

Carál Ní Chuilín MLA  
Chairperson  
Committee on Procedures  
Room 247  
Parliament Buildings  
Ballymiscaw  
Stormont  
Belfast BT4 3XX



**Re: Committee Inquiry into Private Members' Bills (PMBs)**

21<sup>st</sup> October 2021

Dear Carál,

Thank you for your letter dated 18<sup>th</sup> October 2021. I would be happy to provide some written views regarding my experience of the PMB process at the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Firstly, I would like to take the opportunity to commend all of the staff at the Bill Office who worked on my PMB for their hard work and professionalism. They are a credit to themselves and the Assembly. There are a number of suggestions and matters that I would like to raise with the Committee.

As a new member, my staff and I both benefitted from a range of training sessions provided by the Assembly on procedures relating to bills, tabling amendments and motions, after the Assembly returned from suspension. However, as far as I am aware, there is no specific training available to members or their staff on the PMB process. In my view, this would have been very useful prior to commencing the process. I would suggest that any specific training should cover an introduction to the process and timeline, best practice standards, how to develop a robust proposal, and public consultation guidance. This training could also be complemented with a written guide or handbook for members.

With respect to the public consultation for my PMB, I was surprised and disappointed that the online survey had to be funded privately by members or their political parties. In my view, the Committee should explore options for the Assembly to bring online surveys connected to PMB public consultations 'in-house'. This could be achieved, for example, through a business account with an online survey company managed by the Bill Office; or through access to the citizen space facility that is now used by Departments. The administrative burden of managing a consultation, conducting an analysis of responses, and writing up a report also currently falls to Members and their staff who have other competing demands on their workload. The Committee may also wish to consider the possibility of additional support or assistance with this aspect of the PMB process.

Further to the Bill being submitted to the Speaker's Office for consideration, the communication from staff has been very good, and I and my team have been kept up to date with matters dealing with tabling of stages, and the subsequent processes and timelines in order to progress to Second Stage.

I hope you find this useful and should you need to clarify anything contained in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to the Committee's report.

Yours sincerely,

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