



PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01285

Name of petitioner

Caroline Mockford

Petition title

Free calls to NHS 24 for mobile phones

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to make arrangements for all calls from mobile phones to NHS 24 to be free of charge to users.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

E-mailed NHS 24 with regards to a phone call which cost £8 from a mobile phone. Received no response.

Rang the NHS 24 helpline to try and speak to someone who sets the charges for the service. They said they would ring back the following day but again no response.

E-mailed Cabinet Secretary of Health and Wellbeing with regards to the issue in February 2008. Received reply from Scottish Government's Primary and Community Care Directorate in April 2008 (Ref: 2008/0009488OR) stating that the cost of the call is dependent on the mobile network and type of contract the user has. With a landline the cost is split between the caller and the NHS. If, during the call the user gets cut off due to lack of reception or little or no credit they will be called back.

In May 2008 e-mailed request to meet Nicola Sturgeon to discuss the possibility of starting a petition with the aim of getting free calls to NHS 24 from mobile phones. Fraser Dryburgh replied, asking for more information on the exact content of the information that was being sought and who the petition would be aimed at. Replied to Fraser Dryburgh on 22 May 2008 informing him that the petition had been started already and the aim was to lobby the phone companies and was looking for the support of Scottish Government on this.

Received an invite in June from Scottish Government to meet with Nicola Sturgeon in the following few days. Met with Nicola Sturgeon at her constituency office in Ibrox on 6 June 2008

Nicola agreed and understood the problem. She said that there might be a problem with the amount of phone providers that exist and that it would be a large expense but she would look into it. There has been no news on the situation since then.

Collected signatures on paper. Collected 469 so far. Raised awareness and collected signatures at various different conferences.

July 2009 spoke to people at Poverty Alliance who supported the completion of a submission of a public petition.

23 July 2009 called the public petitions committee to ask for advice on submitting a

petition. They advised to call Ofcom to see if there are any obligations for phone companies to provide public services for free. This was done and it was discovered that it is a commercial issue so therefore it is at the company's discretion with only the emergency 999 service being the exception. The query was registered (ref: 1123083031).

Petition background information

What action do you wish taken and why?

I would like to see calls to NHS 24 from mobiles made free. There are many vulnerable groups such as single parents, pensioners, people with disabilities etc who are living on a low income who tend to use mobiles as they are cheaper than landlines. Other people who are living in remote and rural areas will also have a greater need for this service and may have limited access to phone boxes. These groups of people have more health issues and have a greater need for services such as the NHS 24. With the current recession, these groups of people are increasing at a concerning rate.

Despite the call back service that NHS 24 provides there is still a need to have money in the first instance in order to make the call. For people living on a low income this can often lead to problems and also to the calling of 999 emergency services that take up accident and emergency places.

Certain services (such as for the recent swine flu pandemic) have been made free for callers from mobile phones therefore would the same initiative not be possible for regular illnesses and needs.

People in Scotland have a right to access to medical help when needed and this shouldn't depend on their income.

"The NHS was started because of an ideal that good health care should be available to all, regardless of wealth".

(<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/NHS60/Pages/HistoryoftheNHS.aspx>)

I hope that this can be continued in the modern age and I believe that making this service free to callers would be staying in line with the founding principles of the NHS.

When?

ASAP

What questions would you like the Public Petitions Committee to ask and of whom?

To ask why the cost is split between the NHS and the caller for a landline phone but not for a mobile phone.

Even if the cost is split between the caller and the NHS, people living on a low income would still not be able to access this service if they had no credit in their phone, therefore I would like to ask the Scottish Government if it could intervene with mobile phone companies to try to come to some agreement on how it would be possible to make the NHS 24 service available free of charge for mobile phone users, many of whom live on a low income and who have a greater need for such services.

Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01285>

Related information for petition

Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

NO

How many signatures have you collected so far?

47

Closing date for collecting signatures online

N/A

Comments to stimulate online discussion