

PE2099/E: Stop the proposed centralisation of specialist neonatal units in NHS Scotland

Monica Lennon MSP written submission, 24 September 2025

I welcome petition PE2099 because I recognise the importance of specialist neonatal units to my constituents and people across Scotland. The proposed downgrading of the award-winning neonatal intensive care unit at University Hospital Wishaw raises serious concerns about the future care of premature and sick babies. These have not been adequately addressed by the Scottish Government.

More than 20,000 Scots backed the original online petition, and the parliamentary version has since gathered over 3,500 signatures. Each signature speaks to a family who dreads the prospect of their smallest, most fragile infant facing a longer, riskier journey when every second truly counts.

The Scottish Government announced this policy change in 2024 with limited engagement. A short consultation period in the middle of summer holidays and a UK General Election was not a designed with families in mind.

That truncated process amounts to tokenism, leaving families, clinicians, and local representatives feeling betrayed. Mothers from Wishaw Neonatal Warriors have experienced firsthand the lifesaving expertise of the unit and have made it clear that downgrading this award-winning service would be a devastating blow to their community.

Many parents simply cannot afford the upfront costs of accommodation near a distant hospital, and no retrospective fund can erase the stress of separation at life's most fragile moment. Moreover, dismantling one of Scotland's highest-performing Level 3 neonatal teams threatens staff retention across one of our most deprived health boards, undermining hard-won expertise and local trust.

I am grateful to the Committee for its diligent consideration of the petition and appreciate the recent visit to University Hospital Wishaw to see the firsthand how the NICU operates and meet with staff and families closely connected to it.

The Committee has already provided critical scrutiny and allowed more time for careful consideration of the proposal and the risk of unintended consequences. Given the concerns that campaigners have raised about the decision-making process, I believe that the Committee has an important role to play in preventing a terrible mistake from being made. Based on the evidence taken, I would be grateful if the Committee would consider recommending an independent, multidisciplinary review be undertaken before Scottish Ministers reach a final decision.

This review should include robust travel-time modelling, a thorough cost-benefit analysis of family impacts, and a careful assessment of workforce sustainability.

Residents across Lanarkshire and beyond deserve evidence-led and transparent decision-making that takes account of all the likely impacts.

I reiterate my support for the petition and for neonatal intensive care to be retained at University Hospital Wishaw.