

Witness Name: Amanda Provis

Statement No.: 1

Exhibits: 0

Dated: 23/02/24

## **UK COVID-19 INQUIRY**

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### **WITNESS IMPACT STATEMENT OF AMANDA PROVIS**

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I, Amanda Provis, member of Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice Cymru (“CBFJ Cymru”) make this statement in response to the UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry’s request for impact evidence. Within this statement, I have set out my experience in losing both my mother and my grandmother to Covid-19.

1. I am a wife and mother to two children. I work as a civil servant within HMRC as an administrative officer at the Valuation Office. I suffer with asthma, so I worked entirely from home during the pandemic. I returned to hybrid working from September 2022.
2. I sadly lost both my mother and grandmother to Covid-19. Their loss had a devastating impact on our family, and we feel their loss very deeply.
3. My mother, Christine Durbin, was a retired homemaker. She sadly passed away from Covid-19 on 7 April 2020 at the age of just 61.
4. Before retiring, she worked in numerous job roles. She had been a carer, a cleaner and had worked in hospital kitchens. She, unfortunately, had to retire due to ill health. She suffered from diabetes, chronic asthma, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (“COPD”). In 2002, following her diagnosis of COPD, a non-cancerous growth was found on one of my mother’s lungs. As a result, most of the lung had to be removed to remove the growth.
5. My mother was a wife and had 2 children, my brother and I. She was an amazing woman, who would always be found laughing and joking. I have very fond memories of her dancing along to the radio in our living room. She was very loving, especially with her grandchildren. She was particularly close with my son. He would always dedicate a Friday afternoon after school to visit her and he could do no wrong in her eyes. He was 15 years old when she passed away.

6. My father is a hospital porter. He has worked there for around 5 years. In his role, he is required to move around the hospital and cover its entirety. During the pandemic, he would be responsible for conveying all patients, including covid patients, who needed to be moved to the ITU by ensuring all doors were opened and corridors were clear. At the beginning of the pandemic, there was no form of PPE supplied to staff. PPE was brought in between 7 and 30 April, and consisted of a paper surgical mask, a visor, and gloves. Hospital staff were not permitted to use any form of PPE not provided by the hospital.
7. On or around 31 March 2020, my father began showing symptoms of Covid-19. He did not feel unwell but had lost his taste and smell (“anosmia”). Despite anosmia not yet being a recognised symptom of Covid-19, he was advised to see a doctor in A&E. This doctor instructed him, and a few other porters with symptoms, to leave work and isolate. I was worried upon hearing this news, but my father assured me that he felt fine and likened his symptoms to that of a previous cold. Upon returning home, my mother and father decided to sleep separately to protect my mother as much as possible. This continued until she passed away.
8. My father, as an NHS employee, was able to take a Covid-19 PCR test on 2 April 2020. On the same day, my mother began to show symptoms of Covid-19, namely anosmia and a cough. We believed that my father had contracted Covid-19 whilst working and had passed this to my mother. Given her underlying health conditions, these symptoms alarmed us. As GP surgeries were closed to patients, she was unable to physically see a doctor. My mother instead called her GP, who advised that from the symptom description, it was likely Covid-19. My mother held a rescue pack to treat her COPD and asthma pump. The GP advised her to use those when necessary to alleviate her symptoms as much as possible, and she did so in the following days.
9. A few days later, my mother called her GP again due to worsening symptoms. She had developed diarrhoea and was struggling with her cough. Her GP did not advise her to go to the hospital, but instead informed her that she should call NHS 111 if her symptoms continued to worsen. My father asked my mother if she would like to go to hospital in light of how unwell she felt. She did not want to go to hospital – she was frightened to be on her own there.
10. On 6 April 2020, my father’s Covid-19 test returned a positive result. I had a FaceTime call with my parents that day, as I did every day. My mum complained of feeling breathless, as though she’d recently been running. She compared the feeling to that of an asthma attack, which caused her to panic. My father and I attempted to calm her and assist her in breathing. My mother used her nebuliser to attempt to ease this feeling. She began to feel tired, and so decided to go to bed early. This concerned me, as it wasn’t normal for her to do this.

11. Around half past 10 on the morning of 7 April, I decided to text my father. I hadn't heard anything from him that morning, which was unusual and concerning, so I wanted to check in. I did not receive a response to this text message. Shortly after, I received a call via my landline, which my husband answered. I could tell from his reaction when he answered that something was wrong. My husband then informed me that my mother had passed away. This news devastated me. I began to cry and scream and could not believe what I had been told. I took the phone to speak to my father. He was distraught. He told me that he had gone upstairs the morning of 7 April to bring her a drink and check on her. He found her propped up, something she had done to help her chest. She had passed away in her bed.
12. My father made the necessary phone calls after finding my mother. He called for the police and an ambulance and called my brother. I wished I could also have been there in person; however, my father asked me to remain at home due to the underlying health conditions that both my husband and I suffer with. Upon arriving at the house, my brother cleared the upstairs landing to make the process of moving my mother easier. When arriving at my parents' house, the paramedics and police were wearing full PPE gear. They treated my father with kindness and sensitivity. One paramedic in particular recognised my father from the hospital he worked at and offered comfort as a familiar face. It was explained to my father that it was possible that a postmortem would be carried out on my mother. Although this was something difficult to think about, my father understood that this was part of the process and agreed. The postmortem did not occur.
13. It is particularly difficult to look back on this time and remember how I could not be there for my father to comfort him the day my mother passed. There was a limit to what I could do over a telephone or FaceTime call. It was difficult to be there for him whilst the police and paramedics were at the house, as he could not speak with them and with me at the same time. Sitting at home waiting for more news from my father was very hard. I offered to go to my parents' house and talk to my father through the window, but he wanted me to stay at home. He was so scared that as an asthma sufferer, I would also catch Covid-19 and become unwell. In hindsight, I believe my father was right to ask me to stay home, as I found it so difficult to deal with the news of my mothers' passing. I have been there to support my father ever since and will continue to do so.
14. Prior to my mother's funeral, my family and I were not given the opportunity to see her before laying her to rest. We are unsure if this is an option we would have taken, however, this option was not even available. My mother had been very open regarding her wishes to be cremated, and we were glad to fulfil this wish. However, we would have hoped that she could have been

changed out of her nightclothes and into something more respectable. All these options that would otherwise have been available to us were taken away.

15. Something particularly difficult to process is the restrictions imposed on my mother's funeral, which took place on 30 April 2020. Though my mother was not particularly religious, she did believe in God and occasionally prayed. We were unable to hold a service in a church, chapel or our own home and give her the funeral we had all expected. We instead had a small service in my mother's street, led by the local undertaker, where friends and relatives attended in a socially distanced manner. There were, however, heavy restrictions on the way in which we could conduct this outdoor service. The prayer was to be led by the undertaker only and there was to be no singing. A neighbour of my mother's instead played her favourite song via a speaker as she left the street after the service. Though this was a nice gesture, it did not replace the service we would have expected had restrictions not been in place.
16. Following this, we had a service at Llwydcoed crematorium. Only 10 people could attend this, including the vicar. We were not given any options in terms of the numbers who could attend. Though this was intended to be a religious service, we were again restricted from singing hymns and joining the vicar in saying a prayer. We were also restricted from having a family member give a eulogy. Though I would have found it too difficult to speak, given how upset I was during the service, there were many other members of the family who were denied the opportunity to say anything in remembrance of my mother. Those of us who attended the crematorium service continued to remain socially distanced. My father and brother remained together. My husband and I remained together, but we were separate from others, remaining at a 2-metre distance. Being unable to comfort each other at this difficult time made the process that much harder. Following the service, we all had to go our separate ways as were not permitted to hold a wake. As my mother passed early on in the first wave, we were unable to later organise a celebration of her life, as restrictions continued to be in place long after 30 April.
17. Sadly, I also lost my paternal grandmother, Maureen Durbin, to Covid-19. She passed away on 29 January 2021 at the age of 84.
18. My grandmother was retired at the time of her passing but had previously worked as a machinist and as a cook in a hospital kitchen. She was a wife to my grandfather, who sadly passed away in 2002, and a mother to two sons. Following the passing of my grandfather, she sold the family home and moved into her own flat. She continued to live an independent life until 2020. She did, however, suffer with arthritis, pancreatitis, and diabetes, which she largely managed well.

19. Around a year before the beginning of the pandemic, my grandmother's health began to generally decline. She stopped eating properly and found difficulty in her movement as a result of her arthritis. The whole family helped to assist her as much as we could by taking her food shopping and arranging for a meal service to provide her with meals. Despite our best effort, my grandmother was still struggling to eat.
20. In early 2020, my grandmother said that she wanted to move out of her flat and go to a nursing home. As a family we had concerns about this, due to the news surrounding Covid-19 at the time. She continued to stay living at her flat, where she would be safe from contracting the virus. We continued to bring her food while remaining socially distanced.
21. Over the following months, my grandmother began to require a little more assistance. My cousin and I had both attended her flat on separate occasions to assist her in showering. In early May 2020, the morning after I had helped my grandmother shower, I received a call from my father to say that my grandmother had suffered a fall. Luckily, there was a lifeline installed in her flat, which she had pressed for assistance. My father and his brother attended the flat to help her and an ambulance was called. I also attended, as my grandmother was not fully clothed, and I attempted to help her dress prior to the ambulance arriving to preserve her dignity. The ambulance took her to hospital, where it was discovered that she had sustained a fractured wrist and hip. She had also hit her head, though had not sustained a concussion.
22. Whilst an inpatient, restrictions prevented us from visiting my grandmother at first. My father was able to see her while working at the hospital, so would bring any belongings to her, however, she was later transferred to another hospital around early August. As restrictions eased, and people were permitted to visit, I was the first member of my family to see her on this ward. I was required to wear a paper mask at all times and stay seated by her bedside – I could not move elsewhere. It was clear that while in hospital, my grandmother's general health had improved somewhat. She was eating more regularly, which in turn kept her diabetes under control and her mind clear.
23. Whilst in hospital, my grandmother was able to make arrangements with a visiting social worker to be moved to a care home. She was very headstrong, and of clear mind at this stage and so it was agreed that she would move in early September 2020. She was tested for Covid-19 prior to her discharge and returned a negative result.
24. To begin with, my grandmother seemed to be doing okay. However, restrictions on visiting care homes were still in place and so all visitations were held through the window to the main lounge, with visitors standing at a distance. Poor weather often meant these plans had to be

cancelled. Even when the weather permitted a visit, my grandmother would have difficulty hearing us through the window. The main lounge would often be filled with noise from other residents, and our distance from the window often meant that my grandmother did not hear what we were saying. We did not have any normal visits with her for her entire time. We were not aware until Christmas 2020 that we could arrange a FaceTime call with her through a member of staff. We were able to speak to her this way on Christmas day 2020. It was very difficult to celebrate Christmas with only this method of contact.

25. Around the middle of January, about two weeks before my grandmother passed away, multiple residents, including my grandmother began to develop symptoms of Covid-19. All of these residents were isolated in their rooms. My grandmother began to suffer from breathlessness and developed a cough. She also seemed confused. A doctor visited and assessed all residents displaying Covid-19 symptoms. They were told that the only treatment that could be given was paracetamol. We are unsure how Covid-19 was brought into the care home, as my grandmother and other patients discharged from hospital had been tested and visitors were not permitted. We are, therefore, of the assumption that Covid-19 was brought to the care home by a carer or member of nursing staff.
26. I called to check in on my grandmother on or around 25 January 2021. She seemed more like the grandmother I had known and had managed to eat and drink. However, on 29 January at quarter to 5 in the morning, I received a missed call from my father. He had left a voicemail asking me to call him back when I could. I called him and he told me that my grandmother had passed away in the early hours of the morning. The care home had allowed my uncle to go and sit with her when it became clear that she was going to pass, but no other visitors were permitted. Whilst I am glad that someone was able to be with her in her last moments, I am sad that neither myself, nor my father was allowed to be with her for any period of time. It left my father unable to say his goodbyes to his mother, something that has caused our family much distress. We would also have wished that someone had the opportunity to visit her while she still had her faculties. We would have preferred to visit her when she could know we were there.
27. When it became clear that my grandmother's condition was rapidly deteriorating, it seems there was no consideration given to her being treated at a hospital. The care home informed us that she was given medication to ease her pain as she passed, but nothing was done to try and treat her symptoms. Had she been moved to a hospital, there may have been more resources and staff available to treat her. As a family, we wish more would have been done to save my grandmother

rather than simply accepting that she was going to pass. It is my understanding that no residents from the care home were taken to hospital to be treated for Covid-19.

28. Similarly, to the circumstances of my mother's passing, my family and I were not able to see my grandmother before her funeral. This was especially difficult for my father, as another opportunity to say a private goodbye was taken from him.
29. Though there were more people permitted to attend my grandmother's funeral than my mother's, we still experienced restrictions that impacted our ability to properly mourn and comfort each other. My grandmother was a religious lady, so we held her funeral in her local Church of Wales chapel before moving to the crematorium in Llywdcoed. A wake was not permitted. We were again restricted from singing hymns and joining the vicar in prayer. A particular point of frustration regarding my grandmother's funeral arrangements is the continuing social distance requirements. We could not even sit with my father, who was part of our extended household bubble. He was left to sit alone at his own mother's funeral, despite visiting our home often under the household bubble rules. It was very difficult not to be able to provide him with comfort.
30. My family and I carry the loss of both my mother and grandmother with us every day. To lose one person to this virus is devastating, but to lose two has left our family broken. We are left wondering if there is more that we or others could have done to fight for them, to ease their suffering, to save them. To lose two pivotal members of your family so close together, under any circumstances, is an awful experience. This virus not only took my mother and grandmother from us, but it also took all opportunities to say goodbye, to comfort each other, to really grieve. I would not wish this on anyone, and I want to know why this was allowed to happen.

#### Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

Personal Data

Signed: A. J. Provis (Feb 23, 2024 13:09 GMT)

Dated: 23/02/24