Dear Minister,

We welcome the steps taken by the Government, working with supermarkets, to identify high-risk groups and ensure that they have priority access to buy goods online. However, as the database being shared by the Government is restricted to people who were identified as being at severe risk of medical illness from Covid-19, it does not account for people with sight loss, who have been facing severe issues accessing food. We ask the Government to urgently work with supermarkets to ensure that people with sight loss are considered a priority group able to access online shopping.

Blind and partially sighted people often rely on, a combination of touch, and guiding from another person to navigate. The Government’s social distancing requirements and the unprecedented demand on supermarkets make this much more challenging. Moreover, for those who are able to shop, the additional touching of goods in supermarkets increases the possibilities of transmitting Covid-19.

Online shopping is the best available alternative. However, our organisations are already receiving alarming reports that supermarkets are excluding people with sight loss from accessing online shopping slots for vulnerable people, because they are not included on the Government’s database. We would therefore ask that you extend the database to include them.

Unless action is taken, tens of thousands of vulnerable people risk being unable to source food and basic necessities. We have already written directly to the major supermarkets on this issue, and we are asking you to please address this situation as a matter of urgency and ensure that people with sight loss are able to safely stay at home and buy the goods they need online.
If you would like to discuss this matter further, please ask your office to contact Chris Theobald to make the arrangements; chris.theobald@guidedogs.org.uk or 0118 983 8162.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Wright, CEO, Guide Dogs

Matt Stringer, CEO, RNIB

Charles Colquhoun, CEO, Thomas Pocklington Trust

Matt Broom, CEO, Vision UK

Fiona Sandford, CEO, Visionary