The Right Honourable Simon Hughes MP  
Minister of State for Justice and Civil Liberties  
Ministry of Justice  
102 Petty France  
London SW1H 9AJ  

And by email  
8 August 2014  

Dear Mr Hughes  

Thank you for your reply on behalf of the Prime Minister to our letter on essential legislation to end the late registration of deaths sent on 24th July 2014.  

We appreciate you taking the time to respond to us; however, we have several concerns with your response and would appreciate the chance to meet to discuss these concerns in person. It is still our view that legislation is needed to ensure the timely registration of deaths, which is necessary to end delays that undermine the public health and the statistical systems of England and Wales.  

In your letter, you state that “Earl Howe took the view that a change in the law to allow fact of death registration would introduce some problems for the Office for National Statistics as well as some potential benefits, and would probably not provide a complete solution.” You don’t say what those problems would be and neither the former National Statistician, Jil Matheson, nor Director General of the Office for National Statistics, Glen Watson, have said that the change would introduce any problems for them. They both agreed in a 28th November 2013 letter to the Royal Statistical Society that the late registration of deaths needs to be resolved and that the law should be changed. We have attached a copy of this letter for your reference.  

You also said that all government departments want to review the impact of the Coroners and Justice Act 2013 before considering any changes to registration of deaths. But this Act only addresses how long it takes accurately to determine cause of death and it doesn’t deal with the issue of timely registration of fact-of-death: delays of more than 8 days need to be brought to an end. These delays will still exist regardless of the effectiveness of the reforms introduced by the Act.  

Finally, we should also like to know what cost your officials have come up with for implementing the required changes to how deaths are registered.  

We should be pleased to meet with you at your earliest convenience.  

Yours sincerely,  

Sheila M Bird  
Royal Statistical Society  

Tracey Brown, Managing Director  
Sense About Science
Marjorie Wallace, Chief Executive
SANE

Steve Rolles, Senior Policy Analyst
Transform Drug Policy Foundation

Lynsay Allan, Executive Director
Scottish Cot Death Trust

Helen Shaw and Deborah Coles, Co-directors
INQUEST

Elizabeth Scowcroft, Research Manager
Samaritans

Frances Crook, Chief Executive
Howard League for Penal Reform