Office of ………………, MP

House of Commons

London

SW1A 0AA

DATE [    ]

Dear ……………………………………..

I am writing to you as a constituent of yours, and a member of the National Federation of SubPostmasters (NFSP), the only Post Office-recognised trade association   
representing post office operators, responsible for approximately 8,500 post office branches throughout the UK.

I am asking for your help regarding an urgent matter that is seriously affecting myself and 104 fellow subpostmasters.

Following the closure of the Network Transformation (NT) programme in 2018, Post Office now hold a ‘Hard to Place’ (HtP) register, which covers offices that have not found a Potential New Postmaster (PNP) due to location, declining footfall, and low remuneration etc. The majority of these offices are in rural locations, and many of the HtP postmasters are of retirement age and/or have an underlying health issue. All of us have been looking for a PNP since 2015.

All HtP postmasters receive a small, fixed remuneration from Post Office Ltd and have a year-to-year agreement to continue with this, which the NFSP pushes Post Office to extend every year so that we do not lose our compensation. Within the original offer signed in 2015, is a leaver's payment equivalent to 26 months, which the postmaster would receive when a PNP is willing to take over the office. This leavers payment is a nest egg for retirement for many, covers the cost of staff redundancies, and is a return of their original investment. £640m of taxpayers' funds was provided, but crucially not ring-fenced, to Post Office in 2015 specifically to complete Network Transformation. The NFSP have tried on several occasions, via the Freedom of Information Act, to find out where this money has gone but have been blocked by Post Office on cost grounds.

This year, Post Office decided to close the HtP network, mainly due to the cost of transferring to a new IT system which is being introduced throughout the network. This is despite receiving £122m in funding from Government to develop and complete this new system, which is set to replace the ageing Horizon system that has been in existence since 1999*.*

The original offer of 26 months compensation has been revised to 12 months if a PNP has not been found by March 2024. This change has been made without proper consultation    
with the HtP network. Through protracted discussions with the NFSP, PO have stated they will now deploy a field team to try and find PNPs up until the end of March next year. This comes after five years of inactivity, with Post Office admitting they have taken “their foot off the gas”.

We strongly disagree with this offer as it leaves many postmasters hugely out of pocket after serving their communities for years, and instead benefits Post Office and Government due to the savings made. PO have offered no reasonable compromise.

The average leavers payment to my colleagues if the 26 months remained, is £80,000 which would cost Post Office £8.4m to enable us to retire with dignity. The 12 months that Post Office are imposing would cost £3.9m, saving them £4.5m.

However, the question remains; where has the £640m of funding provided to Post Office in 2015 gone?

At a time when a Statutory Inquiry has been set up to uncover mistakes made by PO and others in the past, and an additional £150m funding has been recently approved to cover additional legal costs for the Inquiry, I find it hard to understand how this unethical practice can occur today. The NFSP has raised the issue with the Government, MPs, and external bodies and again no one is listening, just like in the past.

As your constituent, I plead with you to contact Treasury and the Postal Minister to request that Post Office enter meaningful negotiations, to agree a leavers’ payment. This would enable me to retire with dignity rather than in potential debt after covering my costs of closing the office.

I believe that my colleagues will also be writing to their MPs, therefore I would be grateful if a debate on this matter could be raised in Parliament which would highlight how Post Office are treating Postmasters today.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Horizon Compensation Advisory Board, to show how the cultural attitudes within Post Office which led to mistakes of the past, are still present today.

Yours sincerely,

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……………………………………………………………Post Office