

Paulette Wilson

Paulette Wilson, a prominent Windrush campaigner who was wrongly detained and threatened with deportation by the Home Office, has died unexpectedly at the age of 64, a month after delivering a petition to Downing Street calling on the government to deliver justice to those affected by the scandal.

She was arrested twice, and spent time in Yarl's Wood immigration removal centre, before being transferred to another centre in Heathrow in 2017, ahead of a flight to Kingston. It was only a last-minute intervention by her MP, Emma Reynolds, and the Refugee and Migrant Centre in Wolverhampton, that prevented her deportation.

Wilson's decision to speak to the Guardian in 2017 about her wrongful arrest and detention encouraged dozens of other people to come forward and describe how they also had found themselves wrongly classified as immigration offenders. Many had suffered catastrophic consequences as a result of the Home Office's mistake. Some were denied healthcare and others were sacked from their jobs or evicted from their homes, as they became wrongly caught up in the "hostile environment" immigration policy brought in under Theresa May.

About 164 were mistakenly detained or removed from the UK. When the scandal broke in April 2018 it provoked the resignation of the then home secretary, Amber Rudd, and the government was forced to apologise.

Wilson later said she had been put through "the worst heartache anyone could go through".

She and her daughter dedicated much time to raising awareness of the difficulties experienced by thousands of people who had arrived in the UK legally in the 50s and 60s, before wrongly being categorised as immigration offenders.

When she visited Downing Street to deliver a petition calling for compensation to be speeded up, she said she was disappointed that she was still having to campaign for justice. She had hoped after two years that there would be a swifter resolution of everyone's difficulties and faster payment of compensation to all victims. "The word 'sorry' can roll off anyone's tongue easily, but we don't want more apologies," she said.

Paulette is survived by her daughter and her granddaughter. "She was widely loved and respected; her laugh was infectious, and she loved to see people smile; she will be missed by us all," Barnes said.