

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE JUSTICE MINISTER



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Mervyn Storey, MLA
Chair, Committee for Justice
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Stormont Estate
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25 June 2021

Dear Mervyn,

INTRODUCTION OF THE JUSTICE (SEXUAL OFFENCES AND TRAFFICKING VICTIMS) BILL

As you know, I intended to bring forward a Justice Bill to sweep up a mix of legislative requirements that fall outside the scope of the Criminal Justice (Committal Reform), Protection from Stalking and Damages (Return on Investment) Bills, which are all already a part of the Executive's legislative programme for the remainder of the mandate.

You will be also be aware that despite my best efforts, I was unsuccessful in securing a place on the Executive's agenda to seek approval for the Bill's introduction at any of the Executive meetings between 6 May and 17 June. This was apparently due to some Ministers' concerns that the Bill could become a vehicle for controversial content that they did not agree with.

Having met with the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs on 1 June and with the new First Minister on 21 June to discuss their concerns, I have – with some

reluctance – agreed to bring forward a re-drafted Bill, which is now known as the Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill.

This Bill is more narrowly scoped - comprising Parts 1 (Sexual Offences), 2 (Trafficking



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and Exploitation) and 5 (Prevention Orders) of the previous draft Bill. This change was necessary to secure Executive agreement to the Bill's introduction and thus progress at least some of the important public protection provisions of the original Bill in this mandate.

The result of this narrower bill is that important legislation, which is non-controversial, including that required to comply with court rulings, assist court recovery and speed up justice, and reduce the legal aid bill, cannot now proceed in this mandate.

I am deeply disappointed that I have been forced to take this unwelcome step. However, with progression of the previous Bill being repeatedly blocked, and in the interests of some of the most vulnerable victims in the justice system, I have decided to proceed on this basis.

You will wish to note that a paper has issued to the Executive seeking approval of the Bill and associated Explanatory and Financial Memorandum, advance copies of which I enclose, for your information.

Subject to the necessary approvals being secured, I would hope to be in a position to introduce the Bill in during week commencing **5 July 2021**.

You will wish to note that a short paper has separately issued to the Committee Clerk, to provide Committee Members with advice on the revised content of the new Bill.

My officials have also offered to brief Members, at their earliest convenience, on the content of the Bill. They and I look forward to working with the Committee as the Bill progresses through the Assembly.

Yours Sincerely,

NAOMI LONG MLA MINISTER OF JUSTICE