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Your ref: CSD/011/2011/SK

Our ref: SUB/1689/2011

1 December 2011

Dear Alex

PROPOSED PENSIONS BILL – COMMITTEE RESPONSE TO THE EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT CONSULTATION

Thank you for your letter of 24 November and the Committee's response to the Equality Impact Assessment consultation.

I regret the misunderstanding in relation to the Equality Impact Assessment. The passage of the Bill is, I believe, a matter of urgency. Until it receives Royal Assent, women here cannot plan for their future retirement date with certainty. As the Committee have pointed out in their response to the consultation, the period of notice for the increases to the State Pension age is, in retirement planning terms, extremely short. This was a recurring theme during the passage of the corresponding Westminster Bill, which received Royal Assent on 3 November, and concerns have been expressed by Members of the Assembly and by all those who made substantive responses to the Northern Ireland consultation. You are aware that I wrote to Iain Duncan Smith on 24 June to urge the Westminster Government to consider measures to alleviate the impact of the proposals and I met with you on 3 November specifically to discuss how best to progress the Bill, primarily for this reason.

I am grateful for the Committee's response to the consultation. The Department's reply is attached. Both will be included as an addendum in the Completed Equality Impact Assessment.

Yours sincerely

Nelson McCausland

NELSON McCAUSLAND MLA
Minister for Social Development

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