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**Edward Timpson MP**

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

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*Den Paula,*

18 November 2013

Thank you for your letters of 15 and 16 October, addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State, about the protection of vulnerable children. I am replying as the minister responsible for child protection and safeguarding policy.

There seem to me to be two contentions at the heart of your arguments. The first is that mandatory reporting would necessarily have helped in the Daniel Pelka case and, by implication, in many others. The second is that the unintended increase in unsubstantiated referrals would not, in practice, occur if mandatory reporting were confined to regulated activities.

We are in agreement about the need to increase awareness around the signs of neglect and abuse and the need to ensure that professionals working with children have the training and confidence to be able to deal with cases of neglect and abuse when they occur. In relation to your point on the difference mandatory reporting might make, I am more confident about the clarity of expectation and accountability provided by the existing guidance.

I do not believe that a shift to mandatory reporting would make it easier for professionals to identify the signs of abuse and neglect. If mandatory reporting was introduced, there would still be doubts about whether something should be referred. This uncertainty might continue to result in cases which need to be referred not being spotted, as well as an over-reporting of cases where abuse and neglect were not present. Both are serious scenarios. The consequences of missing the signs of abuse and neglect are obvious and can be horrific, while the cost of over-reporting could overburden the system and lead to unnecessary emotional distress for children and their families.

Our priority, therefore, must be to identify how we can support those professionals working with children and families to better understand how to

identify signs of neglect or abuse early on so that they can take the right action at the right time to protect vulnerable children and young people.

I would like to thank you again for raising such important issues and for engaging so actively in the debate around them.

*Yours sincerely,*

*Edward*

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