**Model letter to your MP – adapt this as you see fit, including your own experience. The more the text is your own, the greater the impact will be.**

**Dear [INSERT MP NAME]**

I am writing to you as a constituent to ask you to represent my concerns in an ongoing consultation on Late Payment And Poor Payment Practices, undertaken by the Department of Business and Trade. I have responded to the survey. I believe that the depth of my concerns are such that they require more robust representation than simply appearing as survey data.

Personal paragraph: edit to reflect your experience. E.g. I have been a freelance journalist for the vast bulk of my 37-year professional life. I have written extensively for UK newspapers and magazines, as well as working for news platforms in the US, France, Lebanon, Turkey, among others.

Like a great many freelance journalist working mostly for UK publications, my life has been significantly blighted by news platforms exploiting their commanding economic position to impose payment terms on freelance journalists that would be tolerated in no other sector. The worst of these are ‘self billing’ and ‘payment on publication’. I will explain both of these with reference to personal experiences.

‘Self billing’ is the practice where contractors do not invoice for work, but are paid according to a schedule produced by commissioning editors once publication has occurred. Typically, a journalist is commissioned, sometimes after they have pitched a story idea, sometimes when an idea has come from an editor. There is sometimes a tacit understanding between editor and journalist what the payment will be, there may even be a discussion.

My experience of this system is both as an editor, authorising payments, and as a contributor being paid in this way. Sometimes it works very efficiently, but often it does not. As an editor, one faces budgetary pressures. An easy and frequent way to manage these is to trim the payments to those that you have commissioned.

Personal paragraph: edit to reflect your experience. E.g. To give a personal example, I was commissioned to undertake a major article for a national broadsheet that took several weeks to research. I had an agreement with my editor that I would be paid a daily rate, for a set number of days. I completed the work to deadline, and it was published, with some fanfare in the newspaper. When payment came, it was for half the amount agreed. I complained, to be told that ‘it had been a very difficult week financially, and so I would have to wait for approximately £1,000 of my fee. Several months passed before this was eventually paid, apparently for some subediting shifts that I had not undertaken.

This issue could be resolved by creating a legal right to invoice for work. Of course, commissioners of work could create simple online portals where fees were agreed and set at the commencement of work. At the moment, however, these systems put all the power in the hands of the ‘employers’, and provide no redress for freelance journalists.

The second issue is ‘kill fees’. These occur when work is commissioned and supplied, but not used. This occurs because news is a dynamic environment, and events often affect the space available. Some news platforms simply pay freelances nothing in these circumstances – hoping that the desire to maintain good relationships will persuade freelances to take the hit. Others pay half the agreed fee.

Both are clearly unacceptable in any reasonable business environment. News platforms well understand the environment in which they are operating. Expecting freelance contributors to bear the costs of known uncertainties is grotesquely unfair.

I have many times been required to settle for kill fees. Occasionally I have been fortunate and been able to sell an article elsewhere. More often, I have been left with a time sensitive piece to which I have devoted several days for which I have not been paid, or paid a fraction of what I was promised.

Finally, there is the issue of payment on publication. This is the practice of news platforms commissioning work to a timetable, receiving the work, and then sitting on it until a time of their choosing. It is particularly prevalent in magazines. When I undertook work of this kind, I would often be left waiting months to see a piece appear, and even then have to wait 30 or 45 days after publication to be paid. It is not unknown for magazines to wait more than a year before using material.

All these practices are the result of the enormous disparity of power between freelance journalists and the news organisation for which they work. Freelance journalists play a significant role in allowing media organisations to flex up and down as need arises. They also add very significantly to the breadth of voices that are represented in our national media. Unless business practices improve, however, then number of people who will be able to sustain a living in this manner will dwindle to almost nothing. I hope, as a legislator, you will give this issue the attention is deserves.

Yours sincerely

**[INSERT YOUR NAME]**