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Guy Opperman MP, Minister for Employment,
Department for Work and Pensions

Our ref: [[OUR_REF]]
Your ref: [[YOUR_REF]] delete if none given

November 2022

Dear Guy,

BENEFITS DISREGARD FOR POST OFFICE COMPENSATION SCHEMES

I am writing to seek your support for granting a benefits disregard for postmasters who are recipients of Post Office and Horizon-related compensation, in line with the disregards which are already in place for the Windrush Scheme and Infected Blood Scheme.

I understand that you are due to receive advice on this matter from your officials and would encourage you to grant this disregard in full.

As I am sure you are aware, it is impossible to ignore the negative impact that the Horizon scandal and the related court proceedings have had on affected postmasters' lives: on their livelihoods, their financial situations, their reputations and, for some, their physical and mental health. To date, 83 postmasters have already had their Horizon-related convictions overturned. Post Office has also been making progress at pace on the Historical Shortfall Scheme, with 2,125 claimants (90% of eligible claims) under the scheme having now received offers. Government also announced additional compensation this year for postmasters who brought the High Court litigation against the Post Office, which was settled in 2019 after many years of legal proceedings, given these postmasters were left financially worse off than their peers.

The impact that the Horizon scandal has had on the lives of affected postmasters and their families cannot be overstated. The affected postmasters are extremely vulnerable and have suffered what is described as the "biggest miscarriage of justice" in British legal history, resulting in significant financial hardship, including bankruptcy for some. A benefits disregard would ensure compassionate and fair treatment of postmasters and provide additional comfort to those who are struggling with financial hardship.

Compensation cannot take away the suffering that affected postmasters have experienced. But we are determined to ensure that each eligible person gets what is due to them. We must now ensure that outstanding issues around benefits do not prolong the impacts of the Horizon dispute on these postmasters by affecting their eligibility to apply for benefits as needed. If we do not act, many postmasters may end up losing benefits as a result of receiving compensation. This is why I would be grateful if you could consider deploying any tools at your disposal to expedite the passing of the necessary legislation, which will allow postmasters to access benefits and pension credits, as needed, as soon as possible.

I hope that you agree this approach to be appropriate and in our shared interest. I look forward to working with you on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

**Kevin Hollinrake MP,
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State**