

Response ID ANON-PYJC-FR1V-N

Submitted to Sign Language Bill - Call for Evidence
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Consent and introduction

What is your name?

Name:

[REDACTED]

What is your email address?

Email:

[REDACTED]

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

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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:

No, Clause 1 does not go far enough. While formal recognition of British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL) is an important and welcome step, recognition alone is not sufficient. It must be accompanied by enforceable rights that ensure Deaf people can fully and equally participate in society. BSL and ISL should have the same legal status and protections as spoken and written languages, leading to automatic rights in education, healthcare, employment, justice, and public services.

At present, Deaf individuals in Northern Ireland still face significant communication barriers that limit their daily lives and access to essential services. Without a statutory duty on public bodies, access to BSL and ISL remains inconsistent and inadequate. For example, Deaf people are often denied interpreters during medical appointments, excluded from employment due to lack of communication support, and disadvantaged in legal settings where language services are not provided as standard.

One clear example is healthcare, where Deaf people are frequently denied interpreters because the system has not embedded sign language access as a standard requirement. Instead, Deaf patients must proactively contact hospitals — often via email — to request an interpreter. This creates delays and stress. This should be changed to an automated system where interpreter provision is triggered automatically, ensuring timely and equal access without the burden falling on the individual.

Recognition must go beyond symbolism. Scotland's BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 provides a strong model, placing legal obligations on public authorities to develop and implement BSL plans, leading to measurable improvements in access and inclusion. Northern Ireland must adopt a similarly robust framework.

There should be a clear legal duty on public bodies to provide services in BSL and ISL, including mandatory provision of qualified interpreters, accessible education delivered in sign language, and inclusive communication across public life. This provision should be standard, immediate, and guaranteed, so Deaf people are not required to request or negotiate access individually. True equality requires that Deaf communities are included from the outset, with their languages fully recognised and protected in both law and practice.

I urge the Committee to strengthen the Bill by recommending the inclusion of enforceable rights and statutory duties on public bodies to ensure the provision of services in BSL and ISL. Only then can the Bill achieve meaningful equality and inclusion for Deaf people in Northern Ireland.

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:

While the duty to promote BSL and ISL and support the development of Deaf culture is welcome, the language in this clause remains too vague to guarantee meaningful progress. The phrase "to such extent (and in such manner) as the Department considers appropriate" grants excessive discretion to the Department and could allow them to avoid firm obligations. This clause should include specific, mandatory actions with clear, enforceable duties that are led by the Deaf community and shaped by Deaf people's lived experience. Promotion must not be optional; it must be grounded in a commitment to sustained and meaningful investment that prioritises the needs of the Deaf community.

Section (1)(c) is also unclear and risks undermining the central role of sign language in Deaf culture. While it states that Deaf culture is "broadly identifiable by reference to (but not solely by reference to)" the use of BSL and ISL, this wording dilutes the importance of sign language. While it is true that Deaf culture includes other aspects like shared experiences, values, history, art, and traditions, BSL and ISL are the foundation of Deaf identity, communication, and access. This clause should affirm the central role of sign language in cultural development, rather than weakening it with vague and potentially confusing language.

Section (2)(a) further weakens the clause by using broad terms like "suitable persons." This leaves open the possibility that classes could be delivered by individuals with only minimal sign language skills. To be effective, language classes must be taught by accredited, fluent teachers — not beginners or those without proper qualifications. This is essential if the Department is serious about improving proficiency and promoting real understanding of BSL and ISL.

Beyond these wording issues, the clause must go further by including mandatory, Deaf-led actions. This should include:

- guaranteed and sustained funding for BSL and ISL education in schools and communities;
- support for Deaf-led organisations, events, and cultural activities;
- and fully accessible family learning programs that reach across Northern Ireland, including rural and underrepresented areas.

Promotion alone is not enough. Real change requires investment, leadership from within the Deaf community, and clear statutory duties that public bodies cannot ignore. Only through such measures can this clause deliver lasting improvements in access, understanding, and inclusion for Deaf people.

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:

In addition to providing access to BSL and ISL classes, there are other approaches to promoting greater use and understanding of both languages. These include:

BSL/ISL Integration in Mainstream Education

Including BSL and ISL in the school curriculum, starting early, would help normalise their use across society. Sign language could be offered as an elective or even a mandatory language option. Early exposure builds broader understanding and acceptance.

Public Sector and Government Engagement

Public bodies — local councils, healthcare services, and government departments — should promote BSL and ISL through outreach, awareness campaigns, and sign language use in official communications. Public service and emergency announcements should be delivered in both spoken language and sign language. Public offices could also employ staff fluent in sign language to ensure inclusive services.

Media & Arts

Encourage media outlets to include BSL/ISL in programming, news, and public events, increasing visibility and normalising its use.

Workplace Training

Employers should offer BSL/ISL training to improve communication and inclusivity, particularly in public-facing sectors like healthcare, education, and customer service.

Support for Deaf-led Initiatives

Fund initiatives that empower the Deaf community to lead cultural events, workshops, and educational campaigns about BSL, ISL, and Deaf culture.

Technology and Digital Access

Promote the development of digital platforms and apps offering sign language dictionaries, learning tools, and on-demand interpretation services.

Partnerships with Higher Education Institutions

Universities and colleges should offer accredited BSL and ISL courses, including interpreter training that covers language proficiency, ethics, and Deaf culture. Deaf studies programs can deepen understanding of Deaf history and identity. Academic partnerships should also drive research into best practices in language education, interpreter training, and policy development.

Improved Pathways in Hospitals and Audiology

Hospitals and audiology services should establish clear referral pathways to ensure families of Deaf babies and children receive expert advice on language options. Doctors and audiologists should not advise on language acquisition, as they are not language specialists. Families should be referred to qualified Deaf professionals, sign language specialists, and Deaf-led organisations, who can provide accurate information about BSL, ISL, Deaf culture, and the benefits of bilingual development. This ensures families can make informed decisions based on linguistic and cultural expertise, not just medical views.

Together, these measures — alongside language classes — will help embed BSL and ISL into daily life, removing barriers, preventing language deprivation, and building a more inclusive society where Deaf people can participate fully and equally.

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, the duty as drafted is too weak to guarantee real equality for Deaf people. The terms "reasonable steps" and consideration of "cost and practicability" leave too much room for interpretation. This flexibility means prescribed organisations could offer solutions they consider "reasonable" — such as providing written transcripts or subtitles instead of sign language interpreters — but these may not fully meet the communication needs of Deaf individuals, who require effective access in their own language.

Accessibility should not be optional or negotiable. Deaf people must have equal access to all services, at any time, without having to request or fight for it. The duty must ensure that access is built in as a fundamental right, not as something left to individual interpretation or dependent on a service provider's budget or convenience.

What is needed is a rights-based duty. This means prescribed organisations must prioritise the right of Deaf people to access services in BSL and ISL without unnecessary barriers. The current approach risks continuing inequalities because it allows for interpretations of what is "reasonable" rather than requiring services to meet the specific communication needs of Deaf individuals.

In addition, this duty must guarantee:

- Free, qualified interpreter provision on demand.
- Clear accountability if services fail to meet access requirements.
- Penalties for non-compliance.
- Regular audits by independent deaf-led organisations.

For real equality, the duty must go beyond vague phrases like "reasonable steps" and focus on clear, enforceable obligations that ensure equal access to services — not just based on what a provider finds practical or affordable.

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:

Yes, Clause 4 is a good starting point, but it must go further to ensure comprehensive inclusion of all public services that directly interact with the public. The current framework should not leave room for exclusions or loopholes, especially when it comes to organisations delivering critical services. The list of prescribed organisations should not be limited but should include all public services that engage directly with the public. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Healthcare and hospitals
- Education institutions
- Local councils
- Police and justice systems
- Emergency services
- Public transport
- Job centres
- Arts and culture institutions

The clause should be clear that the definition of "public body" is broad enough to encompass any organisation that exercises functions of a public

character, including those that may not traditionally be seen as public bodies. This would close any potential gaps.

In addition, the list must be reviewed regularly and updated to include new public-facing organisations, especially as services evolve and expand. This ensures that no public body is excluded, and Deaf individuals have access to services across all sectors. The Department for Communities should be required to consult with relevant Deaf organisations to ensure that the full range of public services is covered.

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, the approach to consultation in Clause 5 is insufficient as drafted. The clause states that the Department for Communities must consult "at least one person or group appearing to the Department to be acting on behalf of the deaf community," but this is too vague and narrow. The Deaf community is diverse, and the consultation process must reflect this diversity by engaging with multiple Deaf-led organisations and representatives from different groups within the community.

It is crucial that the consultation includes not only those who use British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL) but also Deafblind individuals and those with additional needs, who may have distinct perspectives and requirements. Limiting consultation to one person or group does not allow for a broad, inclusive representation of the diverse needs of the Deaf community.

Furthermore, consultation must be:

- Conducted in BSL and ISL to ensure that it is accessible to those who use these languages as their primary mode of communication.
- Ongoing, not a one-off event, to ensure that feedback is continually gathered and incorporated as needs evolve.
- Transparent, with public reports showing how Deaf community feedback has been used to inform guidance and policy development.

The guidance issued under this Chapter must be developed with genuine, broad consultation to reflect the lived experiences and needs of the entire Deaf community. This will help ensure that the guidance is meaningful and responsive to the diverse groups it aims to serve.

Clause 6

Do you support the approach taken in this clause?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

Yes, but the approach must go further. Guidance must not remain purely advisory — it should establish mandatory standards that public bodies are required to meet. Best practice should not be optional or open to broad interpretation; it should define clear, enforceable expectations for accessibility and service delivery. This is essential to ensure that Deaf people have equal access to services in their own language, as a right, not as a favour or optional provision.

Prescribed organisations must be required to develop sign language action plans in genuine partnership with the Deaf community, including those who use BSL, ISL, and Deafblind communication. These plans should be reviewed annually, with progress reported publicly to ensure transparency and accountability.

Staff across all levels must receive regular, ongoing training, including deaf awareness and basic sign language skills, to ensure that services are welcoming and accessible. Crucially, Deaf people themselves should be engaged as experts, trainers, and advisors in shaping these services and the development of guidance.

Without clear obligations and accountability, there is a risk that "best practice" will vary too widely, and real equality of access will not be achieved.

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

Not Answered

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details:

N/A

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:

No, not as currently drafted. While it is appropriate that the Department has the power to make regulations to support the Bill, Clause 7 gives too much room to weaken duties through exceptions and limitations. The power to "limit" obligations based on resources (Clause 7(4)) introduces a significant loophole. Access to services should never be conditional on what a service provider claims they can afford. Deaf people's access to BSL and ISL services must be a protected right, not subject to budgetary constraints.

Any future regulations must be co-produced with multiple Deaf-led organisations, ensuring representation from the full diversity of the Deaf community — including users of BSL, ISL, Deafblind individuals, and those with additional communication needs. This co-production should be a requirement, not left to the Department's discretion.

Equally important, regulations must include strong enforcement mechanisms. This includes independent monitoring, penalties for non-compliance, and accessible routes for Deaf individuals to challenge failures and seek remedies. Without these provisions, rights may remain hollow promises without real power.

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details:

No, I do not fully support Clause 7 in its current form. While the clause gives the Department for Communities important powers to create regulations, there needs to be more clarity and safeguards to ensure that the regulations serve the best interests of the Deaf community.

For example, the clause must ensure that consultations are not only conducted with relevant organisations, but also actively involve Deaf-led organisations and Deaf individuals with lived experience. The process should include a formal public comment period, and reports should be made available in BSL and ISL to ensure accessibility.

These changes will ensure that regulations are not made in isolation, and that they reflect the true needs and voices of the Deaf community.

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, the level of consultation required in Clause 8 is insufficient. The clause's requirement to consult "at least one person or group" acting on behalf of the Deaf community is problematic for several reasons. It is too vague and subjective, leaving room for the Department to decide who represents the community, which could exclude important voices. There should be clear criteria for inclusive representation, ensuring that the consultation process genuinely reflects the diversity of the Deaf community.

The Department must ensure consultation with a broad and diverse range of Deaf-led organisations that represent the full spectrum of the community, including users of BSL, ISL, Deafblind individuals, and those with additional communication needs.

Consultation must be inclusive and accessible, ensuring that it reaches rural and underrepresented groups. Materials must be provided in BSL, ISL, and easy-read formats to ensure all Deaf individuals can participate meaningfully. Additionally, the Department should be required to publicly report on the consultation process, outlining how Deaf community input influenced the final outcome.

Regulations should not proceed without clear, documented evidence of genuine engagement and agreement from the Deaf community. This is crucial to ensure that the regulations reflect the true needs and preferences of the community they are intended to serve.

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:

No — five years is too long between evaluations. A five-year gap allows failures, delays, or gaps in delivery to go unnoticed and unaddressed. Deaf people need tangible progress and real change, and they need it sooner.

The first report should be published within two years of the Bill's commencement to ensure early accountability. Subsequent evaluations should take place every three years to maintain consistent oversight and responsiveness.

In addition to these reports, ongoing feedback should be collected annually from the Deaf community to track progress and gather insights for continuous improvement. All reports must be:

- Made public in BSL, ISL, and English.
- Co-developed with Deaf-led organisations to ensure the reports are truly reflective of the community's needs.
- Used as a tool to trigger improvements, not just filed away without action.

Clause 10

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

Yes — absolutely. Teachers of BSL and ISL must be qualified, fluent, and culturally aware — ideally native signers, with a priority for Deaf individuals. An accreditation scheme is essential to uphold quality and consistency. The scheme should:

- Designed with Deaf teachers and Deaf-led organisations
- Include ISL as well as BSL, ensuring the needs of the broader Deaf community are fully represented.
- Prioritise the training and support of Deaf individuals to become teachers, as they have the lived experience and cultural knowledge necessary to effectively teach sign language.
- Provide full funding for training and support, ensuring Deaf individuals have equal access to opportunities to become accredited teachers.
- Ensure rigorous criteria for accreditation, focusing not just on linguistic proficiency, but also cultural competency, teaching skills, and experience within the Deaf community.
- Include ongoing professional development and regular assessment to ensure teachers maintain high standards, keeping up with any changes or advances in language use and pedagogy.

This accreditation scheme should be comprehensive and accessible, aiming to create a sustainable framework that prioritises Deaf teachers and provides high-quality education in both BSL and ISL.

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 — this is vital. Accredited interpreters ensure that Deaf people have access to accurate, respectful communication. However, accreditation alone isn't enough. We also need:

- A larger pool of interpreters: There is a need to significantly increase the number of qualified interpreters, particularly for out-of-hours access, to ensure that Deaf individuals have timely access to services at all times.
- Continuous and specialised training: Interpreters must receive ongoing professional development to stay current with language evolution and best practices, including specialised areas such as legal, medical, and mental health interpreting to be able to handle complex and sensitive situations with cultural competence.
- Strong complaints and quality assurance processes: To maintain high standards, there must be clear, transparent mechanisms for complaints and quality assurance. These processes should be co-designed with Deaf individuals and Deaf-led organisations to ensure that Deaf people have a voice in

addressing any issues with interpreting services.

· Include Deaf interpreters: It's vital to recognise that Deaf interpreters offer unique perspectives and cultural knowledge that are invaluable to the interpreting process.

Clause 11

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

No

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:

No — Clause 11 is too narrow and risks excluding key members of our community.

How this Bill defines the Deaf community will decide who is protected, who is included, and who gets access. Right now, the wording fails to reflect the full diversity and reality of our community.

Clause 11 says:

(a) individuals who rely for communication on BSL or ISL.

This must go beyond terms like "rely on" or narrow functional descriptions. The Deaf community includes all those whose first or primary language is BSL or ISL — recognising that sign language is not an assistive tool, but a core part of identity and culture. Language, not hearing level, defines the community.

(b) deaf or deafblind people who normally use BSL or ISL for communication (including people who can obtain some or better levels of hearing when assisted by auditory devices).

This must explicitly include deafblind people who use tactile forms of BSL or ISL. Tactile signers have distinct access needs and cannot be left out. Sign language users must all be protected, regardless of hearing status.

(c) children of deaf or deafblind people who habitually or occasionally use BSL or ISL for communication (including children who have some or full hearing).

This language is weak and unclear. CODAs (Children of Deaf Adults) are native signers — BSL or ISL is often their first language, even if they are hearing. They are integral to the sign language community and must be explicitly recognised, not described as "occasional" users.

In addition, the definition must ensure inclusion of:

- Hard of hearing people who use BSL or ISL as part of their communication.
- Deaf signers with additional disabilities or complex needs who use adapted or modified forms of BSL or ISL.

Language is what binds ████ community — not audiograms, devices, or medical labels. If the law defines ████ too narrowly, it risks denying rights and access in practice. Clause 11 must be rewritten to reflect the full, rich, and diverse Deaf community — with no exceptions.

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:

Mostly — but this definition needs to go further to fully protect BSL and ISL as living, diverse languages.

Including tactile and non-visual forms for deafblind users is essential — and this is a welcome step. But the definition must also make clear that:

- BSL and ISL have rich regional variations — they are not uniform or standardised in the way written languages sometimes are. Any definition must respect this natural diversity across different communities.
- BSL and ISL are full, natural languages — with their own grammar, structure, and deep cultural history. They are not simply communication tools, and they must never be reduced to simplified versions like "signed English" or artificial systems that distort their integrity.
- Interpreters, teachers, and services must use authentic BSL/ISL — not watered-down or mixed systems, unless specifically adapted to meet an individual user's needs (e.g., deafblind adaptations or simplified signing for those with additional needs).

This clause must go beyond technical description. It must actively protect BSL and ISL as the real, full, diverse, and living languages of the Deaf community — in all their forms. If the Bill fails to uphold this, it risks eroding the language rights of Deaf individuals, allowing simplified versions of sign language to take hold and undermine cultural integrity, leading to poorer services and access for the Deaf community.

Clause 13

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

No

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:

mNo — this definition is too vague and too limited.

The phrase “by necessity or convenience” is not strong enough. For Deaf people, relying on BSL or ISL is not about convenience — it is about human rights, linguistic identity, and daily survival. This wording risks trivialising sign language use and weakening protections.

The definition must make clear that:

- “Everyday reliance” includes all aspects of life — work, education, healthcare, shopping, leisure, transport, emergencies, parenting, legal matters, and social life.
- Access must be guaranteed 24/7, not just during business hours. Deaf people need interpreters and communication access at night, on weekends, and in emergencies — rights don't stop at 5pm.
- Reliance on sign language is neither temporary nor optional. It is a permanent and central part of Deaf people's lives. The law must reflect that sign language users have the right to full, equal access at all times, without being questioned on how often or how substantially they use their language.

This definition needs to be much stronger and rooted in rights, not vague terms like necessity or convenience. Anything weaker risks leaving Deaf people unprotected in practice.

Any other comments

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details:

- No guaranteed 24/7 access to interpreters
Deaf people live full lives, and communication barriers don't end at 5pm. A publicly funded 24/7 interpreter and communication support system must be available — not just for work and health, but for emergencies, social life, parenting, and personal needs.
- No mention of funding for implementation
The Bill sets out duties but does not guarantee funding. Without this, it risks becoming a paper promise. Deaf people deserve investment equal to what is given to other language communities.
- No legal right to education in sign language
Deaf children and Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs) must have the right to learn in BSL or ISL if it's their first or family language. BSL/ISL must be integrated into the education system, not treated as an add-on. Schools must offer BSL/ISL classes and recognise sign language as a linguistic and cultural right for both Deaf children and hearing CODAs.
- Lack of leadership roles for deaf people
Deaf people must lead at every level. Decision-making roles should be held by Deaf experts, teachers, researchers, and community advocates.

Additional Proposal: Fund a Deaf Centre in Northern Ireland

The Bill should include funding for a Deaf Centre — a Deaf-led space where the community can gather, organise, learn, socialise, and access services in BSL/ISL.

This centre would:

- Promote Deaf identity, culture, and language in an accessible environment.
- Serve as a hub for BSL/ISL education, interpreter training, and Deaf-led services.
- Support youth work, mental health, and community services.
- Host events and programmes that empower the Deaf community, including evenings and weekends.

Just as minority ethnic communities receive public funding for cultural and language-based services, the Deaf community deserves the same support. A Deaf Centre is vital infrastructure for equality and must be a core part of this Bill's delivery.

Deaf Education:

Urgent access to Deaf education must be prioritised as a fundamental human right. Deaf children and young people should not be subjected to a lack of education and/or staff with limited sign language skills, nor should they wait years for necessary resources and language support. To prevent language deprivation, the Department of Education must ensure:

- Specialist Deaf education services are integrated from the outset.
- BSL/ISL is embedded in school curricula, particularly in schools with Deaf pupils.
- Funding is allocated to support language development, early access to sign language, and interpreter provision.

Bilingual education must be the foundation, ensuring Deaf children thrive in both sign language and spoken/written language. Early access to both languages is crucial for cognitive, social, and academic development, preventing language deprivation and reinforcing cultural identity. This approach ensures Deaf children, including Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs), are fully included in their education and community.

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

Text box to enter additional details:

This Bill is a welcome and historic step forward for the rights and recognition of the Deaf community in Northern Ireland. However, there are areas that require stronger commitment, clearer mechanisms, and urgent resourcing to ensure meaningful and lasting impact.

Establishment of a Deaf Centre: The Bill should ensure funding for a Deaf Centre, a community space where Deaf individuals can access services, share culture, and feel a sense of belonging. This would be similar to the government support provided to minority ethnic communities for cultural centres.

Deaf Access Outside Working Hours: Communication access must be available 24/7, including evenings and weekends. Deaf individuals should not be excluded from public life, emergencies, or cultural activities due to limited interpreter availability or costs.

Stronger Accountability and Enforcement: While the Bill places obligations on prescribed organisations, there must be clear consequences for non-compliance and a system for reporting failures to meet reasonable access standards.

Funding Commitments: The effectiveness of the Bill relies on adequate and ring-fenced funding for interpreter services, training, deaf education, and community development. Commitments to financial support must be explicitly outlined or guaranteed through secondary legislation or departmental strategies.

Access to Family and Social Life: Communication access must extend to family life, community events, and leisure activities. Deaf individuals should have access to full participation in their personal and social lives, not just public services.

Deaf Education: The Bill should ensure bilingual education, with equal access to both sign language and spoken/written English, and provide early access to BSL/ISL in nurseries and schools.

Mental Health Access: The Bill should specifically address access to culturally appropriate mental health services, including BSL/ISL-fluent therapists and culturally appropriate services is often lacking and must be improved as part of this legislative change.

Support for Deaf Children and Families: Families of Deaf children must have access to free BSL/ISL classes, Deaf role models, and bilingual support in early education. Language development begins at home and needs to be fully supported.

Support for Deaf Elderly People: There is a critical shortage of care homes for Deaf elderly individuals in Northern Ireland. Many face barriers where staff lack Deaf awareness and sign language skills, leading to isolation and mental health decline. The Bill must address the urgent need for care services and activities are provided in BSL/ISL to ensure Deaf elderly people can live with dignity and full access to care.

This Bill represents a crucial opportunity to remove long-standing communication barriers and uplift the rights, language, and culture of the Deaf community. It must be ambitious and inclusive in both language and practice.