Letter to Women and Equalities Select Committee Chair re: Rosie Duffield leaving Dr Stephenson's pre-appointment hearing

Email to: womeqcom@parliament.uk
or
Post to: Women and Equalities Select Committee, Committee Office, House of Commons, Palace of Westminster, SW1A 0AA

Consider copying to: your MP and the JCHR (maybe, idk, walking out shows contempt for them too)

This letter is provided as an example or template, with the expectation that you will reword it. The highlighted portions in particular should be reviewed as they are more individual.

If you'd prefer a simpler outline to fill with your own words, I've provided this at the end.

Dear Sarah Owen,

I am writing to you in your capacity as the Chair of the Women and Equalities Select Committee, regarding the conduct of committee member Rosie Duffield MP around the pre-appointment hearing for Dr Mary-Ann Stephenson on 1 July 2025.

First, I would like to thank you for your thorough scrutiny of Dr Stephenson during her pre-appointment hearing. I was glad to see the committees' questioning cover the range of responsibilities she may be tasked with, including the insistence that she articulate her position on trans rights, which seemed tepid at best. The effectiveness of your questioning clearly demonstrated several fundamental elements on which Dr Stephenson appeared alarmingly unstudied. For brevity I will simply say that I saw no indication that Dr Stephenson would restore any of the trust that the EHRC has burned through of late.

Unfortunately, I must now address the departure of WEC member Rosie Duffield during the hearing and comments she made on social media following this, quoted below.

> *"I admit, on the 3rd or 4th question repeating 'trans rights', I left the room. We are the *Women* and equalities committee, so it grates a tad constantly hearing only about the poor be-penised loves every week. Not 1 of those men-prioritising MPs represents the majority view..."* – Rosie Duffield MP[1]

I find this completely inappropriate of any MP, let alone a WEC member, on the following grounds:

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[1] https://x.com/RosieDuffield1/status/1940070494721515619

1. This framing misrepresents the committees' acknowledgement of Dr Stephenson's significant experience with women's issues and the frequent reference to this throughout the hearing.
2. This framing also misrepresents that the committees' correctly justified weighting their questions towards protected characteristics which Dr Stephenson has little or no experience with.
3. Critically, this framing ignores and distracts from the reason that such significant questioning on trans rights was required, being due to Dr Stephenson's consistently evasive and insubstantial answers on the subject.
    a. For example, Dr Stephenson was asked three separate times if she would condemn trans people being photographed in public bathrooms, as JK Rowling recently suggested to 14 million people.[2] That it took three opportunities for Dr Stephenson to rather mildly rebuke this speaks for itself.
4. Given Rosie Duffield's opinions on trans people, I suggest that she should have welcomed questions on the topic to ensure that Dr Stephenson was not overly supportive, as much as I disagree with this world view.
5. The focus on the women's part of the committee's remit seems to misunderstand the purpose of the Women and Equalities Committee interviewing a candidate for the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, whose names have an obvious commonality.
6. The language used goes beyond my ability to condemn. It is contemptible and wholly unsuitable for use by a parliamentarian, without exception. I find myself too shocked by its use to even express this properly. I also note her inability to simply write trans rights without implication.
7. The claim to represent the "majority view" is as unevidenced and biased as in previous assertions such as that "society seems to be more polarised than ever in terms of […] trans-identified people versus feminists",[3] which falsely attempts to speak for all women.

In addition, I find it completely inappropriate for a committee member to abandon her duties as part of the select committee, no matter her views. The reasoning used to justify this is thoroughly disingenuous and is disreputable to the hearing's integrity, the Joint Committee on Human Rights by extension, and the Women and Equalities Committee most of all.

Given the context, I will say that I am a cis woman who has found no evidence of the threat I am being told to believe that trans people pose to me or to women's rights. In both my own life and in society at large I have seen only an unfounded moral panic. Consequently, I have proudly joined over 37,000 other cis women under NION Women's petition[4] who refuse to have this narrative pushed in our name and know that many of our struggles are shared with trans people. Similarly, I was delighted to see over 3,300 signatures from feminist academics on their exquisitely articulated open letter[5] following the Supreme Court ruling.

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[2] https://x.com/jk_rowling/status/1936542508688842878
[3] https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/16043/pdf/ see Q81
[4] https://www.change.org/p/not-in-our-name-women-in-support-of-the-trans-community
[5] https://docs.google.com/document/d/1UZmaZ4QCXU-b-NcBManyo9-AIZtQlxLDWpTP09goaiY/

I have been pleased and reassured to see the WEC and JCHR set a much better example than the Government over these last two months, especially towards the EHRC's conduct. However, I am concerned that Rosie Duffield has discredited these efforts and the committee as a whole by her actions. I understand that committees are intended to represent broad views, but the statement above goes far beyond respectful disagreement and is strictly unacceptable. By way of attacking trans women, who are incredibly vulnerable, Rosie Duffield is extending the same dehumanising treatment to the entire trans+ population. I fear that this behaviour will erode trust in the WEC from those most relying on your work and their allies alike, along with discouraging participation with you going forward.

I am not familiar enough with Parliamentary workings to make any specific requests of you as the Chair, so can only ask you to consider the conduct in question and its ramifications.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Yours sincerely,

<NAME>

<ADDRESS>

OUTLINE VERSION

(This version gives a rough guide of content in each paragraph to help you write in your own voice rather than editing existing wording.)

Dear Sarah Owen,

<Introduction, address Sarah Owen as Chair of the committee.>

<Thanks for scrutiny of Dr Stephenson.>

<Reason for writing: Rosie Duffield walking out of the hearing and accompanying twitter statement.>

<Criticisms of statement:

- Misrepresents recognition of Dr Stephenson's work with women.
- Misrepresents rightful questioning on trans rights (current EHRC focus, need to examine Dr Stephenson on weak/unproven areas)
- Misrepresents purpose of interview (Equalities Committee interviewing Equalities Commission)
- Bigoted language.
- Unfounded claims of representing a majority.>

<Criticism of Duffield not doing her paid job.>

<How the above reflects poorly on the WEC (and also the hearing and JCHR)>

<OPTIONAL: Mention NION petition and feminist openletter in opposition to Duffield's views.>

<Concerns that trans people and allies may reduce engagement with the committee due to Duffield's actions and presence.>

<Requests for action if you know what to say.>

Yours sincerely,

<NAME>

<ADDRESS>