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**An open letter to Rt Hon Maria Miller, MP
Chair of House of Commons Women and Equalities Select Committee**

Dear Mrs Miller,

Like many in the transgender community we were delighted to learn of the decision by the Women and Equalities Select Committee to look in some detail at issues affecting trans people in the UK.

Different departments, different Ministers have, over the years, looked at specific aspects of the challenges affecting trans people attempting to cope with a society whose ideas on gender are generally fixed and hostile to the idea that an individual may wish to “change” gender, or alternatively consider themselves to be without gender. None, however, have carried out the comprehensive and far-reaching review that your committee has proposed, and for that alone your initiative is to be praised.

We were therefore greatly disappointed to learn that, in the week that your committee began to take evidence from experts in the trans communities and beyond on the nature of issues that affect us, the Ministry of Justice has decided to respond to a petition in respect of the Gender Recognition Act in a manner that appears both to limit the scope for your inquiry and to deny the existence of any real problems for trans people.

Their intervention is a response to a petition to parliament launched in July of this year (<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/104639>). This asks that Government allow a greater degree of self-determination to trans persons when it comes to gender: that Government abstain from charging trans people for the right to obtain official documentation in respect of their gender; and that Government recognise the existence of non-binary individuals.

The MoJ response is both complacent and dismissive. Processes, it claims, are in place for a reason, including the fact that “a person’s gender has important legal and social consequences”. It seemingly asserts that people must prove they are acceptable in order to gain gender recognition. Later, though, in respect of non-binary persons, they assert, in apparent contradiction, that they are not aware of this group of people having suffered any “detriment” as a consequence of being non-binary.

It is unclear on what the MoJ base their opinions about non-binary people as (a) census data was deliberately obscured to make it impossible to identify how many non-binary people there are in the UK (plus there was no option to identify as such); and (b) there is no evidence that they have contacted any researcher in the field to acquire evidence to support their claim that no detriment is incurred by being non-binary.

They are highly cavalier about the reasons why many trans people refuse, as a matter of principle, to obtain a gender recognition certificate, and justify the fee for doing so on the grounds that government charges for other services, such as a passport or driving license. In this respect, they fail to acknowledge that such charges are to allow an individual to perform a certain act (travel, drive, etc.), as opposed to permitting them to live as themselves.

They are uninformed about the state of transgender treatment under the NHS, ignoring the evidence that people in senior positions in the NHS presented before your Committee on Tuesday.

We are particularly concerned about both the nature and timing of this intervention. In respect of other initiatives of which we are aware, the Government Equalities Office has argued that these must be delayed, pending the result of your Committee’s Inquiry.

A Minister of State appears to have decided, deliberately, to “jump the gun” on the inquiry process, deciding that they are aware of the state of play on key issues affecting the trans community without benefit of any evidence, and seeking to lay down the law when, clearly, one output from your inquiry might include recommendations that it be reviewed in certain key areas.

As such, it looks like a deliberate attempt to sabotage your inquiry.

We look forward to a response from you.

Jane Fae (Writer and gender activist)

Helen Belcher (Secretary, Parliamentary Forum on Gender Identity)

Jennie Kermode (Chair, Trans Media Watch)

Dr. Meg John Barker (Senior lecturer in psychology, the Open University)

Dr Belinda Brooks-Gordon (University Reader in Psychology, Birkbeck, University of London)

Bethany Black (Actor and Comedian)

Jess Bradley (Action for Trans Health)

Sarah Brown (Former Councillor and Trustee, Encompass Network)

Jessica Coal (Founder, UK Trans Info)

Dominic Davies (Chief Executive Pink Therapy, Consultant Psychotherapist)

Rowan Davis (Trans officer, Oxford Women's Campaign)

Dr Zowie Davy (University of Lincoln)

Alex Drummond (Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist)

Martha Dunkley (Co-founder TransLondon and Trans liaison, Kaleidoscope Trust)

J Fernandez (Editor, Beyond the Binary)

Roz Kaveney (Former Deputy Chair Liberty)

Natacha Kennedy (Goldsmiths College and University College London)

Paris Lees (Journalist and broadcaster)

Sarah Lennox (Childrens' author)

CN Lester (Founder, Transpose)

Keira McCormack (Project Manager, Gender Essence Support Services)

Professor Surya Monro (Academic)

Anwen Muston (Trans officer, LGBT Labour)

CLlr Zoe O'Connell (Campaigner & Parliamentary Candidate, May 2015)

Claire Parker (Gender Activist & Broadcaster)

Ruth Pearce (Researcher, University of Warwick)

Sarah Savage (Author and Trustee, Trans* Pride Brighton)

Dr Jay Stewart (Founder, Gendered Intelligence)

Reubs Walsh (NUS LGBT Campaign Trans Representative)