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Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London, SW1P 4DF

Sent by email only to: mhclgcorrespondence@communities.gov.uk

23 April 2020

Dear Secretary of State

Re: Support for volunteers

I'm contacting you to highlight the need for further support for the voluntary sector during the coronavirus outbreak.

As you know, volunteers are playing a crucial part in our national response to the coronavirus.

The Catholic Union is a membership organisation, which represents the views and interests of the Catholic laity in Britain.

Many of the 4.5 million Catholics in this country are engaged in volunteer work at this time – whether that's assisting in food banks, giving support to the elderly and vulnerable, or providing a listening ear during what is a lonely and worrying time for many people.

We appreciate the guidance and financial support the Government has already given to the charitable sector during this crisis. The Chancellor's announcement earlier this month of £750 million for frontline charities has been particularly welcome.

Whilst support for charities is welcome, we are concerned that not enough attention is being given to the volunteer army that keeps these charities running. These are the people who deliver care and support to some of the most vulnerable people in society.

The Catholic Union has carried out research into existing arrangements for volunteers – not just from church groups, but across the sector. On the back of this research, we are calling for the Government to adopt several further measures to support volunteers at this time. These are set out below:

- **Include certain volunteers in the Government's list of 'key workers', based on number of hours spent volunteering. This should include all people who volunteer full-time equivalent (FTE) hours each week.**
- **Ensure DBS checks are processed as quickly as possible and provide clear advice to volunteers and charities on the application process. Government should consider what further technology can assist DBS checks, including an app to streamline applications.**
- **Commission guidance from Public Health England on the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) in the voluntary sector. Commit to making any recommended equipment available to volunteers along with other people on the frontline.**
- **Prioritise people who work or volunteer for frontline charities in the roll out of testing for coronavirus. Whilst it is right that testing is focused on NHS and social care workers, the voluntary sector should be next in line as testing capacity is increased.**

The Catholic Union of Great Britain: The Voice of Catholics in Public Life

President: Sir Edward Leigh, MP

Vice-Presidents: Mike Kane MP, Baroness Hooper, Baroness Morris of Bolton OBE, Lord Clarke of Hampstead CBE, KSG, Mr Robert Ffello, Professor John Haldane, Baroness Hollins, Dr Terence Morris, Mr John Deighan KSG, Dr Anthony Cole KCSG, Mr John Barrie KCSG, Mr Michael Henderson KCHS

We would be happy to discuss these measures with you and provide any further information that might be helpful.

I'm sure the Government will want to do all it can to support volunteers at this time. The Catholic Union is ready to work with you, and all politicians, to unlock the full potential of our voluntary sector.

I look forward to hearing from you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nigel Parker', with a large, sweeping flourish underneath.

Nigel Parker

Director

Catholic Union of Great Britain

Email: director@catholicunion.org.uk

cc.

- Natalie Elphicke MP, Parliamentary Private Secretary
- Rt Hon Sir Edward Leigh MP, President of the Catholic Union of Great Britain