



## **Children's Commissioner for Jersey**

Promoting and Protecting Children's Rights

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### **Office of the Children's Commissioner**

Brunel House  
Old Street  
St Helier  
Jersey  
JE2 3RG

8 April 2020

Dear Minister,

#### **RE: Addressing Jersey's Children & Young People about COVID-19.**

I hope you are well. Furthering on to the conversation the Commissioner and I had with you via Twitter, I am writing to you in your position as Jersey's Children's Minister in the hope that you will address the islands Children & Young People directly about COVID-19.

We have already seen various world leaders; including Prime Minister, Erna Solberg of Norway & Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand address their country's youngest citizens. They have been answering their concerns and reassuring them because their Government's see it as a priority to speak directly to the Children & Young People living in their countries.

Approximately 25% of the population of our island are either Children, Young People or are in the UN Youth age bracket (15-24). In essence, this is a large number of people who have not been addressed by the Government directly; however, older Young People have still been frequently targeted in Government Communications.

A lot of Children & Young People have had their nurseries, schools, colleges, and universities closed, others have lost their full/part-time jobs, and the majority are concerned about what the future will hold. Many of our island's youth are also carers for their parents/siblings and will have added fears over COVID-19 and the impact that could have on the person they are caring for. Some of the islands Younger Children are also worried about other things that are important to them, such as the Easter Bunny & Tooth Fairy, which was something that New Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern addressed in her Youth Press Conference.

Children & Young People are supposedly The Government of Jersey's number one priority. The Government of Jersey has a Children & Young People's pledge, which states "We (The Government of Jersey) want children to be heard, valued and involved in the decisions that affect their everyday lives". However, with respect to the COVID-19 situation, this has not happened. COVID-19 is causing a lot of worry and disruption at the moment, and this can lead to some challenging situations. However, even during tough times, Children & Young People still have their rights, and the Government need to ensure their rights are being upheld.

We have, unfortunately, already seen in some countries, suicide rates amongst Young People rise as a result of the current situation. Therefore, I strongly advise you to ensure measures are being put in place to support Children & Young People's Mental Health, as we are certainly going to see an increase in Mental Health cases on the island.

The islands lockdown has impacted a lot of Children & Young People's usual support network, and this may be why some Children & Young People may still be socialising even during the lockdown because being with their friends is their primary coping mechanism for their Mental Health and therefore, they should be provided with the support they need rather than being sanctioned.

Children & Young People are just as scared if not more so about COVID-19 as their adult counterparts. It is essential that you in your role as our Islands Children's Minister, address these concerns directly, in the form of a Youth Press Conference. I would advise you to ask the Chief Minister & Chief of Police to attend the Youth Press Conference to hopefully unanimously deliver the message that even in a time of crisis, The Government of Jersey is still committed to supporting Children & Young People. The Office of The Children's Commissioner would be happy to work alongside you and your team to enable this Youth Press Conference to take place.

I believe your office must also work with The States of Jersey Police to ensure Children & Young People understand about the regulations and measures that are being put in place and obviously by involving the Chief of Police in the Youth Press Conference this would be achieved. I also urge you to meet with fellow Government Ministers and ensure that they are doing as much as possible to support Children & Young People within their own departments.

I am also concerned that The Commissioner and her office has still not been included in any emergency planning meetings and are therefore no more the wiser than other islanders as to the safeguards that are in place to protect Children & Young People during these difficult times. Consequently, I hope this will change, and they will be included from now on.

I also ask you to please change the language Government is using from 'Social-Distancing' to 'Physical-Distancing'. Now more than ever, we need to socialise for our own Mental Health and well-being. We are fortunate enough to be living in a time where we have technology which allows us to socialise without being in physical contact with another person. Therefore, Government messaging should be changed to 'physical-distancing'.

Inevitably in a time of crisis, there is much uncertainty, and in this unprecedented situation, things are changing extremely rapidly. However, I still hope that the Government are continuing to think about our islands youngest citizens' amongst everything else that is going on.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



**Tom Martin Hughes**

Advisor to The Children's Commissioner for Jersey

*\*This letter was emailed to Senator Sam Mézec, Minister for Children and Housing ([s.mezec@gov.je](mailto:s.mezec@gov.je)) to expedite delivery.*

**Cc:** Deborah McMillan,  
Children's Commissioner for Jersey.