

To: All Assembly Members

17 November 2025

Dear Member

You will be aware that a valid petition was tabled under section 28B of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 on 21 October 2025. The petition, which was signed by 31 Members, expressed concern that a decision taken by the Minister for the Economy may have been taken in contravention of section 28A(1) of the 1998 Act; and that it related to a matter of public importance.

The petition related to a decision taken by the Minister to instruct officials to prepare additional measures to eliminate any risk of public funds being used to support the manufacture of arms or components that are used for genocide. The decision was communicated to the Assembly by means of a written ministerial statement on 16 October 2025.

In line with the requirements of Standing Order 29 and the 1998 Act, I have now undertaken the duties placed on me to reach a decision on this matter and announced my decision to the House today.

This is a procedure which has been rarely used – this is the first such valid petition to be received in more than ten years. Therefore, it is worth me briefly recording some key points. The fact that the petition was supported by more than 30 Members did not in itself refer this matter to the Executive. Rather, the receipt of 30 signatures required me to do two things.

Firstly, to consult the political parties in the Assembly. Secondly, it was then for me to decide ONLY whether the decision referenced in the petition was of public importance – in which case it is required to be referred to the Executive.

I wrote to all the parties and independent Members in the Assembly seeking their views on whether the subject of the petition was one of public importance. I am placing those responses from parties in the library.

Two parties did not provide a response but amongst the contributions that were received, there were a range of opinions. However, I need to record that many of those contributions focussed on the view of parties as to whether the Minister had the power to make this decision herself rather than on whether the decision related to a matter of public importance. The Act is clear that the only matter for me consider is whether the Minister's decision relates to a matter of public importance. Whether this was something that should have been decided by the Executive is not a matter for me to take into account.

Over the past few weeks, I have given this matter detailed consideration and I want to thank Assembly officials for the work they have done to provide me with advice. In doing so, I have reviewed the background to this matter and the responses from the parties. I have also considered the frequency with which Members have raised matters regarding relations with Israel in the Assembly. Finally, I have also taken legal advice.

Having taken account of all of these different elements, I have concluded that the only credible position for me to take is that the Minister's decision did relate to a matter of public importance. I have therefore written to the First Minister and deputy First Minister today to refer this matter to the Executive. The next steps are therefore now for the Executive and are not for me.

I return to the point that this is a procedure which is rarely used. However, it is clear that there are some aspects of this procedure which would benefit from greater clarification, particularly in relation to timelines. Therefore, I intend to make a ruling on the operation of this procedure in the next few weeks.

I have informed the Assembly of my decision as I am required to do and it is now for the Executive to consider and to inform the Assembly of the outcome within 7 sitting days.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edwin Poots".

**EDWIN POOTS MLA
SPEAKER**