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Stephen Moutray MLA  
Assembly and Executive Review Committee  
Room 276  
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Stormont  
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10 November 2015

*Dear Stephen*

Thank you for your letter of 20 October inviting me to respond to your call for evidence in relation to John McCallister's Private Member's Bill (Assembly and Executive Reform (Assembly Opposition) Bill).

While I wished to respond formally, I have chosen not to do so using the template provided for two reasons.

Firstly, much of the Bill deals with changes the Assembly can introduce itself by making provision through Standing Orders. It would be inappropriate for me as Secretary of State to comment in detail on matters that are within the legislative competency of the Assembly. Secondly, the Bill also covers some matters on institutional reform contained in the Stormont House Agreement. You will be aware that fully implementing these commitments has been on the agenda of the current cross-party talks. In this context it would not be helpful for me to comment in detail at this point on the issues contained in the Bill.

Nevertheless, I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate this Government's support for reform of the Stormont power-sharing institutions in areas where this would help the Assembly and Executive function effectively and deliver good government for the people of Northern Ireland. I therefore give a broad welcome to the suggestions around facilitating

the establishment of an Opposition, something for which I and the Government have long argued.

In relation to the proposed 'Assembly and Executive Review Motion', I would give careful consideration to legislating on matters outside the Assembly's legislative competence if I was confident that such changes commanded a broad, cross-community consensus within the Assembly. I must be clear that such support would not in itself guarantee UK Government legislation. I would also need to take into account practical issues such as Parliamentary time-tabling. I would need to be satisfied that the content of such a Motion was consistent with the principles of inclusivity and power-sharing that are central to the Belfast Agreement.

I shall monitor the passage of the legislation closely and wish the Committee well as it scrutinises the Bill.

Regards  
Theresa

**RT HON THERESA VILLIERS MP  
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**