

20 June 2025.

Dear Chair

We would like to thank the Committee for the care and consideration being given to scrutiny of the Sign Language Bill and for the opportunity to provide evidence on 12 June 2025.

Following on from this, regarding the Bill's definition of the deaf community in clause 11, we would highlight the importance of ensuring that:

- The Bill explicitly recognises that **deaf children's relationship with sign language may develop and change over time**, for example, through additional phrasing in clause 2(3) or clause 11(1) (or in regulations or guidance) to state that access to sign language for deaf children should be "in line with individual wishes" or "take account of the evolving use of sign language by children". This should ensure a wide range of deaf children and families are within scope of the Bill.
- The Bill uses consistent phrasing where the use of sign language is referenced and that the phrasing in clause 2(1)(b) of this being **"necessary or convenient"** should be used throughout. This should make sure that the Bill does not unintentionally restrict the range of deaf children and families who use, or wish to use sign language, from accessing the provisions of the Bill.
- The definition of the deaf community provided in the Bill **should only be used for the purposes of the Bill** - that is ensuring access to sign language for those who use, or wish to use, sign language. It is important that the Bill does not inadvertently create a definition of deafness which could be used outside of the scope of the legislation and would exclude deaf children and families who do not use sign language. It may be helpful to consider additional phrasing in clause 11(1) to clarify that "this definition applies only for the purposes of this legislation."

The charity for deaf children with any level of hearing loss.

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We warmly welcome the inclusion of provisions for access to sign language classes in clause 2(2) and access to information and services in sign language in clause 3(1). These will clearly benefit deaf children and families and, as highlighted by Members, we also recognise their potential value for deaf adults who may not currently use sign language. We appreciate that the Committee may wish to explore this further.

During the discussion, we also raised the importance of ensuring the Bill will apply across all areas of children's lives and highlighted that linking the Bill to the broader policy framework for children, such as the Children's Service Co-operation Act which defines clear outcome areas for children's wellbeing across all areas of their lives may be helpful. For example, clause 5(1) could include phrasing that guidance issued by the Department "must have due regard to the Children's Services Co-operation Act" or clause 3 could referenced that prescribed organisations should have "due regard to the Children's Services Co-operation Act in relation to children".

Finally, we would warmly welcome the opportunity for the Committee to meet with some of the deaf children and families we support, so they can share their experiences and views directly with Members.

Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Kind regards,

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