

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

10th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday  
8 June 2022

PE1924: Complete an emergency in-depth  
review of Women's health services in  
Caithness & Sutherland

## Note by the Clerk

<b>Lodged on</b>	17 January 2022
<b>Petitioner</b>	Rebecca Wymer
<b>Petition summary</b>	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to complete an emergency in-depth review of Women's health services in Caithness & Sutherland. Women's health services are now breaching basic human rights and we fear someone will lose their life due to the lack of gynaecology care.
<b>Webpage</b>	<a href="https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1924">https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1924</a>

## Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [9 March 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to hear evidence from the petitioner and to consider this petition alongside PE1845: Agency to advocate for the healthcare needs of rural Scotland, PE1890: Find solutions to recruitment and training challenges for rural healthcare in Scotland and PE1915 Reinstatement of Caithness Council and Caithness NHS Board at a future evidence session.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

4. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
5. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
6. A private SPICe questions paper has also been supplied to Members for this week's evidence sessions (Paper 8 in your papers pack).

## Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

### **Clerk to the Committee**

## Annexe A

# PE1924: Complete an emergency in-depth review of Women's Health services in Caithness & Sutherland

## Petitioner

Rebecca Wymer

## Date Lodged:

17/1/22

## Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to complete an emergency in-depth review of Women's Health services in Caithness & Sutherland. Women's health services are now breaching basic human rights and we fear someone will lose their life due to the lack of gynaecology care.

## Previous action

Following several digital meetings with Maree Todd MSP (Women's Health Minister) we feel that this vital message is not reaching a wide enough section of Parliament to achieve any real change.

Scotland's Women's Health is bundled into a single job title along with "Sport". As 51% of Scotland's population, we think women deserve more.

Ms Todd also covers Public Health and this is her constituency, yet not enough is being done urgently to highlight this very real risk to lives in the area.

## Background information

The Highland gynaecology crisis was happening before Covid, with funding funnelled into Orkney or Inverness. Care should be equal to all women in Scotland and I believe serious conditions (e.g. Endometriosis, Ovarian Cancer) are being missed. GP's are not trained in specific

Gynae conditions and pain management is poor. In my view Women are given morphine repeatedly rather than being treated for the condition, creating a drug reliance crisis. Mental health decline is being ignored, women are disbelieved or left in pain. Shockingly, there are no miscarriage/menopause/fertility services.

The A9/A99 are often closed or dangerous to drive, making emergency transport to Raigmore (100+ miles) unreliable, sometimes impossible (e.g. Ectopic pregnancy could be fatal). Ambulance transport to Inverness takes vital units from the area and causes enormous distress to patients.

I understand that many are taking out large loans to cover private Gynae care in the cities and families are moving away for adequate gynaecology services. The economic impact of this is huge for the area.

## Annexe B

### Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1924 on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2022

**The Convener:** PE1924, which was lodged by Rebecca Wymer, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to complete an emergency in-depth review of women's health services in Caithness and Sutherland.

The petitioner believes that there is a Highland gynaecology crisis that predates Covid, with funding "funnelled into Orkney or Inverness."

She believes that serious conditions such as ovarian cancer are potentially being missed due to a lack of specialist training for general practitioners, and she notes that there are currently no miscarriage, menopause or fertility services available in the area. She highlights the logistical difficulties that are associated with patients from Caithness having to travel to Raigmore hospital for help along roads that are often closed or dangerous to drive.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care explains in his submission that the Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport is actively engaging with her constituents on the issues that the petition raises. She has now arranged to meet NHS Highland senior management and clinicians to discuss the delivery of gynaecological services and she will feed back to her constituents on progress.

The cabinet secretary's submission also provides further information on scoping work for the creation of a centre of excellence for rural and remote medicine and social care; a community midwifery unit that is being built at Caithness general hospital; improvements to maternity and neonatal units at Raigmore hospital in Inverness; and co-ordination between transport and other agencies to explore how access to healthcare can be improved, specifically in relation to the A9 and A99.

In her submission, the petitioner reiterates that all women need access to a gynaecologist, but she says that, to her knowledge, no in-person gynaecology appointments have taken place at Caithness general hospital since 2019. She is concerned that the cabinet secretary is unaware of how bad the situation with the roads is. She states that the rural unit framework has been incredibly successful for MRI machines, breast screening, cancer screening and, more recently, vaccination clinics. She suggests that it might include appointments with a gynaecology nurse or consultant to filter out who needs to be on a surgical list and who could be treated in the short term to reduce waiting lists across the board.

Do members have comments or suggestions on the petition?

**Ruth Maguire:** In a future evidence session, we will discuss a number of petitions on healthcare in Caithness. I suggest that we invite the petitioner to join us at that meeting and that we examine all the petitions in that evidence session. Although they are all important individually and they are distinct, they are all part of the same theme and it would be helpful to speak to everyone together.

**The Convener:** Indeed. We have three petitions—PE1845, PE1890 and PE1915—that touch on parallel issues, so that is a sensible suggestion. Are we content to combine consideration of the petition with the others that we have in relation to Caithness?

*[Members indicated agreement.]*