

Dear First Minister,

We are writing to express our deep disappointment in the Scottish Government's decision to renege on their commitment to introduce the Scottish Human Rights Bill in this parliamentary session. Incorporation of more of our international human rights treaties into Scots law is a crucial step in ensuring that the rights are made a reality, and its absence from the legislative programme is a deeply troubling sign of diminishing priority given to human rights at this critical juncture.

This highly regrettable decision is a dismissal by Scottish Government of the very real and pressing human rights issues facing people in Scotland. Children across Scotland are going hungry as families are pulled deeper into poverty, more households than ever before are stuck in temporary accommodation for months on end, disabled and older people are being refused the social care support that they desperately need, and some Scots can't access the medical care they have a right to. These are just some of the human rights emergencies being experienced by people in Scotland today, and these require the Scottish Government to press on with advancing human rights, not sit on its hands.

### **Overwhelming support for the Bill**

This Bill is simply too important to be dropped from your priorities and kicked into the long grass. There is overwhelming support for human rights incorporation from across civil society. The experience of civil society, communities and individuals across Scotland is that human rights incorporation is vital as a bedrock for human rights-based decision making in public bodies, and to enabling people to name and claim their rights. Indeed, the Scottish Government's own engagements through meetings with hundreds of people, community conversations in All Our Rights In Law, the Scottish Government's own Human Rights Bill Lived Experience Boards, and the overwhelming message from the public consultation have all stated very clearly that this Bill is both vital and timely. In choosing not to press on with the Bill in this session, Scottish Ministers are either not listening to those voices or are listening but choosing to ignore them.

### **There is no reason for delay**

We fully appreciate that the Supreme Court decision in the 2021 UNCRC Bill reference has implications for the Bill's scope. Transparent and positive discussion between Governments would avoid all risk of challenge or constitutional difficulty. This Bill could also then have been the means to amend the UNCRC (Incorporation)

(Scotland) Act so that it has a wider scope. The suggestion that the devolution-related issues mean that the Scottish Government does not keep its own promise on the Bill is unacceptable and not credible.

We also appreciate, and agree, that the Bill proposals can be developed further so that they are as strong as they can be, particularly for disabled people, women and people from ethnic minorities. Again, this is no reason to break your promise. Instead, this is reason to engage constructively and innovatively with these groups so that the Bill goes as far as it can do within devolved constraints. This can be done now, and in time for introduction in this session.

### **Pressing need to make rights a reality**

The current financial circumstances provide yet more reason to press on with this Bill in this session. Embedding human rights into decision-making gives an essential framework for determining priorities with participation of the people affected most. Human rights budgeting enables robust decision-making that ensures that fundamental human rights are protected for all in the midst of tough finances.

Furthermore, we emphasise again that those most at risk of violations of their economic, social, cultural and environmental rights are people living in poverty. If the First Minister is serious about ambitions to end child poverty, then surely requiring our public services to deliver everyday rights for all is an essential and valuable tool for doing so.

### **We have engaged in good faith**

Scottish Ministers have made repeated and high-profile commitments to the Human Rights Bill being introduced in this parliamentary session. Many of us have engaged in good faith for many years, contributing thousands of hours to development of the Bill, including sharing deeply personal experiences on lived experience boards. The Scottish Government has already devoted huge resources to developing the legislation. Given all of this, and the urgent need for it, it is highly regrettable that the Scottish Government has reneged on its commitment. Indeed, it is a significant breach of trust and disrespect to all of those who have engaged around the Bill.

### **Keep promise to introduce the Bill in this parliamentary session**

In light of these concerns, we urge you to reconsider the decision to exclude the Scottish Human Rights Bill from the legislative programme. We request a clear and public commitment to this effect, including a detailed timeline for its introduction by February 2025 at the latest.

Anything less suggests that Scottish Ministers' promises on human rights are just words that mean very little.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Yours sincerely,

The Human Rights Consortium Scotland

**Organisational co-signatories to letter:**

Age Scotland  
Alcohol Focus Scotland  
Amnesty International Scotland  
Art27 Scotland  
Autism Rights Group Highland  
Ayr Housing Aid Centre SCIO  
AyeRight  
Barnardo's Scotland  
BEMIS Scotland  
Campaign for Freedom of Information in Scotland (CFoIS)  
CAPS Independent Advocacy  
Capella Charity  
Carers Scotland  
Carers Trust Scotland  
CELCIS  
CEMVO Scotland  
Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland  
Children 1st  
Children and Young People's Centre for Justice  
Children's Parliament  
Clan Childlaw  
Close the Gap  
Coalition of Carers in Scotland  
Committed to Ending Abuse (CEA)  
Community Policy Forum  
Community Transport Association  
Creative Lives  
Disability Equality Scotland  
Dumfries and Galloway Advocacy Service  
Early Years Scotland  
East Ayrshire Advocacy Services  
Energy Action Scotland  
Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland  
Equality Network  
Faith in Older People  
Families Outside  
Fa'Side Women & Girls Group  
Feniks  
Forces Children Scotland  
Global Justice Academy  
Global Justice Now  
Grampian Independent Advocacy Ltd  
Headway East Lothian SCIO  
Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE)  
Highland Senior Citizens Network

Hospice UK  
Humanist Society Scotland  
In Control Scotland  
Inclusion Scotland  
includem  
Inclusive New Normal  
Just Fair  
JustRight Scotland  
Lanarkshire Deaf Hub  
LEAP Sports Scotland  
Liberty  
LGBT Youth Scotland  
Living Rent  
Making Rights Real  
Marie Curie Scotland  
Maryhill Integration Network  
Member of the Human Rights Bill Lived Experience Board  
Menstrual Rights Global  
Migrant Voice  
National Deaf Children's Society  
Nourish Scotland  
NSPCC Scotland  
Outside The Box  
Parenting across Scotland  
People's Health Movement Scotland  
Pilton Youth and Children's Project  
Play Scotland  
Psychiatric Rights Scotland  
Quakers in Scotland (General Meeting for Scotland)  
Robinson Research Institute, University of Adelaide  
Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health  
Royal Edinburgh Hospital Patients Council  
Salvesen Mindroom Centre  
Save the Children  
Scouts Scotland  
SCVO (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations)  
Scottish Care  
Scottish Child Law Centre  
Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance  
Scottish Pensioners' Forum  
Scottish Recovery Consortium  
Scottish Refugee Council  
Scottish Women's Budget Group  
Scottish Women's Aid  
Scottish Youth Parliament  
Secure Scotland

Simon Community Scotland  
SISU  
Springburn Unity Network  
The Destiny Project SCIO  
The Donaldson Trust  
The Fostering Network  
The Hong Kong Scots  
The Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures  
The National Autistic Taskforce  
The Poverty Alliance  
The Sound Lab  
The STAR Project  
Third Sector Dumfries & Galloway  
Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)  
Wellbeing Economy Alliance Scotland  
Welfare Scotland  
Who Cares? Scotland  
WithYou  
Women's Support Project  
Worker Support Centre  
The Young Women's Movement

**Members of the Human Rights Bill Lived Experience Board, which met 12 times to provide vital advice to the Scottish Government, strongly support this letter, including:**

Alex Thorburn  
Amanda Foster  
Ann Coleman  
Caroline Mockford  
Rose Jackson  
Tom Bennett