

Subject: Open Letter – End the Use of the Fabricated or Induced Illness (FII) Label

To:

Secretary of State for Education

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Chief Executive, NHS England

Chief Executive, General Medical Council

President, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

President, Royal College of Psychiatrists

Chief Social Worker for Children and Families

Chair, Association of Directors of Children's Services Safeguarding Group

Chair, NICE Guidelines Development Group

Chair, Family Justice Council

President of the Family Division, Sir Andrew McFarlane

Open Letter: Urgent Call to Withdraw the FII Label

Recent coverage in *The Sunday Times* has exposed the devastating consequences of misidentifying parents - mostly mothers - as fabricating or inducing illness in their children. It told the stories of Ella, who was separated from her mother for eight months and placed with untrained carers who failed to meet her complex needs, and Melody, whose mother watched her die in pain after medication was withdrawn during an FII investigation. We know of many more such cases. These are not abstract tragedies—they are direct, preventable outcomes of acting on flawed guidance.

FII is not a medical diagnosis. It has no agreed criteria, no reliable method of identification, and no robust evidence base. Yet guidance intended to protect is instead causing harm—particularly to disabled and neurodivergent children with complex needs. Parents are increasingly suspected of fabrication not because of evidence, but because they persist in seeking answers, disagree with professionals, or challenge misdiagnoses. Advocacy is being pathologised.

We acknowledge that in a very small number of cases, illness may be fabricated or induced by a parent or carer. These are extremely rare and should be treated as either criminal

matters or mental health concerns, using established safeguarding, forensic, or psychiatric pathways. They do not require a vague and misapplied label like FII.

A review of Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews in England (2010–2021) identified only four cases of serious harm due to confirmed fabrication or illness induction—none involving a child's death. In contrast, hundreds of families report lasting trauma following false FII accusations: delayed treatment, forced separation, exclusion from services, and fear of seeking help again—even in emergencies.

This is not safeguarding. It is systemic harm.

We call for:

- Immediate withdrawal of the FII label and associated guidance
- Creation of new, evidence-based frameworks co-produced with disabled people and parent carers
- Professional training that promotes collaborative, family-centred practice, and understanding of disability and distress
- A review by regulatory bodies—including the GMC, Royal Colleges, and NICE—of any guidance legitimising the use of FII
- Judicial caution in accepting FII allegations without rigorous factual analysis and greater scrutiny of expert witness testimony

We enclose a briefing article, soon to be published in *Family Law*, outlining the evidence and urgent case for reform. We urge all recipients to reflect on the profound and preventable harm being done—and to act before more children and families are damaged.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Archer, CEO, PDA Society.

Dr Ana Laura Aiello, Cerebra Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Leeds.

Dr Andy Bilson, Emeritus Professor of Social Work, University of Central Lancashire

Paul Bywaters Emeritus Professor University of Huddersfield.

Jess Camburn-Rahmani, CEO, Cerebra

Elly Chapple, parent, founder of FlipTheNarrative, Studio III training consultant, RESPOND trainer

Sonya Chowdhury, Chief Executive, Action for ME.

Luke Clements, Cerebra Professor of Law & Social Justice, the University of Leeds.

Taliah Drayak, Co-Founder of Society for Family Preservation, Research Fellow, Department of Public Health, University of Cambridge

Sian Erickson, MSC SCPHN, Co Chair PFAN.

Dr Judy Eaton, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Help for Psychology Services.
drjudyeaton@help4psychology.co.uk

Laura Ferguson, Independent researcher in autism and parental blame.

Lucy Fullard, CEO Parent and Carer Alliance CIC

Emma Gant, Safety First Wales.

Claire Glasman, WinVisible (women with visible and invisible disabilities).

Amy Griffiths, BA Hons, LLM (Human Rights Law), PhD Research Candidate (Public Health), Swansea University

Dr Fiona Gullon-Scott, Senior Lecturer in Clinical Psychology, Newcastle University.

Beverley Hitchcock, Director of Research & Support Services, Cerebra

Debbie Hollingsworth, Independent researcher in autism and parental blame.

Donna Kelso, Voice for Change Staffordshire, donnakelso@btinternet.com

Cathleen Long, independent social worker, lead author BASW guide on FII

Tammy Mayes, co-chair of PFAN

Fiona MacLeod, Advisory Project Manager PAN Cymru.

Amanda Maguire Founder of Neurodiverse Adventures

Andy McDonnell CEO Studio3

Emma McGinnis, Lecturer, Ulster University, and co-chair PFAN.

Anne Neale, Support Not Separation

Tracey Norton, Disabled Mothers' Rights Campaign

Sally Russell OBE, Trustee PDA Society

Diana Skelton, Head of Giving Poverty a Voice Programme, ATD Fourth World.

Dr David Thorpe, Emeritus Professor of Applied Social Science, University of Lancaster

Dr Adrian Tookman. Chairman Forgotten Patients Overlooked Diseases and Retired Palliative Medicine Physician

Chrissa Wadlow Founder & Managing Director, Sunshine Support

Renata Watts, Co-Director, Special Needs Jungle

Dr David Wilkins, Professor of Social Work, Cardiff University

Emma Williams, Independent Child Protection

For further information please contact

Professor Andy Bilson

Email: andy@bilson.org.uk

Tel. 07976069387