

Our ref: SUB 0021-2026
Date: 08 January 2026

From: The DALO

Ms Emer Boyle
Communities Committee Clerk
Room 430
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

Dear Emer,

Pursuant to your letter of 2 December 2025 (your reference CC/25/408) in which you set out the Committee's requests for amendments and further explanation and, officials' appearance at Committee on 11 December 2025, the Department had committed to sharing the text of agreed amendments to the Sign Language Bill with the Committee. Please see below the draft text for those amendments which, as outlined in my letter to you of 5 January 2026, also contains two additional amendments by the Department at clause 2(2) and at clause 7(3)(b). Please note that the text and formatting of the amendments from OLC is in draft form and subject to finalisation. The draft text for amendments from OLC has been highlighted below for each relevant clause, page and line of the Bill and inserted into the appropriate lines of the Bill for ease of reading.

Clause 2

Clause 2, Page 2, Line 13

After 'classes' insert 'free of charge'

Clause 2, Page 2, Line 15

Leave out 'deaf children' and insert 'young people who are deaf'

Clause 2, Page 2, Line 17

Leave out 'children are persons under 19' and insert 'young people are persons under 25'

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of this section, the greater use and understanding of British Sign Language or Irish Sign Language is to be promoted by the Department through making (or entering into) arrangements for ensuring the availability of classes **free of charge**—

(a) taught by accredited teachers or other suitable persons, and

(b) for ~~deaf children~~ **young people who are deaf**, and their close families, guardians and carers, to learn (or improve proficiency in) the Language.

(3) Here, ~~children are persons under 19~~ **young people are persons under 25** years of age.

Clause 4

Clause 4, Page 3, Line 7

Leave out 'are subject to negative resolution' and insert 'may not be made unless a draft of them has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly'

(5) Regulations under this Chapter ~~are subject to negative resolution~~ **may not be made unless a draft of them has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly.**

Clause 5

Clause 5, Page 3, Line 27

Leave out 'one person or group' and insert 'two persons or groups'

Clause 5, Page 3, Line 27

Leave out 'acting on behalf' and insert 'representative or cognisant of the views or interests'

(3) Whenever devising (or reviewing) guidance under this Chapter, the Department must consult—

(a) each of the prescribed organisations, and

(b) at least ~~one person or group~~ **two persons or groups** appearing to the Department to be ~~acting on behalf of the deaf community~~ **representative or cognisant of the views or interests** of the deaf community.

Clause 7

Clause 7, Page 5, Line 1

Leave out ‘each Northern Ireland department in the same way’ and insert ‘one or more of the Northern Ireland departments separately or together in different or similar ways’

Clause 7, Page 5, Line 4

After ‘acting’ insert ‘on behalf or’

Clause 7, Page 5, Line 5

After ‘functions’ insert ‘on behalf or’

Clause 7, Page 5, Line 15

After ‘relevant’ insert ‘material or’

Clause 7, Page 5, Line 18

After ‘behalf’ insert ‘or in the interests’

(3) Regulations under this Chapter may confer functions on— (a) the prescribed organisations (apart from the Northern Ireland departments),

(b) the Department for Communities alone or ~~each Northern Ireland department in the same way;~~ **one or more of the Northern Ireland departments separately or together in different or similar ways** or

(c) persons or groups appearing to the Department for Communities to be—

(i) acting **on behalf or** in the interests of the deaf community, and

(ii) willing to exercise more functions **on behalf or** in the interests of the deaf community.

(5) In deciding whether to prepare (or whenever reviewing) regulations under this Chapter, the Department must take account of any relevant **material or** representations received by it from—

(a) any of the prescribed organisations, or

(b) any person or group appearing to it to be acting on behalf **or in the interests** of the deaf community.

Clause 8

Clause 8, Page 5, Line 27

Leave out ‘one person or group’ and insert ‘two persons or groups’

Clause 8, Page 5, Line 27

Leave out ‘acting on behalf’ and insert ‘representative or cognisant of the views or interests’

8.—(1) Before laying a draft of regulations under this Chapter, the Department for Communities must consult—

(a) everyone on whom functions are to be conferred by them (if made), and

(b) at least ~~one person or group~~ **two persons or groups** appearing to the Department to be ~~acting on behalf~~ **representative or cognisant of the views or interests** of the deaf community.

Clause 9

Clause 9, Page 5, Line 38

After 'be' insert—

'(a) laid before the Assembly by the Department, and

(b)'

Clause 9, Page 6, Line 4

Leave out '5' and insert '3'

9.—(1) The Department for Communities must prepare a report, covering the reporting period, evaluating the impact of this Part.

(2) A report under this section is to be—

(a) laid before the Assembly by the Department, and

(b) published by the Department, in such manner (and in such form) as the Department considers appropriate, as soon as practicable after the end of the reporting period.

(3) For the purpose of this section—

(a) the first reporting period is the period, of not more than 5 years beginning with the day on which this section comes into operation, determined by the Department, and

(b) each subsequent reporting period is the period of ~~5~~ **3** years following the previous reporting period.

Clause 10

Clause 10, page 6, Line 25

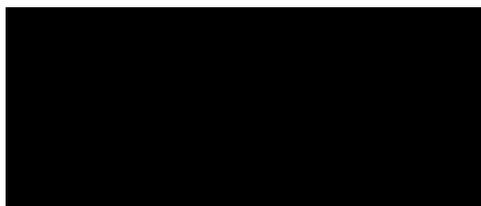
Leave out 'are subject to negative resolution' and insert 'may not be made unless a draft of them has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly'

(5) Regulations under this Chapter ~~are subject to negative resolution~~ may not be made unless a draft of them has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly.

I understand that officials will be attending Committee to support its considerations at informal and formal clause by clause scrutiny when they will be happy to clarify any issues the Committee may have with regards to these draft amendments.

I trust you find this information helpful.

Yours sincerely,



Laura Coffey

Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer

Private Office



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITIES

Room 430
Parliament Buildings
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

2 December 2025
Our ref: CC/25/408

Laura Coffey
Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer
Department for Communities
Level 9
Causeway Exchange
Belfast

Dear Laura

Sign Language Bill Deliberations

Committee agreed at its meeting on 27 November, following the session with Departmental officials, that it would have an additional meeting on Tuesday 02 December, with the specific aim of reaching Committee consensus in relation to proposed amendments and clarifications in relation to the Sign Language Bill.

At the Committee on 27th November Members expressed concern that the Department had not yet progressed decisions in relation to its requests from for amendments following deliberations of Clauses 1-4. In order to expedite decision-making, Committee agreed that a single dedicated meeting to consider the remaining clauses would be more efficient and would enable the Committee to communicate it's full position to the Department in terms of proposed amendments for all the Bill Clauses.

At its meeting on 2 December 2025, the Committee completed its deliberations of the Sign Language Bill. As confirmed during the broadcast portion of the end of both Committees (Thursday 27 November and Tuesday 2 December) Members agreed that I write to you to clearly set out Committee's requests for amendments and further explanation:

Clause	Committee Request
Clause 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clarifications in relation to 5(1)(b) that ‘or’ rather than ‘and’ wouldn’t have unintended consequences in terms of issuing guidance regarding one language over another - 5(3)(b) - that the phrase relating to consultation ‘At least one person...’ be revised and extended to require at least two individuals or groups representative of the deaf community who use BSL and the deaf community who use ISL
Clause 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In line with Committee request previously made for Clause 4, Members agreed to seek further explanation of the definition of the term ‘public character’ - Confirmation that this explanation will be included in the EFM.
Clause 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 7(1) Proposal to change ‘may’ to ‘must’ - In addition Committee sought assurance in terms of what the department have in mind in terms of regulations under 7(1) - To this end, the Committee has also asked the Bill Clerk to draft an amendment for its consideration. - 7(1)(b)(2) – After ‘as the Department considers appropriate (line 30) add ‘following consultation with the deaf community’. - 7(4)(b) (line 13) - After ‘the Department believes this to be appropriate’ add ‘following consultation with the deaf community’.
Clause 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 8(1)(b) As per 5(3)(b) – that the phrase relating to consultation ‘At least one person...’ be revised and extended to require at least two individuals or groups representative of the deaf community who use BSL and the deaf community who use ISL (or wording to give this effect)
Clause 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 9(1) (line 37) – After ‘this part’ add ‘to be laid before Assembly’ - 9(3)(a) (line 2) – remove from ‘which’ to end and insert ‘on Royal Assent’ - 9(3)(b) (line 4) – remove ‘5’ and add ‘3’ <p>The latter may require associated consequential amendments to Clause 9 title and clause 14.</p>
Clause 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 10(5) – Remove ‘negative’ and add ‘draft affirmative’.
Clause 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seek Department view on 11 (1) (b) – Removal of word ‘normally’ (line 33) and seek definition of same. - Seek Department view on inserting 11(1) (d) – (line 38) – adding ‘parents of deaf children’
Clause 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Line 17 and 18 - Ask for explanation of what is meant by ‘relying on...’ and ‘everyday activities’ and how this relates to ‘persons or groups exercising functions of a public character’ in 4(4)

Committee received the Department's response to deliberations on Clauses 1-4 of the Bill last week and would welcome confirmation in relation to the detail of specific amendments set out in its correspondence.

Specifically, Committee requests a response from the Minister / Department to be received for consideration at its meeting on 11 December 2025, at which officials will be in attendance. It is essential that the forthcoming response indicates if the Department **will either accept, not accept or partially accept the amendments** sought by the Committee and provides the draft text of any amendments, for Committee review (on all of the Bill clauses).

To make the most efficient use of time remaining, the Committee has also requested that the Bill Clerk draft the amendments set out above for its consideration.

Committee would be grateful for the earliest possible response.

Yours sincerely

Emer Boyle

Clerk to the Committee for Communities