

**RESPONSE OF THE COUNCIL FOR CHURCH IN SOCIETY  
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND  
TO THE CALL FOR EVIDENCE ON  
THE HUMAN TRANSPLANTATION BILL**

DECEMBER 2015

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has over 230,000 members belonging to 545 congregations across 19 Presbyteries throughout Ireland, north and south.

The Council for Church in Society is authorised by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to speak on behalf of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland on matters of public policy. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the call for evidence on the Human Transplantation Bill.

**Introduction**

1. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, along with many others both in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, regards life itself as a gift, and as such, any change to the law regarding transplantation should positively affirm and uphold that principle. We believe that, as a society, we should strive to increase the opportunities for that gift of life to be given through organ donation, with the maximum level of consent of both potential donors and their families.
2. Due to the short timeframe provided for the formulation of responses, we will confine our submission to the following key areas of interest and concern:

**Clause 1**

3. We fully support promoting awareness of the need for organ donation and to increase the number of organs available. Our understanding is that amongst the key factors influencing donor rates are the numbers of potential donors, provision of intensive care facilities, end of life care, use of transplant coordinators, trust in the donation system and trust in the medical profession (particularly those treating dying patients). This brings important considerations into play:
  - (a) That any campaign is properly resourced and is specifically designed to reach a very wide cross section of the population of Northern Ireland.

- (b) That the impact of the campaigns must be paralleled by the necessary resources elsewhere (as indicated immediately above) to make them most effective.

#### Clause 4

4. The explanatory memorandum to the Bill states: *The affirmation required is that the deceased would not have objected to the transplantation activity and the person making the affirmation must have reasonable grounds for believing that to be the case.*
5. We live in a culture where discussion of death and dying is often still a 'taboo' subject, and the clause, as it currently stands, will inevitably leave many qualifying persons, at a time of distress and pressure for them, in a quandary as to the presumed wishes of the deceased.
6. Accordingly, we strongly urge that this clause be amended so that *positive* consent is given by the qualifying person(s) for the donation. This would also help to protect the concept of organ donation as a gift.

#### Clause 14

7. We agree that an annual report should be produced, and that the effectiveness of the Act be analysed on a regular basis. However, we urge that in the interests of full and proper understanding of the whole picture relating to human transplantation, the periodic report should include quantitative data on the numbers of potential donors, the provision and availability of intensive care facilities in relation to demand for transplantation, resources available for end of life care, and the workload and use of transplant coordinators.



Very Rev Dr T Norman Hamilton (Convener of the Council for Church in Society)



Rev Trevor D Gribben (Clerk of the General Assembly)