Rt Hon Wes Streeting MP
Secretary of State for Health & Social Care
Department of Health & Social Care

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Dear Mr Streeting,

NHS Workforce Plan: Addressing the crisis in Learning Disability Nursing

This month's LeDeR (Learning from Lives and Deaths Review) annual report highlighted how important Learning Disability Nurses are in preventing the avoidable deaths of people with learning disabilities, who die on average nearly 20 years earlier than the general population, and are twice as likely to die avoidably.

43% decline in LD nurse numbers
As the only profession trained specifically to meet the health needs of people with learning disabilities at point of registration. Registered Nurses in Learning Disabilities have a significant role in addressing these drastic health inequalities. The Learning Disability nursing workforce has declined by 43% since records began in 2009. If nothing changes, it is predicted by 2028 there will only be a tiny number of Learning Disability Nurses qualifying in England with a pattern of reducing numbers in the other UK countries too.

Courses closing
As university pre-registration courses close across England, whole regions, such as the South-East, and potentially soon also the Midlands, are left with no localised academic institutions that offer Learning disability nurse training. Recent course closure announcements have included the University of Winchester, Keele University, with the University of Derby under consultation. The profession is in crisis, and urgent intervention is needed to avoid imminent collapse.

NHS workforce plan
The 2023 NHS Workforce Plan contained an important commitment that "…to 2028/29, training places will increase by 46% for learning disability nursing", with a longer-term commitment by 2031/32 to double training places to over 1,000 places.

The plan also set out that by 2031/32, 42% of learning disability nurses could be trained through the degree level apprenticeship route.

We recognise that the Labour government did not develop or sign up to this plan, and you have publicly stated that it wasn't properly funded. However, in reviewing the plan over the coming months, we urge you to place strong emphasis on safeguarding people with learning disabilities and the learning disability nursing profession. There are a number of key steps that could be taken-

- **Re-committing to deliverable targets** regarding training places and apprenticeship routes, including funding guarantees for universities to maintain programme viability.

- **Targeted national recruitment campaigns** to raise awareness of Learning Disability Nursing as a rewarding and vital career option and of the available routes into the profession to increase uptake of Learning Disability Nurse apprenticeships and education programmes

- **Set minimum numbers of learning disability nurses per population** to maintain the viability of the workforce in the delivery of health services to neighbourhoods and communities. This would ensure sustainability of the profession and build the future healthcare workforce for people with learning disability to address causes of premature deaths and to enable realisation of the Mental Health Bill's ambitions.

- **Financial support packages tailored to mature students** and those with family commitments to reduce barriers to course and apprenticeship uptake. i.e., childcare and travel support.

- **Introduce financial support packages to enable employers to release staff for pre-registration Learning Disability Nurse apprenticeships.** The current apprenticeship levy does not cover the full salary costs of apprentices, nor does it provide funding for backfill arrangements during their training release. As a result, apprenticeships place a considerable financial strain on NHS Trusts and other providers—particularly challenging during a period of sustained fiscal pressure across the health and care sector.

- **Use apprenticeship levy share** to encourage smaller organisations in the private, voluntary and independent sector to offer paid apprenticeships for Learning Disability Nursing student candidates.

We would welcome an opportunity to meet with Ministers and/or officials leading on the workforce plan, to discuss solutions to the LD nurse workforce crisis and how, within this parliament, we can significantly improve the position of the workforce and health outcomes for people with a learning disability.

Your sincerely,

Jon Sparkes OBE, Chief Executive, Mencap
Baroness Rosa Monckton MBE
Professor Nicola Ranger, Chief Executive, Royal College of Nursing
Paula McGowan OBE, Campaigner
Jacqui Shurlock, CEO, The Challenging Behaviour Foundation
Carol Boys OBE, Chief Executive, Down's Syndrome Association
Stephen Unwin, author of *Beautiful Lives: How We Got Learning Disabilities So Wrong.*
Tim Keilty, Scott Watkin, Kate Chate, Jack Marshall, Co-Chairs, Learning Disability England

Jessica Lister, Chair, Rachel Mills and Michelle Curran, Co-Chairs, UK Learning Disability Consultant Nurse Network
Jo Welch, The Learning and Intellectual Disability Academic Network
Dr Keri Lodge, Campaigner
Aaron Hume, Campaigner
Ramandeep Kaur, Campaigner and Parent Activist
Giovanni Ulleri, Filmmaker and Campaigner