NUJ Member

Address

Date

Dear *[insert name of MP]*,

I write as a constituent to ask that you raise questions in Parliament on behalf of freelance and self-employed workers who face a significant loss of income owing to the coronavirus pandemic.

The pandemic has highlighted that the self-employed and those working within the gig economy and on zero-hours contracts are unfairly denied basic financial support if they fall ill. While I welcome the new provisions for access to Statutory Sick Pay for employed workers, freelance workers have recourse only to Employment Support Allowance (ESA) and Universal Credit (UC).

ESA and Universal Credit are welfare benefits for those on low or zero incomes, and thus unsuitable for those who make a living from self-employment. The system is complex and time-consuming, and as it is means-tested those with savings are ineligible.

I am a wholly self-employed freelance journalist. As is good practice, I have a sum of money set aside to pay my tax bill and for contingencies. Therefore, I do not qualify for ESA or UC should I become ill or need to self-isolate. Those eligible for these benefits could find the five-week assessment period pushes them into debt and default on loan repayments.

Freelances are finding they are losing income as organisations cancel the public events which form the bread and butter of their work, and there is no adequate support in place. I further risk being unable to pay my tax bill as I use up the money set aside for this purpose.

A proper support package should be available that is specifically designed for the self-employed.

The National Union of Journalists supports the calls from the TUC for the government to introduce emergency legislation that:

* Gives every worker the right to statutory sick pay from the first day of absence.
* Scraps the minimum earnings threshold for statutory sick pay.
* Ensures that sick pay is paid to workers having to self-isolate.
* Increases the weekly level of sick pay.
* Provides funds to ensure that employers can afford to provide sick pay, and additional support to those who miss out.

These provisions should also encompass the needs of freelancers.

Yours sincerely,