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Last Chance To Block New Rules

A last-chance attempt to defeat the Government's new NHS privatisation regulations takes place in the House of Lords on April 24. The regulations have already been redrafted once because of public and medical opposition but the revised version still compels local NHS commissioning groups to put most contracts out to bids from the private sector.

Labour's health spokesman in the Lords, Lord Hunt, has taken the rare step of tabling a blocking motion under the obscure procedure the Government has been using to add extra teeth to its Health and Social Care Act.

Lord Hunt argues that the new NHS regulations force Clinical Commissioning Groups to put all services out to tender unless there is only a single provider capable of providing that service. He says that even in cases where the "single provider" escape clause might be usable, Commissioning Groups would be afraid to invoke it because of the risk of legal challenge.

Labour's motion can only succeed if it wins some Liberal Democrat peers away from supporting the Government position. Many Liberal Democrat peers were known to be unhappy with the first draft of the NHS regulations before the Government made some cosmetic changes.

The national campaign Keep Our NHS Public is calling for people to write urgently to Liberal Democrat and cross-bench peers by using draft letters and addresses that are available via its website www.keepournhspublic.com.

"We need an avalanche of letters to members of the House of Lords to ask them to reject these undemocratic changes. Please give some time to doing this if you want the NHS to stay the kind of institution we love," says the campaign.