



E-mailed to: Emer.Boyle@niassembly.gov.uk

Ref: JA/PM/Assembly/10223

Clerk of
Committee on Procedures
Room 247
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast

21st October 2021

Dear Ms Boyle,

Re: Private Members' Bills

As someone who has steered two PMBs through the Assembly, I wish to comment on the proposal that the sponsor of such a Bill - if not already a member - should be permitted speaking rights - not voting rights - on the committee scrutinising the Bill.

My first Bill passed through a committee of which I was not a member. In the case of my second, I was already a member of the scrutinising committee. The experience for me as sponsor was immeasurably different.

It is this experience which causes me to strongly support speaking rights for the Bill sponsor during committee evidence gathering and deliberations on the Bill.

No one knows the Bill and its intentions better than the sponsor. Thus, being able to pose questions to witnesses and contribute can crystallise the issues for the committee and retain focus.

For the sponsor too it is an invaluable experience, as confronting first hand problems identified allows the Bill to be shaped and amended for the better.

Thus, in my view this would be a positive move which can improve the law-making process.

James H Allister QC MLA, 38 Henry Street, Harryville, Ballymena, Co Antrim BT42 3AH

Tel: 028 25 640250

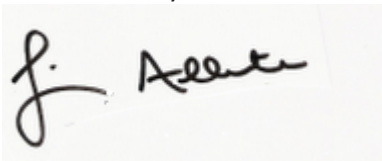
I also take the opportunity to comment on what I believe would be a wholly retrograde step, namely, the suggestion that a proposal for a Bill could only qualify for Bills' Office assistance if it demonstrated majority support.

This seems to be completely antithetical to the very idea of a backbencher being able to advance legislation. Big party dominance and knee jerk dismissal, rather than mature consideration of a properly fleshed out Bill, could result.

It is only when a Bill is presented in its fully drafted form that rational and fair consideration can follow.

The right of a backbencher to require the Assembly to consider a Bill is important and something to be thwarted only by a negative second stage vote, after full and reasoned debate. If the sponsor fails to convince the House - as I have done - then the Bill falls, but the rejection is not premature, but considered.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is written in a cursive style and appears to read 'J. Allister'.

Jim Allister MLA