# TEMPLATE MINISTERIAL LETTER

**Please find below a template letter to David Rutley MP, Minister for Welfare Delivery. We would grateful if you would consider writing to the Minister to alert him to the challenges women with convictions who claim Universal Credit face. Please feel free to personalise or edit the letter.**

David Rutley MP

Minister for Welfare Delivery

Department for Work and Pensions

Caxton House

Tothill Street

London SW1H 9NA

david.rutley.mp@parliament.uk

[Date]

**Re: Universal Credit reform for women with convictions**

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you following a recent event I attended with Working Chance and their lived experience policy group, Changemakers, about the challenges faced by women with experience of the criminal justice system who claim Universal Credit. I want to alert you to some of the issues they raised, and ask your Government to take urgent steps to address them.

I heard from Working Chance and Changemakers that while more than half of people on Universal Credit are women, the benefits system isn’t currently functioning well enough for many women to keep their heads above water. They told me that:

* Monthly Universal Credit payments fail to cover basic life costs.
* There is an unavoidable five-week wait for the first payment and advance loans leave women in debt.
* Women leaving prison can’t start a claim for Universal Credit before they leave prison, practically guaranteeing that they will fall into poverty or debt on release.
* Lack of the right advice and support at the jobcentre can lock women with convictions into poverty and leave them ill-prepared to find employment.
* The deductions that are pulled back from payments can be hefty and unpredictable.

Women with convictions are particularly vulnerable to these challenges, since their difficulty finding a job is exacerbated by having a criminal record. A criminal record presents a significant barrier to employment, putting women in a position of financial precarity – and without the right support, women are more likely to reoffend.

Furthermore, most offences committed by women are low-level and acquisitive, such as shoplifting. 38% of women state that they committed an offence to support their children. Given that poverty is so often behind women's convictions, it is especially important that women have a strong social security system in order to prevent crime.

These problems are becoming more acute as the cost of living increases. As you will be aware, in April inflation will outstrip benefit uprating in yet another real-term cut to incomes. The current proposed level of uprating for all benefits (3.1%) is less than half the projected level of inflation in April (7%). I am greatly concerned that this real-terms cut will constitute a second benefits cut in less than 6 months.

I would be grateful to hear what steps the Government is taking to ensure that women with convictions are adequately supported at the jobcentre, and what action you will take to prevent these women falling into poverty or debt.

Additionally, I would urge you to meet with Working Chance to discuss this issue in further detail.

Yours sincerely,

[Name]

[*Working Chance*](https://workingchance.org/)*is a national charity that supports women with convictions to find employment. We advocate for changes to policy and practice that will dismantle the barriers women with experience of the criminal justice system encounter when looking for work.*