. If I emailed the Infected Blood Inquiry on the Friday and Sir Brian responded on the Tuesday. I started cc'd in everyone, Sir Robert, Sir Brian, Collins Solicitors, the Cabinet Office, and once Keir Starmer. I'm surprised Keir Starmer didn't respond.

38. Even the announcement before Christmas where they changed rules on siblings (meaning I will be paid £34,000 compensation rather than zero) I thought '*Whoop de doo*', as it is £2.54/day. Great. That will pay for my milk for the last 37 years of suffering.

#### **Section 6. Impact on those affected**

39. It's causing a lot of distress in our Community. People in our group have varying levels of understanding. For some people you have to explain things to them a lot because they don't understand and you have to repeat yourself over several conversations. It does not help that the IBCA publications are not speaking in plain English and the compensation scheme numbers are very complicated and a lot of the information that was required was very confusing.

40. It's also causing ripples in the Community between the living infected and the affected, between partners and wives. We're asking questions and not receiving answers. There's no respect. In our meeting with Sir Robert on 8 October, they said they were going to pass our '*key points*' document to the Cabinet Office. We've never received a response from them regarding this document. It feels like we're talking to a wall.

#### **Section 7. Steps and Measures needed**

41. The main step the IBCA and government can take to help our group is to become more '*human*'. I'm not kidding you; I feel like I'm talking to someone who isn't humane. We, the victims, see this as a mediation process. I've had a few dealings with courts cases; mainly with taking people to court. You sit down

as adults and discuss different proposals. You have a discussion, an adult discussion on why it is worth more, or less, or whatever. This isn't happening. We're getting answers from above. It feels like there having a tick-box exercise to say that they've engaged with us.

42. I want our group to have a one to one meeting but I do not know who I want the meeting to be with as if you ask a question of IBCA they say they have to ask the Cabinet Office and vice versa. I think it would be good to have a meeting with the expert groups and the scheme designers in the Cabinet Office.

43. We need legal support for our group (the Government have Brown Jacobson) and we need to have a proper consultation before this legislation comes out. Otherwise the only way forward would be through court and no one wants this at all. The government needs to know that this will happen.

44. I don't think Nick Thomas-Symonds is in charge of drawing up the scheme at all. I think he's a puppet. I think he's leaving it to his legal experts without any input from our community or our legal representatives. We don't even know who has the final decision on the scheme.

45. We need to be able to provide genuine input on this as anyone would reasonably expect before the scheme goes before parliament. With everything that is happening to us we feel we have become primary victims instead of secondary victims from the way we have been treated.

#### Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed

GRO-C

Dated

27th February 2025

**Table of exhibits:**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Notes/ Description</b>	<b>Exhibit number</b>
8 July 2024	Personal letter to Sir Robert Francis KC	WITN6897003
18 December 2024	Rt Hon Nick Symonds MP - Thomas response to my personal letter 8 July 2024	WITN6897004
2 September 2024	TB – Siblings & Children letter to IBCA	WITN6897005
26 September 2024	Email chain with Cabinet Office enquiries 2 September 2024 - 26 September 2024	WITN6897006
26 September 2024	TB – Siblings & Children Agenda for pre-meeting with IBCA 26 September 2024	WITN6897007
26 September 2024	TB – Siblings & Children minutes for pre-meeting with IBCA 26 September 2024	WITN6897008
1 October 2024	Call for the urgent revision of proposed Legislation for Affected Persons and Supplementary Route of the Infected Blood Compensation Framework – on behalf of TB Affected Siblings and Children	WITN6897009
8 October 2024	TB – Siblings & Children Minutes of meeting Sir Robert Francis KC & David Fowley 8 October 2024	WITN6897010
8 October 2024	TB – Siblings & Children Key Questions following meeting with Sir Robert Francis KC & David Fowley 8 October 2024	WITN6897011
2 December 2024	Facebook synopsis of meeting with IBCA Digital	WITN6897012
18 December 2024	TB – Siblings & Children Minutes of meeting with Rt Hon Nick Symonds MP on 18 December 2024	WITN6897013



17 January 2025	TB - Siblings & Children Minutes with James Quinault, Director-General at the Cabinet Office on 17 January 2025	WITN6897014
29 January 2025	Update provided by James Quinault, Director-General at the Cabinet Office following meetings with community representative groups, 17 – 22 January 2025	WITN6897015