



The Autism Bill (NI) – Consultation 2010

Comments by Mencap in Northern Ireland

1.0 About Mencap

Mencap is a voluntary organisation which works alongside and represents the views and interests of people with a learning disability and their families. We provide a range of services to children, young people, men and women with a learning disability and their families throughout Northern Ireland. Our services and activities support people across the spectrum of learning disability, including individuals with autism. We support a membership network of over 50 local groups, including Gateway Clubs, and campaign for equal rights and opportunities for everyone with a learning disability.

Our vision is of a world where people with a learning disability are valued equally, listened to and included.

2.0 Support and services for people with autism and their families

Mencap recognises that, for too long, people with autism and their families have not been getting support and services to meet their needs. We recognise, too, the failure of departments and other public bodies to adequately address the inequalities experienced by people with autism, including people with a learning disability who also have autism. We agree that the needs of people with autism, including people with a learning disability, are not properly understood or planned for and that much needs to be done to address the myriad barriers they face and which result from structural and commissioning arrangements, restrictive eligibility criteria and inadequate levels of resourcing. We agree, too, that the difficulties and barriers between and within departments and other public bodies need to be addressed and better, more robust mechanisms developed to strengthen joint planning, funding and monitoring arrangements.

3.0 The Autism Bill (NI)

Mencap understands the importance of legislation in ensuring that people are able to access the support and services they need and should be entitled to. We believe, however, that legislation should promote fairness rather than result in inequalities between people who have a similar need for support. We believe that legislation should give a guaranteed access to support and services based on the needs of an individual rather than based on a clinical diagnosis.

4.0 Conclusion

Mencap welcomed the opportunity to comment on the proposals outlined in the consultation paper.

Paschal McKeown
Policy & Information Manager – Mencap NI

March 2010