

Dear Health Minister Robin Swann,

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chair of the Foster Care Workers' Branch of the [Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain \(IWGB\)](http://www.iwgb.org.uk). As you will be aware there are around 2,000 foster carers under the remit of your department, and in the midst of this global pandemic they are working incredibly hard to care for the children most in need, many of whom have already faced trauma in their lives.

Around 42% of foster carers are over 55 years old¹, making for a work; it is inevitable that many will become ill and some will become very ill. However, whilst the Government is moving quickly to put in place wage subsidies for employees, there is currently no financial support for foster care workers. A small number of fostering services may pay a small retainer if a foster carer becomes ill, but the vast majority will not, leaving them with no income and no ability to pay their bills.

We are already facing a recruitment crisis in foster care with an estimated shortfall of 8,600 households across the UK². We cannot afford to lose experienced and skilled foster carers who can no longer afford to maintain a house with extra space for fostered children. Being forced to give up fostering would not only be devastating for the carers, but would also be incredibly costly for fostering services, as well as for the economy. The urgency of this now compels you to take the following actions with immediate effect:

1. Lobby the UK Government to make foster care workers eligible to claim statutory sick pay;
2. Compel all fostering services to pay their foster carers a retainer if they are unable to look after children due to the coronavirus.
3. Enable foster carers to be able to make decisions around the care of children to keep them and their families safe.

Our full Covid 19 statement can be viewed [here](#)

¹ The Fostering Network State of the Nation Survey 2019

² The Fostering Network Recruitment 2020 Targets

Now is the time to come together in the interests of society's most vulnerable. Children and young people in care, and those who care for them, await your response.

Yours sincerely,

Jane
Wright

Chair of the IWGB Foster Care Workers' Branch