

Labour calls for urgent action to deal with shortcomings in mental health provision following the judgment of Sir James Munby

Barbara Keeley

MP, Labour's Shadow Minister for Mental Health, has today written to Jeremy Hunt, following the judgment of Sir James Munby in the case of the young person referred to as X, calling on the Health Secretary to take personal action today to ensure the allocation of a supportive and safe placement for the young person X.

In the letter, Keeley urges Hunt to take heed of the 'scathing words in this judgment' and take immediate action to deal with the shortcomings in our Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. To achieve this, Keeley calls on the Government to announce extra funding for those services and commit to ring-fencing funding both for CAMHS and mental health services more generally.

Ends

Notes to editors

Full text of the letter

Dear
Jeremy,

I am writing to you following the judgment of Sir James Munby in the Family Division of the High Court on 3rd August in the case of the young person referred to as X. The scathing words in this judgment stand as a warning of the need for urgent action to improve the care available for children and young people in a mental health crisis.

The judge
said:

"What this case demonstrates .. is the disgraceful and utterly shaming lack of proper

provision in this country of the clinical, residential and other support services so desperately needed by the increasing numbers of children and young people afflicted with the same kind of difficulties as X is burdened with...

"If this is the best we can do for X, and others in similar crisis, what right do we, what right do the system, our society and indeed the State itself, have to call ourselves civilised? The honest answer to this question should make us all feel ashamed..."

"If, when in eleven days' time she is released from ZX, we, the system, society, the State, are unable to provide X with the supportive and safe placement she so desperately needs, and if, in consequence, she is enabled to make another attempt on her life, then I can only say, with bleak emphasis: we will have blood on our hands."

On Monday of this week you defended your Government's performance on mental health services by saying "Look at our record". The judgment in the case of X allows us to make that examination and it finds current services seriously wanting.

There have been many reports warning of the current weaknesses of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. In a report in May 2016, the Children's Commissioner reported that: "of particular concern were some of the 3,000 children and young people we heard about who were referred to CAMHS with a life-threatening condition (such as suicide, self-harm, psychosis and anorexia nervosa), of whom: – 14% were not allocated any provision; – 51% went on a waiting list; – some waited over 112 days to receive services."

In October 2016, you said that CAMHS: "is possibly the biggest single area of weakness in NHS provision at the moment" and that there were "too many tragedies".

Sir James Munby has expressed his fears about the worst potential outcome in this case. We must also be aware of other similar and pressing cases.

I urge you to take personal action today to ensure the allocation of a supportive and safe placement for the young person X. I further urge you to make plans to deal with the shortcomings so clearly identified in our CAMHS services and to announce both extra funding for those services and plans to ring-fence funding both for CAMHS and for mental health services more generally.

As Sir

James Munby has said, if the current state of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services is the best we can do, what right does the State have to call itself civilised?

Given the

level of public interest in this case, I will be making this letter public.

Yours

sincerely,

Barbara

Keeley MP

Shadow

Cabinet Minister for Mental Health