

## Response ID ANON-PYJC-FR1U-M

Submitted to Sign Language Bill - Call for Evidence  
Submitted on 2025-05-09 23:52:51

### Consent and introduction

What is your name?

Name:

[REDACTED]

What is your email address?

Email:

[REDACTED]

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

Please confirm you have read the Northern Ireland Assembly's Committee privacy notice by clicking the button below.

I have read the privacy notice

Do you consent to your submission being published on the Committee's website and included in the Committee's report?

Yes, publish but with my personal information and any content that could be used to identify me redacted.

### Clause 1

Do you feel Clause 1 goes far enough in formally recognising BSL and ISL as languages of Northern Ireland?

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details:

BSL and ISL are languages with equal status as spoken languages such as Spanish. French. It is good they are recognised as languages, however not enough is done compared to what is done for people from other countries to have access to their language in any public services. I understand that DfC have funded a lot of projects to support BSL and ISL, but more needs to be focused on the Deaf community for DEAF people to ensure they gain qualifications and that more DEAF people are involved in decision making and leading Deaf related projects.

### Clause 2

Do you feel Clause 2 goes far enough in promoting the use of BSL and ISL and developing deaf culture?

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

It is encouraging that DfC wants to promote BSL, ISL and Deaf culture. However, too much funding is often spent on the wrong projects, especially those lead by people who are not part of the Deaf community. This not only fails to support the real needs of Deaf people but also causes harm to the languages and the culture. When Deaf people are excluded from leading projects about their own language and identity, it disempowers them and shows a lack of respect for their lived experiences as the native users and custodians of BSL, ISL and Deaf culture.

Are there any other approaches (apart from providing for the availability of classes) that could help to meet the objective of the greater use and understanding of BSL and ISL?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details:

I believe that from an early age of every Deaf child's education must be based on access to their language, i.e. BSL or ISL. Promoting sign language within the school system, starting from nursery, is essential.

Every Deaf child (and their family) deserves equal treatment and the right to be educated in a way that supports their full development. Sending a Deaf child to a school without sign language access is unfair and can lead to poor outcomes.

for example:-

1. Deaf children should be taught by Teachers who are fluent in BSL or ISL preferably Deaf teachers.
2. Schools should employ Deaf teaching assistants and Deaf role models.
3. Deaf Awareness should be included in the curriculum for ALL pupils.
4. Sign Language learning should be encouraged among hearing people, classmates, helping to build inclusion and understanding.

This approach helps Deaf children thrive and build a more inclusive society for everyone and continue to increase capacity as time moves on.

their is paramount which means access to BSL and ISL will need to be promoted more within schools from nursery age. Every Deaf child or person should have equal treatment in schools to be educated just the same as hearing people. It is wrong to send a child to school with no access to their language to learn and thrive the same as their hearing peers.

### Clause 3

Do you think the duty placed on prescribed organisations to make the information and services accessible to members of the deaf community is sufficient?

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

No, I do not think the duty is strong enough. The wording "reasonable steps" is too vague and allows organisations to make excuses, such as saying it costs too much or is too difficult. In reality, many Deaf people still struggle to access basic services like full education, proper healthcare, suitable housing, and a fair social life.

For example, some hospitals still do not provide interpreters and many public websites do not offer BSL or ISL translations. These create real barriers and leaves Deaf people feeling excluded from vital information.

There should be clear legal standards and accountability to make sure BSL and ISL access is ALWAYS provided. Deaf people should not have to fight for their rights again and again. True equality means having the same access as hearing people - no more - no less.

### Clause 4

Do you support the approach taken by Clause 4?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

It is important to clearly name the organisations that must follow the duties under Clause 3. This brings transparency and accountability. Deaf people need to know which services must provide BSL and ISL access. It also helps the government and the public check if organisations are meeting their responsibilities.

### Clause 5

Do you support the approach to consultation required in Clause 5?

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

No, I do not think the consultation approach in Clause 5 goes far enough. The requirement to consult just one person or group acting on behalf of the Deaf community is too limited. The Deaf community is diverse - with BSL and ISL users from different backgrounds, ages, and experiences across Northern Ireland.

The Department must engage in meaningful, wide-ranging, and Deaf-led consultation. This means involving multiply Deaf-led organisations, grassroots groups, young and older Deaf people and those with lived experiences.

Token consultations with single group risks missing important voices and could lead to decisions that don't truly reflect the needs of the Deaf community. Deaf people should be active partners, not just consulted as an afterthought.

### Clause 6

Do you support the approach taken in this clause?

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

No, I do not support Clause 6 in its current form. The guidance described sounds good in theory, but it is not strong enough in practice. "Best practice" is not enforceable - it's just a suggestion. Many organisations will ignore it unless they are legally required to follow it.

Deaf people have faced too many broken promises and token gestures. We need clear duties not optional advice. Guidance must be backed by Deaf-led oversight and legal accountability, or it risks becoming another document that sits on the shelf while access barriers continue.

Do you feel there is anything else this Clause should include?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details:

Yes, this clause should go further. The guidance must include Deaf-led training for public service staff, so they understand how to interact with BSL and ISL users. It should explain what happens if organisations fail to follow the guidance - right now there are no clear consequences.

In addition, the guidance itself should be made available in BSL and ISL not just English and it should be reviewed regularly with feedback from the Deaf community across Northern Ireland.

## Clause 7

Do you support the provision for the Department for Communities to make regulations detailed in Clause 7?

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

While it sounds useful to give the Department power to make new rules in the future, this clause gives them too much control without enough protection for the Deaf community. The ability to "adjust requirements" based on an organisation's resources could allow public bodies to avoid providing proper access, using cost as an excuse. This is not equality.

Deaf people have waited too long for real rights. We do not need more flexibility for government - we need firm commitments backed by law. Regulations that affect BSL and ISL users must be created WITH Deaf people, not just in consultation or a token group.

This clause risks creating a system where Deaf access can be delayed, reduced or ignored depending on money or political will. That is not acceptable. The rights of BSL and ISL users must be protected in law itself, not left open to change later.

Do you support the approach to consultation detailed in Clause 7?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details:

Yes, I support the approach in clause 7 - IF it is done meaningfully. It is right that the Department for Communities must consult with the Deaf community and relevant organisations before making changes to the law. This shows that the voices of BSL and ISL users are being recognised in shaping how the law works over time.

However, for consultation to truly work, it must be more than a tick-box exercise. The Department must engage with a wide range of Deaf people including BSL and ISL users, Deaf-led organisations, young people and those from different regions and backgrounds.

The clause has potential to strengthen Deaf rights, but only if consultation is open, inclusive and ongoing, not limiting to a small group or done behind closed doors.

## Clause 8

Do you feel the level of consultation required in Clause 8 is sufficient?

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

No, I do not feel the level of consultation in this clause is sufficient. The clause only requires the Department to consult with one Deaf person or group. This is far too limited and does not reflect the diversity of the Deaf community. BSL and ISL users have different experiences and there must be proper, inclusive and accessible consultation involving a range of Deaf-led organisations.

If consultation is too narrow or rushed, it can lead to rules that don't work well in real life and don't meet the needs of the people most affected. The clause should include stronger safeguards and require transparent, meaningful engagement in BSL and ISL.

## Clause 9

Do you think evaluating the impact of the Bill in a report every five years is an appropriate length of time?

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

Five years is too long to wait for an evaluation of such an important Bill. Things change quickly in services, funding and technology, and Deaf people need regular checks to make sure their access is protected.

I believe the first report should be done within 3 years, and then 3 years after that. It gives time to see results, but not too long that problems get ignored. Quicker reviews would also build trust in the process and show the Department is serious about making real improvements.

## Clause 10

Do you support the creation of a scheme for accrediting BSL and ISL teachers?

Not Answered

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

I am unsure because while I support the idea in principal, I would need more information about how the accreditation scheme would work and who would lead it.

It is important to make sure BSL and ISL are taught properly by qualified Deaf people, but I have concerns about who decides the standards and whether Deaf-led expertise will be prioritised.

For example, will the scheme value native BSL/ISL users, Deaf culture and community experience - or favour academic qualifications only? Will it include both BSL and ISL equally, given the unique language needs in Northern Ireland.

I support the high standards, but I believe any accreditation scheme must be developed with Deaf people and not just for them.

Do you support the creation of a scheme for accrediting BSL and ISL interpreters?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details:

Yes, I support creating a scheme for accrediting BSL and ISL interpreters. This is essential for protecting the rights of Deaf people and ensuring quality communication. Interpreters play a vital role in education, healthcare, employment and legal settings - and they must be trained, skilled and culturally aware.

The scheme should recognise the linguistic and cultural differences between BSL and ISL, especially in Northern Ireland, and must ensure interpreters are assessed appropriately. Accreditation would also give Deaf people more confidence and consistency when accessing services.

It should be developed with input from Deaf community, not just interpreting organisations, to ensure the focus stay on access and respect - not just qualifications on paper.

## Clause 11

Do you agree with the definition of the deaf community provided for in the Bill?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer. Please outline what people or groups you think should be included or excluded and why.

Text box for entering additional information:

Yes inclusive of Deaf, DeafBlind, CODAs and fluent signers.

## Clause 12

Do you agree with the definition of BSL and ISL provided for in the Bill?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer. If you think there are any aspects missing, please outline what you think should be included.

Text box for entering additional information:

It is important that the Bill includes both visual and tactile forms of sign languages. This recognises the real ways that Deaf and DeafBlind people communicate. Including non-visual/tactile forms shows that the Bill respects the full diversity of the sign language community.

### Clause 13

Do you agree with the definition of "everyday reliance" provided in the Bill?

Not Answered

Please give details to support your answer. If you think there are any aspects missing, please outline what you think should be included.

Text box for entering additional information:

### Any other comments

Is there anything which you expected the Bill to make provision for which has not been included in the Bill?

Not Answered

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details:

If you have any other comments in relation to the Bill please tell us here.

Text box to enter additional details: