Dear **[MP’s Name],**

My name is **[your name]** and I am writing to you today as a resident of your constituency, regarding the introduction of changes to ‘fit for work’ assessments and significant benefit sanctions for people with long-term illnesses. These changes were announced in the Chancellor’s Autumn Statement. The changes will see far fewer people meeting the criteria for ‘limited capability for work-related activity’ (LCWRA) and losing the vital ‘Health Element’ of Universal Credit/ESA as well as losing protection from benefit sanctions. The measures target disabled people with limited mobility and mental health difficulties, and I am getting in touch to ask for your support in opposing these damaging new measures.

[**Insert your story: How does your health condition/disability limit the work you can do? How does limited mobility and/or mental health challenges affect the job opportunities you have? Have you tried finding suitable work that accommodates your health condition and what was the outcome?]**

**[IF APPLICABLE: If I am reassessed and am found no longer eligible for the LCWRA/Support Group of ESA, my rate of benefits will be reduced by £390 per month, which means I will lose around half of my income from Universal Credit/ESA.]**

This matter is important to me because **[what will be the impact of the drop in income on your health and your ability to prepare for and look for work? How do you feel about having compulsory meetings with a Work Coach and possibly having to participate in work preparation activities with the threat of benefit sanctions? include your own experiences here, and/or how you have been affected by this news e.g. fear or worry for the future]**

Research into long-term conditions and employment is limited. However, I would like to share the work of [Astriid](https://www.astriid.org/), a charity I support, that has expertise in this area. Astriid is led by a team with lived experience who have expertise in the subject of health and work. The charity works to connect talented individuals with long-term health conditions with meaningful work.

As made clear by this charity, not every person with a long-term health condition is well enough to work. This is not a reflection of somebody’s levels of motivation or desire to be in work – often, people wish this for themselves more than anything. Introducing benefit sanctions is not the key to getting people into work, because penalising people will not magically make their health condition disappear. In fact, increasing the risk of disabled people living in poverty is more likely to exacerbate their level of illness. Therefore, these measures will not save taxpayer money because pushing ill and disabled people into destitution simply passes costs onto the NHS as their health deteriorates.

Astriid also consults with employers to improve accessibility in their workplace practice, and [through their research and consultancy](https://www.astriid.org/consulting/) have identified [multiple causes for concern](https://www.astriid.org/news/astriid-statement-on-autumn-budget-2023/) with the changes to disability benefits announced in the Autumn Statement. Here are just some of them:

* Reducing eligibility for the Limited Capacity for Work and Work Related Activity (LCWRA) and introducing tougher conditions on benefits further erodes the essential safety net of a population who are already at a severe financial disadvantage. The existing WCA descriptors are already a poor proxy for assessing work capability among people with long-term conditions, and only account for fatigue in terms of mobility, rather than the broader disabling impact of energy impairment. The system does not consider the core health-related barriers to work faced by this population.
* Working from home is an important adjustment. [84% of our survey respondents](https://www.astriid.org/reports/making-employment-work-with-long-term-conditions/) said they need to work from home in order to manage their health condition, yet three quarters said that a lack of remote and flexible working opportunities is a key challenge in returning to work. Analysis of the jobs market by the CIPD bears this out: only 7% of jobs are advertised as fully remote. We welcome the call for more opportunities of this nature, but homeworking does not resolve every access barrier faced by people with long-term conditions. The assumption that finding a remote job is the solution to enabling more people to work reveals a startling lack of understanding about the unique challenges that this population must contend with in the world of work. In addition, research shows [that disabled people are underrepresented in occupations where working from home is technologically viable](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0047272720300992?via%3Dihub). In fact, at present disabled people disproportionally work in low-paid, non-managerial, and routine occupations where working from home is not feasible.
* The rationale for moving more claimants out of the LCWRA group is that they would be ‘motivated’ to undertake work preparation, but there is no research evidence of this. An inability to work due to long-term illness is not due to a lack of personal motivation or desire to ‘contribute to society’ – it’s due to an acute awareness of the detrimental impact that work can have on a person’s illness and condition management. There is, however, evidence that [conditionality of this nature increases mental distress](https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com/view/journals/jpsj/25/2/article-p107.xml) and that the UK sanctions regime has actually had an adverse effect on disabled people’s employment outcomes rather than improving them.
* The new rules would see more disabled claimants being compelled to engage in work preparation schemes. However, to the best of our knowledge, there are currently no employment support services through the DWP or contractors that understand and meet the unique needs of people with [Energy Limiting Conditions](https://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/knowledge-hub/resources/factsheet-energy-limiting-conditions/#:~:text=What%20is%20an%20'energy%2Dlimiting,underlying%20health%20conditions%20and%20disabilities.) (an impairment group that encompasses many people with long-term conditions). There are no programmes that accommodate fluctuating capabilities, the need for significantly reduced hours, and the importance of carefully pacing a return to work to avoid damaging overexertion. We oppose the implementation of compulsory work experience as a concept, and also because the programmes currently on offer do not contain these essential components of employment support even for those who are able to work.

These changes pose threats to the safety and wellbeing of hundreds of thousands of disabled people who are unable to work due to their health condition. For many people, it takes everything they have just to get through the day and take care of their core needs for survival. Those who are incorrectly assessed as ‘fit for work’ under these new roles are likely to experience a severe decline in their mental and physical health, and become further ostracised from society as a result.

At a time when disability inclusion is beginning to experience its biggest movement to date, please join us on the right side of history and stand up for the needs of this population. We are asking you to use your position of power and influence to advocate for the needs of those who cannot, and challenge the introduction of these new policies at the earliest possible opportunity.

An alternative proposal that is more humane is to focus on how to make the world of work more accessible for people with long-term conditions - **those** **who want and are able to do so**. This could include government schemes to incentivise business to work more closely with employment support services led by subject experts (such as Astriid) and creating more inclusive employment opportunities for people with health conditions and disabilities. After all, the number of people with long-term conditions in work is never going to increase unless there are more roles available that are genuinely suitable for their needs – roles that go beyond remote working and offer appropriate workplace adjustments, fronted by employers who have had disability equality training that specifically includes long-term illnesses and Energy Limiting Conditions.

If you require further information on this matter, **[please let me know/contact Astriid – delete as applicable depending on your capabilities].** In the meantime, you can find further research on the unique barriers to work that this population face in [Astriid’s newly-released report, Making Employment Work: Lessons From The Frontline.](https://www.astriid.org/reports/making-employment-work-with-long-term-conditions/)

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

**[name]**