Witness Name: Catherine Griffiths
Statement No: 2
Exhibits: None
Dated: 30 May 2025

MODULE 6 OF THE UK COVID-19 PUBLIC INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF CATHERINE GRIFFITHS

I, Catherine Griffiths, make this impact statement as a member of the Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice Cymru ("CBFJ Cymru").

1. My father was Group Captain Harold Abraham Griffiths, he was aged 86 and he lived in a care home in I&S He died on 17 November 2020, after he contracted COVID-19 in his care home. Prior to this he had enjoyed robust physical health and despite his dementia, he had a good quality of life. He loved Wales, rugby, singing - so many things but most of all he loved us, his children and grandchildren.

2. He was brought up in Dinas Mawddwy, and attended Dolgellau boys grammar school until he was 18 years old. Welsh was his first language, and he left school with a place at Durham University to study maths. He was a remarkably intelligent man with a mathematical mind and a photographic memory. He would have excelled in life no matter the path he chose. However, instead of university he was called to national service. He joined the RAF after school with the goal of becoming a pilot. Unfortunately, at 6 foot 4 he was too tall be to be a pilot, so he became a navigator instead, allowing him to put his prodigious mathematical mind to good use.

3. Dad lived life to the fullest and was considered somewhat eccentric. Following his death, many senior RAF Officers, including an ex-Air Chief Marshall wrote to us noting Dad's extraordinary qualities. The RAF does not encourage mavericks, but Dad defied this convention. He was a one-off. He initially failed the officer's exam, a result of his Welsh tongue and slightly imperfect

English. My Mother was always correcting his grammar. Despite this, the RAF saw something within him. He was a natural leader of men and with his extraordinary aptitude, Dad rose through the ranks of the RAF reaching the rank of Group Captain; a feat to which the Air Chief Marshall remarked was a testament of his ability, skill, grit and charisma.

4. Dad enjoyed a number of hobbies and interests. He was a competitive man and a keen sportsman, playing rugby for both his school and the RAF, although his career was cut short by an ACL injury when he was a young man. His true passion however was golf. He channelled this enthusiasm for the game and subsequently became the secretary of the RAF Golfing society after retiring – he was particularly proud of his single figure handicap. He was also a bit of a news junkie; it was rare to find him without a newspaper – anything to increase his knowledge. Quiz nights were a particular favourite within our household, a consequence of his competitive nature.

5. Dad's first love was his family. My mother, Elisabeth, died when I was a baby and my father wore a black tie every day for a year, in her memory. I lived with my paternal grandparents, Nain & Taid, in Dinas Mawddwy, until Dad met and married the woman who became my mum - Jennifer. We had a happy family life. Mum died suddenly and unexpectedly in 2018 from sepsis. This loss hit my father very hard.

6. Soon after mum's death, my father entered a care home in I&S Dad had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease in his early 80s and with the loss of Mum, who was his carer, it was the safest place for him. I moved my Father from the east coast of England to I&S in February 2020. I wanted to bring him home to Wales and felt that speaking Welsh, his first language, would offer an excellent opportunity for brain stimulation. I wanted Dad to be near to me so that we might enjoy more time together. He loved the new home where he was surrounded by and cared for by Welsh speakers. For the briefest period of time we were comfortable and happy. We often went for day trips in the car, or he came to my home.

7. However, to our dismay, the pandemic hit and all of a sudden, we were unable to see each other. We spoke frequently on the phone and despite his dementia, Dad had periods of lucidity. Although we couldn't meet in person, these calls were deeply precious to us both. We talked about Dad's long experience as a navigator and the various aircraft he had worked on, he told me jokes and we even discussed politics and current events; Dad read The Times every day and in the main, had some awareness of what was happening in the world. In the summer of 2020, Dad asked me if I felt that the government was looking after us and was making good decisions during the pandemic; poignant and prescient, in retrospect.

8. The first lockdown was intensely difficult. I was terrified for my father's safety and if he could have managed the steep stairs in my home, I would have brought him to live with me. The restrictions imposed were difficult to deal with. I had to wave through a window when I visited Dad on his 86th birthday, which made him (and then me), distraught. Shortly after, for my 60th birthday, we were allowed to meet in the garden but could not touch. It was excruciatingly painful to stop Dad from hugging me.

9. As a retired A&E nurse, I have some knowledge of infection control and was fearful that systems might not have been in place for the protection of the vulnerable residents at his care home. The carers were resolutely cheerful, kind and thoughtful to me and I know they looked after Dad with great expertise and compassion, but they were also very afraid and occasionally shared their concerns with me. One carer confided in me that "it feels like we are waiting for the inevitable, I am very frightened".

10. As the second wave progressed and the numbers of deaths in Wales increased and became ever more shocking, the feeling of inevitability grew. On 9th November 2020, I received the late-night call I had been dreading; Dad had both tested positive for COVID-19, and had fallen, and an ambulance had been called. I insisted on speaking with him on the phone - visits were not possible during this time. Throughout the call he was sweetly hopeful, and his stoical self. He was very pragmatic, and promised he was okay. He believed in hospitals and the medical systems, never questioned it. I said goodbye. This was the last time we would ever speak before he died on the 17 November 2020.

11. My father was admitted to hospital that night where he was given IV fluids and pain relief with good effect. He made some improvement over his 24 hour hospital stay and was discharged back to the care home with instructions for subcutaneous fluids and analgesia.

12. When my father was discharged, he was provided with a care package. The package provided necessary pain relief and fluids. The district nurses were to administer the controlled drug analgesia via syringe driver and to set up the fluids. The fluids were to be delivered via subcutaneous administration, that is, the insertion of medications beneath the skin either by injection or infusion - a very simple, effective and safe way to give a dying person fluids. I was devastated and blindsided to discover that when he was most vulnerable, the care home/district nurses had failed to administer the fluids along with the rest of the care package. As a consequence of this neglect, he was dehydrated and in pain. I called to discuss the matter in the night and the next day I received a call from the care home manager who screamed at me over the phone. She told me not to ring in the night. There was a complete lack of support. I felt helpless, alone and desperate in the face of such neglect, particularly as

my immediate family lives 6,000 miles away.

13. The following week was torturous. I live alone, my immediate family are 6,000 miles away, and we were in lockdown. On 16th November, I was invited to the home to say 'goodbye' to Dad. I wanted to go in and be by his side and to hold and comfort Dad; my brother urged me not to. The level of PPE in the home was abysmal; we could see the nurse wearing just an apron and a flimsy surgical mask. I was forced to say goodbye to my father whilst standing in the icy rain, outside his window. My brother, who lives in Hong Kong, was with us on a group WhatsApp call. I couldn't hold our father's hand as he was dying. I always promised that I would, just as I did for Mum. The images of Dad reaching out to me still wake me up, crying, sweating and with my heart racing.

14. Following his death, the home provided little support, it was very impersonal. His body was handled in an incredibly disrespectable manner. They simply zipped him up in a body bag and refused to touch him. As far as I am aware, he was cremated in soiled pyjamas. Pyjamas I had given him as a present. I would have liked to have known that my father was washed and prepared for cremation; I know that he wasn't, this was against the rules. I've laid people out in my life, it is an important part of our ritual surrounding death. Rituals give us comfort when we are saying farewell. They afford us a process that is familiar and meaningful and gives support when we most need it. I would have wanted him in something comfy, clean, decent – something he liked. It's about providing care and love, these rituals help with grief and loss, offering a cathartic release of emotion - knowing you've done as much as you can for this person who has loved you all your life. It feels like the inability to perform them diminishes this farewell. We are left with a sense of guilt, of having failed in such an important way.

15. The funeral itself was a small intimate affair in the local crematorium, attended by only ten people. This was not out of choice. My father was a very popular man. The funeral was livestreamed and attended virtually by so many. He was much loved and well respected; friends, family, ex-colleagues, people he played golf with, all wanted to come but were unable due to the restrictions. With the kind help of the carers, I managed to retrieve two of his belongings from the care home; his RAF hat which I placed on his coffin; and a photo album about his life that Mum had made him for his 80th birthday. I couldn't give my brother my father's wedding ring.

16. My family and I still do not know exactly how our father acquired COVID-19. The care home management team have never given us a clear answer. After Dad died, one of the carers said that they were working symptomatically and were waiting up to two days for test results. We are astonished that there has been no inquiry into how, in a home with 90 residents, over half

contracted COVID-19. The home has provided no bereavement support whatsoever. Any communication has been in the form of completely impersonal emails. No one has phoned to check up on us. What little communication we had was that of an email informing us to pick up Dad's watch, one that I had bought him as a gift when he moved to I&S that had been left in the home's safe. I couldn't face it, I just left it. We are obliged to put our trust in the places which care for us when we are most in need and now this trust has been sorely damaged. Ultimately, his death felt like that of a mere business transaction. My father deserved better. Everyone deserves better.

17. My father's death sadly serves to highlight a significant gap in the quality of end-of-life care in Wales and underscores the urgent need for improvement to ensure that all individuals receive the compassionate and comprehensive care they deserve during their final days.

18. I would also like to mention another troubling aspect of my father's care connected to a DNACPR authority. My father's GP had called me early in the pandemic to request I sign a DNACPR. The GP was incredibly callous in his conduct towards me; he didn't introduce himself and his first words were that we needed to place a DNACPR on Harold Griffiths. I was overwhelmed and completely shocked that I had been asked to make this decision, as my father was fit and healthy prior to his fall. I was also completely taken aback by the manner in which the GP had asked me. Their justification for pressing the matter was my father's dementia, stating: "he doesn't know what he had for breakfast, he won't understand it". In spite of his dementia, my father had full awareness of his mortality and both could and would have signed this himself. The complete lack of bedside manner on display is indicative of a system wide failure in bereavement support training and management. Furthermore, I believe that these decisions were thrust upon myself and others when we were at our most vulnerable in a way that felt deliberate.

19. I have been on anxiety medication since this time, as a result of everything that happened to my Dad, and to me, during his time in the care home. I also underwent an 18 month course of Somatic Trauma Therapy, which started in August 2020

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.

Signed: PD

Name: Catherine Griffiths

Dated: 30 May 2025