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The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury

1 Horse Guards Road
Westminster
London
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8th November 2023

Re: Universal Credit conditionality changes for parents with lead care

Dear Chancellor,

We write to you to express our shared concerns with the introduction of stricter conditionality requirements for Universal Credit claimants with lead care.

When you announced in the Spring Statement that the Government would be boosting childcare support for low-income families – notably through changes to the childcare element of Universal Credit - we welcomed this as a positive step forward that would help to break down barriers to work for a considerable number of parents. However, the subsequent changes to conditionality threaten to counteract this progress.

Under the new rules, over 700,000 lead carers on Universal Credit (90% of whom will be women, and over 23% of whom will be disabled) will need to increase their work hours significantly or spend more time seeking work to be eligible for the benefit.

As organisations representing parents, we are extremely worried about the impact this will have on those affected for the following key reasons:

1. The new requirements ignore individual circumstances (often including those who are wishing to study alongside employment).
2. Sufficient childcare provision is not in place to support increased work and work search requirements (only 18% of Local Authorities have enough childcare





provision for disabled children and less than half of Local Authorities have enough childcare for all parents working full time).

3. The changes assume that part time work is available, when this simply isn't the case - the volume of people wanting part- time work is outstripping the number of part-time jobs 4:1.
4. The government's own research shows that conditionality forces people into poorly paid jobs, often forcing them into the first job that they can find that fits the hours, or AET required, rather than employment that matches their skills and aspirations.

With this considered, the changes risk placing lead carers in the impossible position of needing to work more hours without having access to suitable childcare or jobs and a potential increase in sanctions among parents of young children. This is particularly troubling as a five-year academic study of welfare conditionality published in 2018 found that not only were sanctions ineffective, but they also impacted on people's wellbeing and pushed them further into poverty.

Moreover, for certain groups- including disabled parents and single parents- the impact of these changes will be more acute due to the unique challenges they face. Single parents will be forced to take jobs that do not work for them or their families. For this group, work is not just important for financial reasons, it can have wellbeing benefits and many single parents have told us they want to work to be a role model for their children. Yet the new requirements will give single parents no flexibility to look for jobs which really suit their skill set, motivations or family circumstances.

Further, for disabled parents, the changes coincide with the Government's proposed Work Capability Assessment changes, increasing the demands placed upon them to take up jobs that may not work for them, particularly if they have fluctuating conditions.

Ahead of the Autumn Statement, we urge you to look again at the overall package for jobseekers and reverse the changes for lead carers.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Victoria Benson, Chief Executive Officer, Gingerbread

Joeli Brearley, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Pregnant Then Screwed

Alison Garnham, Chief Executive Officer, Child Poverty Action Group

Claire Reindorp, Chief Executive Officer, Young Women's Trust



Gingerbread*

Mark Russell, Chief Executive, The Children's Society

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Laura Millar, Strategic Manager, Fife Gingerbread

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Jemima Olchawski, Chief Executive Officer, Fawcett Society

Katie Ghose, Chief Executive Officer, Kids

Ruth Talbot, Founder, Single Parent Rights Campaign

Kate Bell, Assistant General Secretary, TUC

Dr Mary-Ann Stephenson, Director, Women's Budget Group

Maggie Gordon-Walker, Founder, Mothers Uncovered

Joseph Howes, Chair, End Child Poverty Coalition

