[Insert name] MLA

[Insert constituency office address]

XX December 2021

Dear [insert name] MLA,

I am writing to you as your constituent and as a [ job title] to ask you to help ensure there is parity for agency healthcare workers who have shown unwavering dedication throughout the pandemic.

Earlier this year, the Department of Health (DH) announced the Covid-19 Special Recognition Payment (SRP) for healthcare workers, including agency staff, to recognise the immense contribution we have made throughout the pandemic. While substantive health and social care (HSC) staff have now been paid the one-off bonus of £500, the current scheme excludes the vast majority of agency workers, including myself .

[The current instruction](https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/special-recognition-payment-agency-workers) states that eligible agency workers would have to have worked with the same ‘host organisation’ for at least a 12-week period on a salary commensurate with the role being covered. While I agree with the department’s focus on long-term workers, this clause fails to recognise the very nature of agency work and the vital role we play. Agency work is about being flexible and adaptable, filling the gaps in the medical workforce, often at short notice and during times of extraordinary need. Our contribution has been critical in ensuring the health system could cope and continue to serve patients. But the letter from DH specifically says, “a nurse supplied to cover different ad hoc shifts across different settings will not be eligible.”

I work via an agency for the necessary flexibility it provides me. For the past 22 months, I’ve worked XX hours/weeks/months, . The pandemic has challenged us all, we’ve all had to make sacrifices, as have our families, but we stepped up to deliver the services needed because that’s our job. We love what we do, and we’re committed to helping our patients and protecting the NHS. For 22 months, I have worked alongside substantive staff doing the same job. They’ve been recognised for their work, yet a huge portion of the agency workforce has been excluded from the scheme.

Additionally, [insert agency name], my employer, has advised me that their deadline to submit the invoice to DH is 31 December 2021 but they were only instructed on how to issue payments from 5 November. Agencies have been tasked with significant administrative work, bearing responsibility for deciding if a worker is eligible and then making 80% of the initial payment. 31 December seems like an unrealistic deadline, particularly taking account of the festive period. Further agencies don’t tend to have the level of cash required to make the initial payments, particularly not at this time of year.

I’d be extremely grateful if you could raise this with the Health Minister. Agencies need an extension to the deadline so that they can process the paperwork effectively. In addition, I’d like to see the scope extended so that workers like myself are included.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[name]

[home address including postcode]