Dear First Minister,

As a broad coalition of national organisations, community groups, academics, trade unions and faith groups who share a concern for the wellbeing of families across the country, we are writing to you today to express our grave concern. The coronavirus crisis is putting low income families under financial strain which risks long term consequences for Scotland’s children.

We have all welcomed your government’s commitment to ending child poverty, the leadership that you have shown in setting the 2030 child poverty targets, and the continued prioritisation of the Scottish Child Payment as a key policy supporting these ambitions. It is vital that the coronavirus crisis does not undermine these goals. That is why we have also warmly welcomed the significant support already provided by the Scottish Government in response to the crisis, including through the Wellbeing Fund and additional investment in the Scottish Welfare Fund. We have appreciated the opportunities many of us have had to engage with your Ministers and officials to help inform your government’s response.

However, despite this support, and uplifts to UK benefits, families across Scotland are struggling to stay afloat. Families that were already more likely to experience poverty – such as lone parent families – are being particularly impacted, and are being pulled deeper into poverty. This is particularly true as women are more likely to be experiencing poverty, have disproportionate responsibility for caring for children and account for 91% of lone parents. Women’s poverty is inextricably interlinked with child poverty.

It is clear that progress on tackling child poverty is being put at huge risk.

An out of work family with two children is still being left with an income 20% below the poverty line, a poverty line that in itself is well below the income the general public believe is needed for a minimum socially acceptable standard of living. The families that many of our organisations work with are reporting increased financial stress and associated anxiety, loneliness, and more complex mental health problems. The charitable hardship funds many of us operate have come under massively increased pressure, with, for example, a 1400% increase in demand for Aberlour’s Urgent Assistance Fund.

In the face of this increased hardship our organisations continue to call for the UK Government to take action to ensure that UK social security system protects people from poverty. However, we believe that where any level of government can do more to loosen the grip of poverty then it must. We therefore believe that the time has come to build on the existing investments made by your government and the emergency provision provided by children’s charities and others, and provide a direct financial boost to all low income families. The £10 per week Scottish Child Payment will be a vital lifeline, but will not start to be delivered until next year. Families need a lifeline now to help them weather this storm.

We call on you to use every tool at your government’s disposal to deliver an emergency package of financial support to all low income families – a package we believe should amount to at least the equivalent of £10 per week per child.

**Options** for delivering such an emergency package that we have identified include the following:

- Using **Best Start legislation and payment systems** to introduce new or increased payments of Best Start Grants.
- Investing further in **the Scottish Welfare Fund** to provide a new coronavirus crisis grant for all low income families, whilst retaining and boosting the capacity of the existing Fund to support all those facing income crisis.
- Increasing **School Clothing Grant payments.**
- **Topping up benefits that go to families to help with the costs of raising children** - many organisations have called on the UK Government to increase child benefit, the child element of Universal Credit, and child tax credit in response to the crisis. The Scottish Government also has the powers to top up UK benefits.
- **Using local government powers** to provide payments to advance the wellbeing of children, for example under s22 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 or via financial support under the power in s20 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003. These could be used to provide equivalent financial support, particularly to families with no recourse to public funds.

**Additional targeted support** could include:

- Increase the value of **Best Start Foods.**
- Providing a **crisis grant for families awaiting their first Universal Credit payment.**
- To support families impacted by the two-child limit, by making additional direct payments to families affected. Larger families were at increased risk of poverty even before the current COVID-19 crisis.
- To further **increase the Discretionary Housing Payment budget**, and direct local authorities to target additional funds towards those affected by the benefit cap. By increasing the DHP budget, those households impacted by the benefit cap can receive the additional support they need.

We understand that to identify the most effective delivery option, judgements will need to be made based on organisational capacity within local authorities and Social Security Scotland, and the ability to engage and work with UK agencies. It may well be that a combination of the options is needed to deliver this quickly. Whatever approach is taken the overriding priority must be to use the powers and structures available in Scotland to give an immediate cash boost to all low income families to support them through the current crisis. This will be an essential foundation on which to build the full package of financial, practical and emotional support needed to protect children’s wellbeing as we transition from the crisis to recovery, in line with the principles in your government’s Covid-19 Framework for Decision Making.

We are keen to work with you constructively to find practical and effective ways of achieving this, and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

SallyAnn Kelly, CEO Aberlour
Paul Carberry, Director for Scotland, Action for Children
Martin Crewe, Director, Barnardo’s Scotland
John Dickie, Director of Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland
Jackie Brock, Chief Executive, Children in Scotland
Mary Glasgow, Chief Executive, Children 1st
Satwat Rehman, Chief Executive, OPFS
Jamie Livingstone, Head of Oxfam Scotland
Peter Kelly, Director, The Poverty Alliance
Claire Telfer, Head of Scotland, Save the Children
Tracey McFall, CEO, Partners in Advocacy
Dr Neil Henery, Director, Camphill Scotland
Clare Cable, Chief Executive and Nurse Director, Queen’s Nursing Institute Scotland
Alistair Brown, National Director, Scottish Association of Social Work
Justina Murray, CEO, Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol & Drugs
Ewan Aitken, Chief Executive, Cyrenians
Martin Dorchester, Chief Executive, Includem
Janis McDonald, Chief Officer, deafscotland
Professor Ian Welsh OBE, Chief Executive, Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE)
Prof Morag Treanor, Heriot-Watt University
Nancy Loucks, CEO, Families Outside
Matt Forde, National Head of Service, NSPCC Scotland
Ella Simpson, Chief Executive, EVOC
Duncan Dunlop, CEO, Who Cares? Scotland
Jimmy Wilson, CEO, FARE Scotland
Dr Anne Mullin, Chair, the Deep End Group Scotland
Craig Samuel, NAWRA representative Scotland
Jo Derrick, CEO, Staf
Dr Hayley Bennett, Social Policy Research Fellow, University of Edinburgh
Prof Adrian Sinfield, University of Edinburgh
Claire Burns, Director, CELCIS
David Thomson, Destiny Church
Dr Hartwig Pautz, Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at the University of the West of Scotland and co-lead of the UWS-Oxfam Partnership
Mike J Kirby, Scottish Secretary, UNISON
Professor Mhairi Mackenzie, Professor of Public Policy, University of Glasgow
Nick Bailey, Professor of Urban Studies, University of Glasgow
Graeme McAlister, Chief Executive, Scottish Childminding Association
Colin Flinn, Chief Executive, Royal Caledonian Education Trust
Mark O’Donnell, Chief Executive, Royal Blind
Douglas Guest, Acting Director for Scotland, Home-Start UK Scotland
Billy Watson, Chief Executive, Scottish Association for Mental Health
Alan Thornburrow, Director, Business in the Community Scotland
Juliet Harris, Director, Together (Scottish Alliance for Children’s Rights)
Bernard Harris, Professor of Social Policy, University of Strathclyde
Janet Haugh, Chief Executive, Ypeople
Cath Morrison, Chief Executive, The Lilias Graham Trust
Dr Mhairi Crawford, Chief Executive, LGBT Youth Scotland
Pat Rafferty, Scottish Secretary, Unite the Union
Professor Stephen Sinclair, Co-Director, Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit, Glasgow Caledonian University
Professor John McKendrick, Co-Director, Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit, Glasgow Caledonian University
Professor Sharon Wright, Professor of Social Policy, University of Glasgow
Hugh Foy, Director of Programmes and Partnerships, UK Region Xaverian Missionaries
Professor Chik Collins, Rector (Vice Chancellor) of the University of the Faroe Islands
Shaben Begum, Director, Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance
Dr David Walsh, Public Health Programme Manager, Glasgow Centre for Population Health
Emma Revie, Chief Executive, The Trussell Trust
Professor Steve Turner, Scottish Officer, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health
Kate Wimpress, Chair, SURF – Scotland’s Regeneration Forum
Angela Moohan, Chief Executive Officer, The Larder West Lothian
Nathan Sparling, Chief Executive, HIV Scotland
Neil Mathers, Chief Executive, Children’s University Scotland
Steven McCluskey, Chairperson, Bikes for Refugees
Margo Uprichard, CEO, The Louise Project
Clare Simpson, Manager, Parenting across Scotland
Ron Culley, Chief Executive, Quarriers
Jane Brumpton, Chief Executive, Early Years Scotland.
Hazel Brown, Chief Executive Officer, Cornerstone
Anne F. Meikle, Convenor, Scottish Women’s Budget Group
Larry Flanagan, General Secretary, EIS
Douglas Hamilton, former Chair of the Poverty and Inequality Commission
Emily Beardsmore, CEO, Light Up Learning
Virginia Radcliffe, CEO, Licketyspit
Roz Foyer, General Secretary Designate, STUC
Marie Ward, Chief Executive Officer, Cranhill Development Trust
Ian Bruce, Chief Executive, Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS)
Jacqui Hardie, Executive Strategic Manager, Fife Gingerbread
Professor Mike Danson, Chair, CBINS (Citizen’s Basic Income Network Scotland)
Shona Blakeley, Executive Director, Women’s Fund for Scotland
Emma Jackson, National Director Scotland, Christians Against Poverty
Sharon Colvin, CEO, 3D Drumchapel
Dr Patrick Roach, General Secretary, NASUWT
Margaret Nakityo, Secretary, Afreshe
Traci Kirkland, Head of Charity, Govan Community Project
Rachel Sutherland, Bureau Manager, East & Central Sutherland Citizens Advice Bureau
Bishop Nolan, President, Justice and Peace Scotland
Jim McCormick, Associate Director for Scotland, Joseph Rowntree Foundation
Russell Gunson, Director, IPPR Scotland
Frazer Scott, CEO, Energy Action Scotland
Anna Ritchie Allan, Executive Director, Close the Gap
Tim Frew, Chief Executive, YouthLink Scotland
Shruti Jain, Chair, Saheliya
Marguerite Hunter Blair, Chief Executive, Play Scotland
Linda Tuthill, CEO, The Action Group
Rami Okasha, Chief Executive, CHAS
Irene Audain MBE, Chief Executive, Scottish Out of School Care Network
Rachel Adamson, Co-Director, Zero Tolerance
Dr Marsha Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Scottish Women’s Aid
Dave Liddell, Chief Executive Officer, Scottish Drugs Forum
Sharon McAulay, Project Manager, STAR Project
Danny Collins, National President, Society of St Vincent de Paul (Scotland)
Emma Ritch, Executive Director, Engender