XXX YOUR NAME
XXX YOUR ADDRESS

XXX DATE

XXX MP NAME
XXX MP ADDRESS

Dear XXX MP NAME

**Re: 30 November Westminster Hall debate on deafness and hearing loss and the cap on Access to Work awards**

I am writing to ask you to take part in the Westminster Hall debate on deafness and hearing loss on 30 November. I hope you will raise the issue of the cap on Access to Work awards, which will have a negative impact on my business and ability to work.

I am Deaf, use British Sign Language (BSL), and work as XXX with XXX. [PUT YOUR JOB TITLE AND NAME OF BUSINESS HERE IF YOU WANT TO] Access to Work helps me to run my business on an equal with hearing people, by paying the costs of communication support.

The support I need is BSL/English interpreters. [CHANGE / ADD IF YOU USE DIFFERENT SUPPORT] Communication support is expensive, which is why as my business develops, and I need more communication support, I’m not going to be able to afford the support I need.

In 2015 the Department for Work and Pensions imposed a cap on Access to Work awards. The cap is one and a half times the national average salary, currently £42,100 per year.

[THE NEXT TWO PARAGRAPHS ARE FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE SELF EMPLOYED. IF YOU ARE NOT SELF-EMPLOYED, THEN DELETE BOTH PARAGRAPHS] While this is enough support for me in my current role, I am worried the cap will act as a glass ceiling on my business and career aspirations, and those of other Deaf people. Put simply, having the cap means that I won’t be able to develop my business, apply for promotions or look to develop my career, because the ATW support won’t be sufficient. The cap means that at most I would be able to book interpreters for three days a week, leaving me with two days when I couldn’t communicate with people.

Because I am self-employed I have no employer who can pay the difference between the communication support I need, and what Access to Work will pay for. I can’t increase my charges to customers to pay for this, as this will make me uncompetitive against hearing people who are self-employed. This means I will only be able to work part time.

 [THE NEXT TWO PARAGRAPHS ARE FOR PEOPLE WHO RUN THEIR OWN BUSINESS. IF YOU DON’T RUN YOUR OWN BUSINESS, THEN DELETE BOTH PARAGRAPHS] While this is enough support for me with my business currently, I am worried the cap will act as a glass ceiling on developing my business, and the career aspirations of other Deaf people. Put simply, the cap means that at most I would be able to book interpreters for three days a week, leaving me with two days when I couldn’t communicate with people.

Because I run my own company I have no employer who can pay the difference between the communication support I need, and what Access to Work will pay for. I can’t increase my charges to customers to pay for this, as this will make me uncompetitive against hearing people and businesses. If I can only talk to customers three days a week, I don’t know how the business will manage.

It is also confusing, as I thought the point of Access to Work was to pay for adjustments that are unlikely to reasonable. Instead, Access to Work makes lots of smaller awards, leaving people like me and my employer to struggle.

I have attached research done by DeafATW with people whose awards have already been capped, or who will be capped in April 2018. The research shows the cap is having a negative impact on the careers and aspirations of Deaf people. Especially affected are Deaf people who are in or aspire to professional, managerial or leadership roles, or who are self-employed or run their own business.

Access to Work revolutionised the career opportunities of deaf people, shattering the glass ceiling that had previously limited us to manual jobs. It has been largely due to Access to Work that we have progressed as far as our talent allows. There are now deaf CEOs, deaf intermediaries working at the Ministry of Justice, deaf theatre directors, deaf social workers and deaf entrepreneurs.

As well as fearing for my own work and career, I am concerned this new policy will undo that good work. I understand the government wants to help as many disabled people as possible, but I don’t think that was supposed to be the point of Access to Work. It was meant to help disabled people and employers with higher support costs.

I do hope you will be able to join the debate, which was arranged by the APPG on Deafness, chaired by Jim Fitzpatrick MP. I also urge you to join the Group, which is working on a range of issues: access to broadcasting, telecommunications, education, employment, and health and care services.

If you are able to attend, I will appreciate an opportunity to talk to you about it afterwards. I can tell you more about how the cap is affecting my work and career.

If you are not able to attend, please can you write to Sarah Newton MP, the Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work. Please ask to remove or raise the cap, and once again lift the ceiling on our aspirations.

I look forward to your reply.

Kind regards