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Autism

Thank you for contacting me about autism.

Autism is a complex condition which affects many people in very different ways. In recent times, we have made great progress in improving our understanding of autism. However, I believe there is much more work to be done, and I am pleased to see that there are efforts being made across government and throughout society to support those with autism.

Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the recent debate on autism in Parliament, however, I am pleased to say that my ministerial colleagues are continuing to build on the advances made since the passing of the Autism Act in 2009. Since 2010, the Autism Strategy has united multiple government departments, and improved the diagnosis and treatment of autism, and support available to those with the condition.

Of course, autism's complexity poses significant challenges, and I acknowledge that the regional variation in waiting times for autism diagnoses, and the quality of support available must be addressed. Efforts are being made to reduce diagnosis waiting times, and NHS England is now collecting data on autism in mental health services, to improve our wider understanding of the condition, and how it can be diagnosed as quickly as possible. The Think Autism strategy establishes a clear route to diagnosis, care and support, and I will make every effort to see it is properly implemented in my constituency, and beyond.

The Government is considering the recommendations of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism's recent report. Since 2011, teachers and support staff in schools have been trained to help children with autism in schools; and, the Government is providing over £200 million to reform the support for autistic children in schools, and find ways of reducing rates of exclusions.

This work, of course, stretches beyond the realms of Health and Education. I am encouraged to note that the Department for Work and Pensions is developing plans to help 1 million more people with a range of disabilities into work, and I know that all staff at job centres, and those conducting work capability assessments receive extensive training to support people with autism in seeking and gaining work.

I know that some constituents are concerned about the treatment of autistic people in the criminal justice system. My colleagues at the Ministry of Justice and Home Office are developing a guide to help police officers and prison staff identify people with autism, and treat them appropriately, and to date, eight prisons and young offenders' institutes are part of the criminal justice accreditation scheme, which is driving forward new ways of supporting people with autism in these institutions.

I hope I have been able to offer you some reassurance that the Government is implementing significant measures to support people with autism, and thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP