



Alex Davies-Jones MP  
Parliamentary Under-secretary of State for Victims  
Ministry of Justice  
102 Petty France  
London  
SW1H 9AJ

Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> November

Dear Minister,

**Extending the Duty of Candour to tech companies regulated under the Online Safety Act**

We write to you as a group of bereaved parents, survivors of online harm, civil society organisations and academics, many of whom know your deep personal commitment to doing right by families affected by preventable harm.

The Public Office (Accountability) Bill is a landmark piece of legislation and we strongly support its passage and objectives. Time and again, we have seen the State fail its most vulnerable citizens and then close ranks to frustrate or obfuscate public proceedings that set out to discover the truth.

However, it is not only public bodies that have pronounced incentives to delay, frustrate or impede inquests and other public hearings. Social media firms have consistently sought to delay or prevent vital evidence relating to the death of a child or young adult; and as regulation in the UK begins to take effect, the legal, commercial and reputational incentives for them to continue to delay, obstruct or obfuscate coronial proceedings is stronger than ever.

It is for this reason that we strongly encourage you to extend the Duty of Candour to technology companies regulated under the Online Safety Act. This shift would fundamentally reset the relationship between tech companies and their victims – a move that would require tech companies to act transparently and expeditiously when responding to legal requests; that would impose a proactive duty on companies to provide any information relevant to coronial proceedings; and that could fundamentally reset the status quo in which platforms continue to find it more advantageous to drag

their heels or look for legal loopholes than to choose to co-operate and give families and loved ones the answers they need and deserve.

The whole country was rightly appalled by the circumstances of Molly Russell's death, but we believe they would be equally horrified by the protracted battle that her family and legal team had to fight to discover the detailed circumstances of her death.

It took some 1,779 days before the coroner in Molly's inquest was able to deliver his conclusion that social media played 'a not insignificant contributory role' in her death. During that time, Meta repeatedly failed to disclose requested information about Molly's experience on Instagram, with the company's disclosure often limited, supplied the night before a hearing, and in some cases available for review one day but not the next.

It took sustained questioning from the coroner to determine that Meta was unwilling rather than unable to share the full set of data requested from Molly's accounts. Full data relating to Molly's experiences on Instagram was never made available. The company also refused to disclose research they commissioned in respect of the impact of suicide, self-harm and depressive content, despite their witness repeatedly relying on this to justify their position on children's exposure to harmful content.

As if these issues weren't bad enough, just days before the inquest was originally due to have taken place, Molly's family were forced to request an adjournment due to Meta's failure to follow the coroner's directions. It was then only in the month before the final inquest that the company finally disclosed examples of over 1000 posts that Molly had engaged with – including some of the most distressing videos and posts - as well as information about accounts she had been suggested.

Despite the recent enactment of new information disclosure and retention powers, the incentives for tech companies to seek to delay, obfuscate or frustrate public proceedings remain frustratingly evident.

For example, just weeks ago a coroner issued a Prevention of Future Deaths report to Google after they failed to respond to coronial information request following the death by suicide of 16-year-old Leo Barber. Leo had been accessing a suicide forum that a coroner concluded contributed to his death. However, Google declined to provide requested information claiming that the legal entity holding this data, Google LLC, was outside the jurisdiction of England and Wales.

Extending the Duty of Candour to tech firms would first and foremost afford dignity to bereaved families. It would demonstrate that this Government is on their side and determined to do everything possible to lessen the re-traumatising impact of losing a child and then having to fight a David and Goliath battle to get the answers about the circumstances of their loss.

However, the Duty of Candour could also offer a set of broader and substantive benefits. The Duty would likely streamline the pre-inquest process; improve the quality

of evidence that a coroner can consider; and in turn would allow for the inquest process to more readily and actively identify recommendations to prevent future deaths. At a time when many of us are concerned about the effectiveness of the Online Safety Act, but are determined that it must succeed, the benefits of a strengthened coronial process to inform Ofcom's understanding and strengthen its approach to tackling online harms should be clear.

We strongly encourage you to extend the Duty of Candour and to stand up for the families and individuals who have experienced the entirely preventable trauma of technology-facilitated harm, only to then face the unchecked power of tech firms that seek to excuse themselves from the resulting inquest processes and scrutiny relating to preventable deaths in which they have played a role.

This letter is being copied to the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, and also to the Home Secretary.

Signed by:<sup>1</sup>

Molly Rose Foundation

Adele Walton, Bereaved Families for Online Safety

Alison Webb, Bereaved Families for Online Safety

Amanda Stephens, Bereaved Families for Online Safety

Dermot Maguire, Bereaved Families for Online Safety

Ellen Roome, Bereaved Families for Online Safety

Esther Ghey, Bereaved Families for Online Safety

George Nicolaou, Bereaved Families for Online Safety

Hollie Dance, Bereaved Families for Online Safety

Lisa Kenevan, Bereaved Families for Online Safety

Lorin LaFave Gordon, Bereaved Families for Online Safety

Mariano Janin, Bereaved Families for Online Safety

Ros and Mark Dowey, Bereaved Families for Online Safety

Ruth Moss, Bereaved Families for Online Safety

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<sup>1</sup> Two bereaved parents included here signed after the letter was sent to the Justice Minister on 13/11/25

David Parfett, Families and Survivors to Prevent Online Suicide Harms

Dawn Birch, Families and Survivors to Prevent Online Suicide Harms

John Lee, Families and Survivors to Prevent Online Suicide Harms

Graham Caisley, Families and Survivors to Prevent Online Suicide Harms

Mary & Bob Pritchard, Families and Survivors to Prevent Online Suicide Harms

Mia-Helena Knight Nikolin Caisley, Snezana Nikolin Caisley & Masha Radakovic Nikolin Caisley,  
Families and Survivors to Prevent Online Suicide Harms

Özlem and Martin Walton, Families and Survivors to Prevent Online Suicide Harms

Peter and Amanda Aitken, Families and Survivors to Prevent Online Suicide Harms

Sarah Dornford-May, Families and Survivors to Prevent Online Suicide Harms

Sharon Nevens, Families and Survivors to Prevent Online Suicide Harms

Shelley Macpherson, Families and Survivors to Prevent Online Suicide Harms

Catherine Reader, survivor of harmful online suicide and self-harm content

5Rights Foundation

Alliance to Counter Crime Online

Antisemitism Policy Trust

Beyond

Breck Foundation

CEASE

Clean up the Internet

Conscious Advertising Network

End Violence Against Women Coalition

Marie Collins Foundation

Papyrus

Parent Zone

R;pple

Thomas William Parfett Foundation

The Jordan Legacy

Arturo Bejar, former Meta lead for integrity and care

Professor Bernadka Dubicka, University of York

Professor Sonia Livingstone, London School of Economics

Dr Elinor Carmi, City St George University

Dr Karen Middleton, Senior Lecturer in Marketing, University of Portsmouth

Dr Richard Graham, University of York