

Will Quince MP
Minister of State for Children and Families
Department for Education
20 Great Smith St,
London SW1P 3BT
23 June 2022

Dear Minister,

As a group of cross-party MPs representing constituencies from across the country, we are writing to express our collective concern about the worrying prevalence of secure transportation providers restraining and handcuffing vulnerable children unnecessarily.

We are also writing to request that you:

- urgently conduct a review of the data gaps in secure transportation, which preclude proper monitoring and scrutiny of providers' restraint practices
- meet with us and representatives from the Hope instead of Handcuffs campaign to discuss how accountability and transparency can be increased across the sector

As you are aware, secure transportation providers are often hired by local authorities to transport care-experienced children between care placements or other settings. Shockingly, many of these providers use restraints - including handcuffs - on these vulnerable children. To be clear, these are innocent children outside of the custodial system.

Frontline secure transportation providers report that children entering their care – some as young as 12 years old – have red marks left on their wrists from the handcuffs being used by other providers. Some providers even advertise that they use handcuffs on their website.

Restraint in other parts of the care system is heavily regulated and Ofsted can inspect any instances of restraint in children's homes. However, children and young people are not protected by the same regulations when they are in the care of secure transportation providers. These providers are not required to record or report any instances of restraint during any of the journeys they carry out. Nor can the regulator inspect the restraint practices of secure transportation providers.

As you know, improving data collection is a key recommendation of the recently published Independent Review of Children's Social Care. Accurate data is fundamental to informing effective decision-making. Yet data and regulatory gaps in secure transportation continue to be overlooked, putting vulnerable children at risk.

These gaps prevent us from understanding exactly how many children are being restrained during secure transportation, what restraints are being used and why. Without this information, we cannot improve accountability and transparency across the sector, nor work to reduce a worrying reliance on restraint - including the use of handcuffs - among providers.

Providers should be required to record and report any instances of restraint to an appropriate body, which would be appointed by the Government to monitor and scrutinise this data. These changes – which would not require extra funding from Government – would bring secure transportation into line with other parts of the care system, improve transparency and initiate a cultural change within the sector that will reduce, and ultimately end, the brutal handcuffing of vulnerable children.

We hope that you will meet with us and representatives of the Hope instead of Handcuffs campaign to understand more about the issue, the impact it is having on vulnerable children, and to discuss what steps can be taken to end this brutal practice.

Please could your office liaise with max.wilson@whitehousecomms.com regarding your availability to meet with us.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Champion MP

Kim Johnson MP

Sarah Champion MP

Kim Johnson MP

Baroness Jenny Jones

Ben Lake MP

Kate Osborne

Baroness Lister

Tony Lloyd MP

Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP

Baroness Jones

Neale Hanvey MP

Lord Mackay

Apsana Begum MP

John McDonnell MP

Jim Shannon MP

Mick Whitley MP

Diane Abbott MP

Paula Barker MP

Kenny MacAskill MP

Andy Slaughter MP

Navendu Mishra MP