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Subject: Naming of Mental Health and Early Years Portfolio - REF: AS/VG/300424
Date: 30 April 2024 at 16:27
To: correspondence.vaughan.getting@gov.wales Correspondence.Vaughan.Getting@gov.wales
Cc: Madeleine.Brindley (Special Adviser) Madeleine.Brindley@gov.wales

HD

Dear First Minister

OUR REF: AS/VG/300424

I am writing to you following recent conversations with third sector organisations including Learning Disability Wales and Mencap Cymru.

Concerns have been raised with me about the new ministerial portfolios in the Cabinet, particularly that the policy development in terms of Learning Disability and Autism now come under the Minister for Mental Health and Early Years. A particular concern is that this risks decades of work by self-advocates, parent carers, organisations which represent and support them, like those mentioned above, to try and decouple Learning Disability and Mental Health.

Campaigners feel that there is still much work to do to help the public and statutory agencies understand the difference between these conditions and they are concerned that placing this stream of work under the Minister for Mental Health will not only potentially alienate families and self-advocates but could also re-enforce outdated and erroneous views of Learning Disability and Autism as Mental Health conditions.

I am aware that in some Local Health Boards there have been moves to place these teams together and whilst people with a Learning Disability might have episodes of mental ill health and people with Mental Health conditions might also have a Learning Disability or be autistic, they are very different.

Campaigners feel that to provide confidence to families and people with a Learning Disability, the Welsh Government needs to address this concern, either by placing Learning Disability and Autism back in the Social Services portfolio or changing the Minister's title to a more inclusive one, such as Minister for Mental Health, Neurodiversity and Learning Disability.

I wish to emphasise that campaigners are in no way criticising the Minister herself; nor are they questioning her ability to carry out her role. They have no doubt that she will bring a wealth of experience and empathy to her portfolio. However, they feel that she needs to be given the best start in her role and are concerned that this change could make stakeholders less like to engage with her and her officials.

I would be grateful if you could take these concerns that have been raised with me into consideration and would welcome your comments on the issue.

Yours sincerely,

Hefin

Hefin David MS

HEATH DAVID IAN
Member of the Senedd, Caerphilly