

QD PBNI Probation  
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The Committee Clerk  
Committee for  
Justice Room 242  
Parliament Buildings  
Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill

Hugh Hamill, Interim Chief  
Executive

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill.

The aim of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) is 'changing lives for safer communities'. PBNI is committed to working with individuals convicted of sexual and violent offences to reduce the number of future victims. PBNI is of the view that this Bill (and the amendments contained therein) represents an effective enhancement of current provisions under law to protect victims and is fully supportive of it.

Sexual offences are very personal and potentially stigmatising offences for victims. They can have a far reaching and traumatic impact for victims in terms of fear, anxiety, depression, anger and shame. Through incorporating recommendations from the Gillen Review and enhancing the privacy of victims, the Bill will encourage future reporting of sexual offences.

PBNI welcomes the fact that the Bill gives effect to a number of the outcomes from the review of child sexual exploitation legislation. The creation of the new offence of adults masquerading as children will enhance public protection as 'masquerading as a child' often is a precursor to the grooming and sexual abuse of children. PBNI also welcomes the removal of terms such as 'child prostitution' and 'child pornography' which minimise the seriousness of offences linked to child abuse images.

The provisions contained in the Bill to improve services for potential victims of slavery and exploitation are to be welcomed particularly as these victims often have no recourse to public funds.

PBNI also welcomes the amendments set out in the Bill. PBNI is supportive of tightening the legislation to make it more difficult to raise a defence of consent to violence during sexual activity. Such an amendment provides additional protection for victims. By using consent as a defence,

violence against intimate partners is normalised. Victims cannot be blamed for their own injuries or death.

Changing Lives for Safer Communities

The strengthening of the current legislation in respect of 'revenge pornography' to include threatening to share private or sexual images is also to be welcomed. Threatening such behaviour (even if it is not followed through on) causes significant psychological damage and is indicative of a wider pattern of coercive control.

PBNI welcomes the extension of existing legislation covering abuse of a position of trust from statutory functions such as education and state care to include sport coaches and faith groups. The legislation should be widened to include all situations where adults have power over children.

In conclusion, PBNI is of the view that the provisions of the Justice Bill will enhance the protection of victims. In introducing the Bill it would also be important to raise awareness amongst the general public and to ensure there is necessary provision to provide support for victims. It will also be important to ensure that the recommendations made by Sir John Gillen in respect of the training of practitioners working with sexual violence cases are delivered on.

Yours sincerely

Hugh Hamilt

Interim Chief Executive