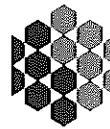


FROM THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH,
SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY



Department of
**Health, Social Services
and Public Safety**

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST BT4 3SQ
Tel: 028 9052 0638
Email: private.office@dhsspsni.gov.uk

Ms Maeve McLaughlin MLA
Chair, Committee for Health, Social Services
and Public Safety
Room 414
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

Our Ref: SUB/1402/2015

Date: 17 November 2015

Dear Maeve

During the debate yesterday (16 November) in the NI Assembly on the 2nd Reading of the Human Transplantation Bill, I referred to a letter I had received from Consultant Nephrologists and Transplant Surgeons at Belfast HSC Trust .

Please find attached that letter for your information.

Yours sincerely

SIMON HAMILTON MLA

To: Simon Hamilton MLA Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Dear Minister

Re: Private Members Bill on changes to the arrangements for Organ Donation

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, as providers of the only solid organ transplant service in NI, have an obvious interest in the above proposed legislation in relation to organ donation.

While fully supportive of the principle of increasing the number of deceased donor organs available to provide life-saving transplantation, we are cautious about any change which, although well-meaning, may potentially have a detrimental impact on the public's willingness to donate.

There are differing opinions within both the medical profession and society at large with regard to the acceptability of an "opt out" system. The perception by some that this effectively means acquisition by the state of "body parts", and removal of the altruistic aspect of donation, is of concern. These and other ethical issues have prevented the global adoption of presumed consent legislation.

The Public Health Agency's research in 2013 on public attitudes to organ donation and transplantation revealed a high level of misunderstanding about organ donation. However, the number of living kidney donors, (per million population), in NI is over twice the UK average and is comparable to the highest international living donor rates. This reflects the generosity of the population here and, with understanding of the issues, a very positive attitude towards transplantation. With further public education it is probable that there would be a better and more widespread willingness to increase deceased organ donation, and that an understanding of the benefits of legislative change would also be achieved and accepted.

The higher rate of organ donation in "opt out" jurisdictions persists even when the next of kin are still asked for their approval before donation. Rather than enforcement of a legislative decree, the increase in deceased donation in this setting reflects increased public awareness, societal attitudinal change to donation, and improved infrastructure.

We suggest therefore that hesitation may be appropriate at this time. Deferring any change would allow firstly for re-evaluation of the impact of the Public Health Agency's public education campaign, and secondly assessment of the impact of a similar change made by the Welsh assembly which will take effect on 1 December 2015.

Consultant Nephrologists and Transplant Surgeons Belfast HSC Trust