

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP

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Dear Prime Minister

On 15 February 2013 my nine-year-old daughter Ella died of an asthma attack, following nearly 30 hospitalisations over three years.

Following an inquest in December 2020 the Coroner ruled that Ella 'Died of asthma contributed to by exposure to excessive air pollution'. He found that air pollution 'was a significant contributory factor to both the induction and exacerbations of her asthma'.

We live by the South Circular Road in Lewisham, London. The Coroner found that the principal source of Ella's air pollution exposure was from traffic emissions.

Between 2010-2013 (which was the period of her illness and ultimately her death) the Coroner found that she was exposed to illegal levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and also levels of NO<sub>2</sub> and particulate matter in excess of World Health Organization limits. The inquest identified a discrepancy between the national air pollution targets for particulate matter and the 'health-based' targets set out in the WHO guidelines.

Two weeks ago, on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> April, the Coroner published his Prevention of Future Deaths (PFD) report. In this report he identified three areas which he felt posed a risk of future deaths and made three recommendations for them to be put right:

1. Adopt legally binding targets of Particulate Matter based on the minimum requirements for the protection of health, as set out in the World Health Organization guidelines
2. Improve public information at a national and local level about air pollution levels so that people are aware of how to reduce their exposure (this will include increasing air quality monitoring capacity).
3. Educate and train medical and nursing professionals, and improve guidance about the adverse effects of air pollution on health.

The inquest demonstrated to me that successive governments have not prioritised health in terms of policies to tackle air pollution. Insufficient regard has been given to the public health emergency and this continues to cost lives.

I am adamant that lessons will be learned from Ella's death and that other families are spared the heartache that my family and I have suffered. This is a life and death issue.

I am writing to you as Prime Minister to ask you:

- to meet with me to discuss the lessons that need to be learned from Ella's death

- to commit to adopt the Coroner's recommendations in order to prevent avoidable future deaths
- to ensure that the Queen's Speech this month contains a commitment to adopt the recommendations
- to work with me on improvements to the Environment Bill to better focus on protecting public health

As the host of the UN's Climate Change Conference, COP 26, this November, I was heartened to hear you say that the COP 26 summit was one of your government's 'single biggest priorities' both domestically and internationally and that you are 'throwing everything at it'. I would like to offer my commitment to work with you to ensure that the UK successfully tackles this 'massive job' and to ensure that the lessons from my daughter's death are learned.

Given that the State Opening of Parliament takes place in only one week's time, on 11 May, and that your Government's legislative agenda for the next parliamentary session will be set out in this speech, time is very short.

More than 1.1 million children and 4.3 million adults suffer from asthma in the UK. Through my air pollution advocacy, I regularly receive letters from parents all across the UK telling me that air pollution is exacerbating their child's health problems. While my child died, there are many out there who need to be saved, and can be, by you introducing measures to tackle air pollution via government legislation.

I do hope that you will be able to find the time to meet with me before the Queen's speech to reassure me of your commitment to tackling the public health emergency that is air pollution and to learn the lessons from Ella's death.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully



Rosamund Adoo-Kissi-Debrah (mother of Ella)

Enc.s:

1. Prevention of Future Deaths Report and Accompanying Reasons:  
<https://www.innersouthlondoncoroner.org.uk/news/2021/apr/inquest-t>