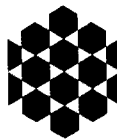


FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE



Department of

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27 January 2011

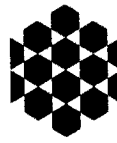
Dear Christine

AUTISM BILL – HSSPS COMMITTEE CORRESPONDENCE

Thank you for your letter of 14th January in respect of the proposals contained in the Autism Bill which is presently before the Assembly. The Minister welcomes the opportunity to comment on this important piece of legislation.

The objective of the Bill is to enhance the provision of services and support across Government to people with conditions on the Autistic spectrum. It proposes to do this by amending the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to clarify that disability includes Autistic spectrum conditions. The Bill also places a responsibility upon DHSSPS, which will have the lead role, to prepare and implement an Autism Strategy which will require all Departments to take account of sufferers in the services and support





they provide. The Bill is currently being considered by the HSSPS Committee.

The Strategy must set out how the needs of sufferers are to be addressed throughout their lives. The responsibilities in this area for DOJ would begin when sufferers come into contact with the Justice system or are employed by it. The Strategy will specify the measures to be taken when providing training for frontline staff, eg: Prisons; Courts and Tribunals Service personnel. The financial implications of this, while not yet known, are unlikely to be significant.

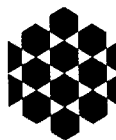
The Courts and Tribunals Service already has in place a programme aimed at raising awareness of Autism with training provided to staff who have been nominated as Disability Liaison Officers. This tuition encompasses the full range of commonly known disorders. In addition, work placements have been made available at Enniskillen Court Office and the Civil Processing Centre with fulltime staff being provided with information about Autism.

The Prison Service has had in place a Multi-Agency Steering Group (MASG) on Learning Disabilities since September 2009 which is chaired by the Head of Learning & Skills. MASG includes representatives from the health, education and criminal justice systems – including the Youth Justice Agency and the Juvenile Justice Centre – and from a range of voluntary organisations, which includes Autism NI. The Group, which has also invited representation from the PSNI, is in the process of compiling a report on its activities which will be provided to the Minister next month.

I understand that the report will include agreed recommendations spanning four areas. These cover improving screening tools for learning disabilities and learning and communication difficulties; awareness training for frontline staff and specialist staff; information sharing arrangements that will allow suspected and sentenced offenders to be tracked as they progress through the various channels; and interventions that will meet the needs of individuals within the criminal justice system.



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I trust that this information is helpful.

Jane Holmes.

Jane Holmes
Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer

