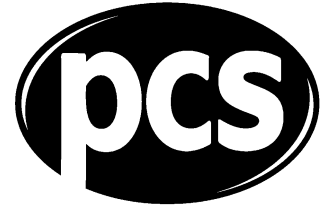


Dr. Kevin Pelan  
Committee Clerk  
Social Development Committee  
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**9 October 2012**

Dear Dr. Pelan

### **Parliamentary Passage of the Welfare Reform Bill**

I am writing to you on behalf of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) about the timetable for the Parliamentary passage of the Welfare Reform Bill.

PCS has 270,000 members working across UK departments, with around 100,000 delivering welfare provision. PCS has taken a leading role within the trade union movement in voicing concerns about welfare policy and in campaigning to defend and strengthen the welfare state. PCS members take pride in the welfare state and they want a welfare state that provides a decent standard of living for the retired, the unemployed and for those unable to work. Over the past 30 years the concept of welfare has been under attack as successive governments have stopped pursuing policies of full employment and sought to blame the unemployed or the individual.

PCS firmly believes that the UK governments £18 billion (with the potential for another £10 billion announced yesterday at the Conservative Party conference) welfare cuts will damage the welfare state and we have no wish to return to the welfare state of the 1940's which reflected the social attitudes of its time especially towards women and the disabled. As a consequence PCS has published "Welfare – an alternative Vision" and have had public meetings in Northern Ireland and distributed this material.

We understand that the Welfare Reform Bill will be referred to the Committee for its consideration stage from 10<sup>th</sup> October until 27<sup>th</sup> November, where scrutiny will take place two and a half days a week. Standing Orders allow 30 days for a Committee to consider a Bill, however, extensions can be sought.

We are seeking confirmation from the Committee that the commitment given to Congress for full line by line scrutiny will be honoured.

We are also seeking reassurance that the committee will request an extension to 90 days to allow for a full debate to occur on the practical consequences of any proposals within the Bill and to discuss potential options to mitigate impacts. It is vital that a real appraisal of the effect of these proposals locally is achieved. The welfare reform changes are likely to last a generation and any attempt to hasten the timetable will prove counter-productive.

Like our Congress colleagues PCS believes it is appropriate to tailor a Northern Ireland approach to issues presented by the Welfare Reform Bill. Given the wide range of reforms, the implementation of the changes will impact upon a significant percentage of the working age population in Northern Ireland. Different arrangements could be made and we argue that, in previous circumstances, different arrangements have been made that reflect the very different challenges that face society in Northern Ireland.

Furthermore, despite the legislation being passed in Great Britain, there remains a high level of uncertainty around the finer detail of Universal Credit. It is clear from the regulations that a number of important issues have yet to be decided, for example the level of the assumed minimum income floor which will be set of the self employed and the question of whether to pay monthly or fortnightly.

The challenge posed by these proposed reforms provides the NI Assembly with a unique opportunity to demonstrate the positive value of a devolved government and to impact on the formation of social security policy here for the next generation. We hope that this opportunity is seized and maximized and we look forward to working with the Committee on this important task.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

**Lynn Henderson**  
**PCS National Officer for Northern Ireland**