

# Marie Goldman

MP for Chelmsford



## Pension age campaigners deserve more than just another apology

If you spend enough time in Westminster, you start to recognise the particular tone officials use when they know something has gone badly wrong but hope a well-crafted sentence might soften the edges. Last week, meeting Chelmsford women affected by the state pension age changes, I was reminded - sharply - that no amount of polished regret can substitute for justice.

The WASPI (Women Against State Pension Inequality) Women campaign has been running for years now, powered not by lobbyists or think-tank strategists but by ordinary women who did everything asked of them. They worked, they cared, they contributed. They planned their lives around a pension age they were told was secure. And then, with barely a whisper of warning, the goalposts shifted.

The WASPI campaign is demanding compensation for the lack of notice women received about the change to the state pension age - which, in 2024, the Ombudsman found to be maladministration.

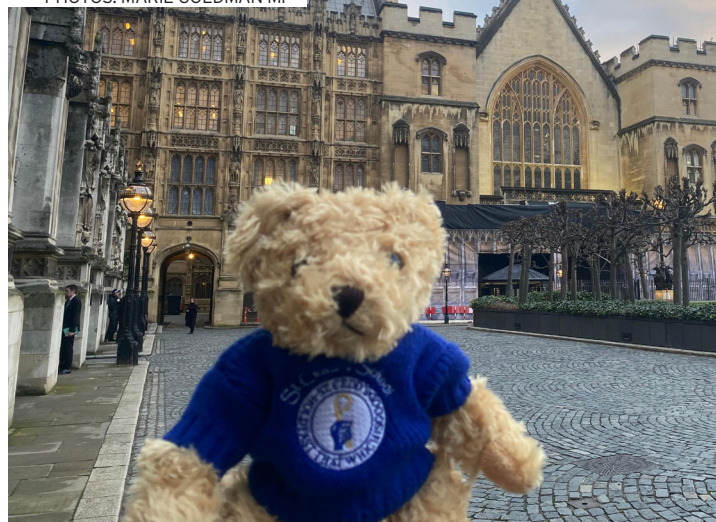
Chelmsford has its fair share of these women - and they are not the caricatures sometimes painted in national debate. They are former nurses, head teachers and teaching assistants, civil servants, accountants, shop workers, carers.

They are women who held families together, who kept public services running, who paid in with the expectation that the state would keep its side of the bargain. What they are not is a footnote in a policy document.

Sitting with them last week, listening to their stories, the scale of the injustice felt almost disarmingly simple. These are women who were not given adequate notice of a major change to their financial future. Some found out by accident. Others only realised when they tried to retire. A few told me they had assumed the letter must have been lost in the post - because surely no government would make such a significant change without telling them directly.

But it did. And the consequences have been profound. One woman described the injustice of her spousal support payments having stopped at 60 because the court had assumed that would be her retirement age, despite the Government delaying the date for several more years. Another woman had already left her job to care for a relative, only to discover she would need to find work again at 62.

Ceddric, the mascot of St Cedd's School, Chelmsford, during his visit to the Houses of Parliament  
PHOTOS: MARIE GOLDMAN MP



If you'd like to find out more about the WASPI campaign, have a look at their website here: [waspi.co.uk](http://waspi.co.uk).

On a rather more light-hearted note, at the beginning of last week, I visited St Cedd's School, in New London Road, Chelmsford, to take questions from their budding young journalists and to speak in the whole school assembly about their beloved teddy bear mascot, Ceddric, and his recent grand adventure to the Houses of Parliament.

There are few things more cheering on a grey weekday in Westminster than the sight of a small, well-travelled teddy bear being proudly paraded through the corridors of power. If ever there were proof that democracy can be both serious and delightfully silly, Ceddric is it.

The children greeted me with the kind of enthusiasm that could power the Parliamentary Estate if only we could bottle it. They were eager to see where Ceddric had been - and, more importantly, whether he had behaved himself. (For the record: mostly.)

As I showed them photos of Ceddric perched on the famous green benches, doing some work in my Westminster office, meeting his cousins in the gift shop, and posing - somewhat smugly - on the infamous Terrace, the hall filled with that wonderful mix of awe and giggles you only get from primary school pupils.

They were curious about everything: how many MPs there are, who gets to sit where and whether Ceddric had met the Prime Minister. I explained that he hadn't, but he had made quite an impression on the security staff (see photo).

What struck me most was how naturally the children connected the dots between a cuddly mascot and the idea of public service.

To them, Parliament wasn't an abstract institution; it was a place their bear had visited, a place they could imagine themselves in one day. That spark - that sense of belonging - is exactly what civic education should nurture.

St Cedd's is a school full of warmth, curiosity, and community spirit. If Ceddric's trip helped make Parliament feel a little less distant and a little more theirs, then his journey was well worth it.

And judging by the children's faces, he may need to start planning his next diplomatic mission.

Thanks for reading.

Marie

Campaigning for years for something as basic as fair treatment wears people down.

Marie Goldman MP

Several spoke of the emotional toll - the sense of being dismissed, overlooked, or treated as an administrative inconvenience. Many told me about the double standards of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), saying that they must have received a letter about changes to the state pension age and simply

thrown it away without reading it (how incredibly patronising!)

And this is despite the DWP not being able to prove that they ever sent the letters in the first place. It also ignores the fact that their own website continued to tell women their retirement age was 60 right up to the point that the age change came in - misleading, and profoundly unhelpful with nothing to facilitate planning.

What struck me most was not anger, though there was plenty of that, but exhaustion.

Campaigning for years for something as basic as fair treatment wears people down. Yet they keep going, because the alternative is accepting that this is simply how things are now.

The WASPI campaign isn't asking for the earth. It is asking for recognition, accountability and compensation that reflects the real-world

impact of the state's failure to communicate. It is asking for a system that treats citizens as partners, not afterthoughts.

Chelmsford's WASPI women are not going away - and neither are the WASPI women right across the country. Nor should they.

Their persistence is a reminder that policy is not abstract; it lands in real lives, with real consequences. And while Westminster may prefer to move on, the women I met last week made one thing abundantly clear: they will not be quietly filed away.

They deserve better than another apology. They deserve action - overdue, but still possible - from a state (and a ruling political party) that promised to stand by them.

Thank you to all the women (and one very supportive man) who came along to tell me about their experiences.