

ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE,
WESTMINSTER, LONDON, SW1P 1QJ

The Right Honourable Iain Duncan Smith MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London SW1H 9DA

12 July 2011

Dear Secretary of State

I am writing to express my concern about the potential impact of new and planned government welfare policies. I recognise the difficulties which must arise in seeking to promote fairness between those in work and those of working age receiving benefits but our own agencies working with poor families are becoming increasingly concerned with how the detail of how the changes will affect those families. The figures from the Department for Work and Pensions show that up to fifty thousand households will lose an average of £93 per week- a significant sum for those already struggling financially. As you know, some estimates which have appeared in the media suggest forty thousand families may be rendered homeless. If this were indeed the case, it would surely be a perverse result of policies aimed at reducing dependency of the 'benefits culture' since emergency support would inevitably need to be put in place.

Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN), the Church's domestic social action agency, is in close touch with many charities working at local level, and there is rising concern as to the repercussions of the changes and the intensified social problems in our communities. Depaul UK notes, for example, that homelessness has increased for the first time in ten years and that youth homelessness has risen by fifteen percent in the last twelve months. In some areas of my own Diocese of Westminster, it is being suggested that one in six children may have to move home (and quite probably move school) while in Maida Vale the effects may force up to forty-three percent of households to move. We fear that the cost of this may be felt most by vulnerable families, whose support networks may rapidly disappear in the process.

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It would be very helpful to have your reassurance that steps are available and being taken to ensure that the vulnerable and marginalised in our society will not be disproportionately harmed by the new welfare policies. It seems that a further considered look at the impact on individuals, in particular those already struggling, is needed fully to determine the effect of the changes on both people and communities.

I should like to offer the opportunity for representatives of CSAN and its member charities to share their expertise and knowledge of these groups by meeting with staff in your department to assist in the understanding of the practical impact at the grassroots.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vincent Nichols". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

✠ Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Westminster