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THE PRIME MINISTER

15 February 2016

Dear Alison,

Thank you for your letters of 9 December 2015 and 12 January 2016. I apologise for the delay in replying.

At the Summer Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that in future, all families - those in receipt of benefits and those supporting themselves solely through work - will be faced with the same sorts of financial considerations when making decisions about having more children. Families will no longer be able to claim additional support through Child Tax Credit or Universal Credit for third or subsequent children in a family where the child is born on or after 6 April 2017.

We have always been clear that women who have a third or subsequent child as a result of rape will be exempt from this policy. The Government recognises this is a difficult and sensitive issue and we need to establish a way of making this assessment that is sympathetic and responsive to the claimant.

As set out by Lord Freud on 27 January during the Lords Report stage of the Welfare Reform and Work Bill, the Government's intention is not to focus on, or pre-empt, criminal justice outcomes, but to ensure that mothers receive the help they need at the time they need it.

We want to use clear criteria that are straightforward to apply and are not overly intrusive. Whilst we continue to look at the detail of this, our thinking is that a third party evidence model offers the most promising approach to strike the balance to be achieved.

We are clear there is more to do to develop the detail of the model and that is why we will be working with organisations with an interest in this policy to help ensure that the process is as compassionate and as supportive as possible for claimants in these circumstances. This exemption will be developed and brought forward in secondary legislation for effect from April 2017.

I hope this helps to reassure you that we are thinking very carefully about how we respond to this sensitive issue.

Thank you, once again, for writing.

Yours,
David