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A coalition of organisations and individuals has launched a parliamentary petition calling for Parliament to be inclusive of communication differences. The petition calls the current state of parliamentary debate a “febrile environment where people who communicate differently fear they’ll get ripped to shreds”.

The catalyst for this action was the recent withdrawal of Liberal Democrat Chris Nelson from standing as a parliamentary candidate in the General Election due to abusive comments about his stammer from political colleagues.

Led by STAMMA, the British Stammering Association, the petition has launched with signatories from the **Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists**, the **Michael Palin Centre**, **Disability Rights UK** and the **Co-op** as well as STAMMA Patron, the actor and podcaster **Scroobius Pip**.

Chair of STAMMA, Paul Fix, said: *“It can’t be right that people fear to stand for Parliament, believing they won’t be heard or listened to because of their difference. We want Parliament to hold a debate to examine how they debate, and whether name calling, jeering and booing, should be allowed”.*

Elaine Kelman, Head of the Michael Palin Centre, commented: *“As speech and language therapists, we support people with communication challenges and differences to become more effective and confident as communicators. As he publicly acknowledged, we helped Chris Nelson to do this with his stammering. It was so disappointing to learn that his experiences of bullying by those he sought to serve alongside in politics, led to his decision to stand down as candidate. We expect our parliament to demonstrate the same respectful behaviour and support for difference that is expected of all of us in our workplaces”.*

Paul Gerrard, Campaigns, Public Affairs and Board Secretariat, Co-op, added: *“For nearly 30 years I have worked with parliaments and politicians across the UK and have done so with a stammer. It isn’t something to be overcome, it’s part of me. Too many people, especially in politics, see it as a weakness or a vulnerability to be exploited. It is hurtful, it is plain nasty but above all else it prevents talent from entering public service which is something we can ill afford. This petition is asking those who represent us and make our laws to act with respect and welcome all views not just those who sound like them”.*

Steve Jamieson, Chief Executive of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, said: *“We fully support STAMMA’s petition calling on Parliament to practise inclusive communication and embrace peoples’ differences. People should never be heckled or made fun of for having speech, language, and communication difficulties. As our elected representatives, they should be fostering an environment where everyone’s voice is heard, and bad behaviour is not tolerated”.*

Kamran Mallick, CEO, Disability Rights UK, said: *"Creating an inclusive society that works for everyone has to start with the government. Their role is to set the example, ensure that different voices and experiences are heard, and create environments that value and respect difference. Parliament should be a space to debate robustly and not a place where Disabled people fear bullying and discrimination. Our country will only benefit from diversity in political life. We stand in solidarity with STAMMA in calling for a change so that individuals who stammer can realise their ambitions of a role in public life".*

Every year, STAMMA deals with over 1,000 phone calls, emails and webchats from parents of stammering children and adults who stammer, some who believe they've been discriminated against because of how they talk. Through our [Advocacy Service](#), which we introduced last year, we take on complaints from people who have been mocked or discriminated against.

The purpose of this petition is to demand that MPs discuss and review how well our debating system works for people who communicate differently. Founding signatories include people who stammer, and those working with people who stammer or have communication differences.

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