

Charter of Rights

**Disabled women are not unfit mothers.
End discrimination by social services
and the family courts.
Our legal rights – and our children’s –
must be implemented!**



- 1. Women with disabilities have a right to family life – to start a family and keep our children.** Our children have a right to be raised by their mother and family, and not be denied her love and care due to disability prejudice.
- 2. We have a right not to be discriminated against** just for being disabled, of colour, immigrant, LGBTQI+, working class, single, a sex worker, on benefits, survivors of violence and abuse, we grew up in state ‘care’ . . .
- 3. Support services under the Care Act and Children Act must be obligatory.** We must be given information about how to get that support, and get non-discriminatory assessment of our needs as a family.
- 4. All meetings and hearings in ‘child protection’ and/or family court proceedings must be made accessible,** so we can have our say.
- 5. Court hearings must be open to the public** so courts can be accountable for the treatment we are receiving.
- 6. Mothers, overwhelmingly the primary carers, must never be cut off benefits.** We support the call for a Care Income for the work of raising children. Child poverty is state neglect not mothers’ neglect.

Endorsers so far -- Organisations: Alliance for Inclusive Education; Camden Disability Action; the Chronic Collaboration; Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty; Elfrida Society; Fiightback; Inclusion London; Parents, Families & Allies Network (PFAN); Support Not Separation, which includes All African Women’s Group, English Collective of Prostitutes, Global Women’s Strike, Lactation Consultants of Great Britain, Milk of Human Kindness, Payday men’s network, Psychotherapy & Counselling Union, Scottish Kinship Care Alliance, Single Mothers’ Self-Defence, Soul Sisters: empowering people, Women Against Rape, Women of Colour in the Global Women’s Strike, Give Us Back Our Children - Los Angeles & Philadelphia, former social workers, teachers and other professionals. **Individuals:** Professor Andy Bilson; Taliah Drayak, Co-chair & founder Society for Family Preservation; Sahera Khan, artist/actor; Don O’Neal, adult social care user/campaigner/author; Tina Rodwell, Independent Disability Advocate

The Disabled Mothers’ Rights Campaign (DMRC) is co-ordinated by **WinVisible** (women with visible and invisible disabilities) and is part of **Support Not Separation**.

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Blog: <https://winvisible.org/disabled-mothers-rights-campaign>
Twitter: [@WinVisibleWomen](https://twitter.com/WinVisibleWomen) [@NotSeparation](https://twitter.com/NotSeparation)

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1. Women with disabilities have a right to family life

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 23, upholds our right to found a family. Children are bonded to mothers, disabled or not. The trauma of depriving children of their birth mother must be recognised as harmful. Most disabled mothers, like other new mothers, need some practical support. Instead, we are more likely to have our children removed, deprived of the love and protection a mother gives. Children and mothers are left distraught, damaging us for life, and stopping us from having any more children. Many disabled women never have children as we are terrified they will be taken from us at birth or later. Disabled mothers who are truly unable to cope must be enabled to maintain the relationship with our children, whoever has custody of them.

2. We have a right not to be discriminated against

Many social care and health professionals treat us as unfit mothers. Often we are pressured to have an abortion, even up to the birth. Deaf mothers are wrongly told that we are a risk as we can't hear the baby cry, blind mothers that we can't breastfeed if we can't see the baby, mothers with mobility disabilities that we can't run after our children. If we have learning disabilities, we are *54 times more likely to have our children taken away* (Ch5 News). We experience worse discrimination as single mothers, women of colour, immigrant, victims of domestic violence, and for other reasons. Yet we have raised children safely and successfully, including with help from family or friends.

3. We have a right to supportive services

All mothers are entitled to support, and especially if we have a disability. But when we ask councils for support, we are often denied. They assume we are unable to cope and that we pose a risk to our children because they may become our carers in future. We are accused of 'child neglect' and put under 'child protection' – our children under threat of being taken. Yet it is the responsibility of councils to provide adult social care services for parents to enable mothers to care and relieve child carers, not to punish children by forcibly taking them from the mother they love and who loves them.

All disabled mothers who ask for support from councils must get it under the Care Act s12 and Children Act s17. Local authorities must provide comprehensive and respectful support tailored to the needs of each individual and family, not determined by social workers' time constraints and prejudices and local authorities wanting to save money at our expense. Mothers are the real experts in our own situation and our experience must be acted on. We should be informed of the kinds of support we are entitled to, so we can easily understand, and get help to apply.

4 & 5. We have a right to accessible meetings and court hearings

Disabled mothers are severely disadvantaged in all proceedings due to lack of access in communication, lack of time to read documents... Family courts must recognise and implement the Equality Act and Human Rights Act. We must be enabled to understand proceedings and have our say, and to have an independent advocate of our choice with us. Requests for disability adjustments in family court under [Practice Direction 3AA](#) must not be refused. Access needs must not be used to claim that we need too much support to be able to look after our children. Health experts must be specialists in the mother's or the child's condition. Court hearings held behind closed doors must end; there must be public accountability. Anonymity protection, the same as in rape trials, can be applied.

6. Financial security, healthcare and a Care Income for mothers

Benefit sanctions and benefit cut-offs hurt mothers and children, especially disabled mothers subject to needless reassessments – they must be abolished. Asylum-seeking and other immigrant mothers must be able to access benefits and healthcare without charge just like other mothers. Abolish 'No Recourse to Public Funds' and NHS charges targeting maternity services, which risk mothers' ill-health and birth disabilities. Mothers and all other carers deserve a Care Income for the work of raising children.