

Reference number

██████████

What is your name?

████████████████████

What is your email address?

██

If you are providing a submission on behalf of an organisation, please state its name.

██████████

(Required) Please review the Committee privacy notice at this link. Please tick here to confirm you have read the notice.

Yes

(Required) Do you consent to your submission being published on the Committee's website and included in the Committee's report? (For signed responses, these will be transcribed into written English before publication)

████████████████████

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.

In addition to the DDA, this Sign Language Act is essential in protecting not just our language, but our culture and heritage as well. Will this bill ensure that?

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.

While teaching sign language is vital, the preservation and continuation of our language and culture require that deaf young people are regularly exposed to the deaf community - and to as large and diverse a group of deaf individuals as possible. Culture and values are passed down through lived community experiences, not language alone.

In order to fully realise this goal, it is crucial that deaf leadership and deaf role models are at the forefront of all initiatives.

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/NO

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

The promotion of sign language can be significantly strengthened through deaf sports, deaf arts, academic research, and cultural heritage projects. We must create high-quality, purpose-driven spaces where the deaf community can gather, celebrate, and empower one another. Deaf-led spaces have a uniquely powerful impact and are fundamental to the vitality of our community, culture, and language.

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? YES/NO

No

Please give details to support your answer.

The term "reasonable" is highly subjective. For example, █████ visited a solicitor to draft █████ will, █████ stated an interpreter was unnecessary. █████ interpretation of "reasonable" was to proceed without one. For █████ the reasonable and necessary accommodation was the provision of a sign language interpreter, which was denied. This illustrates the ambiguity and inequality in the current interpretation of "reasonable."

Clause 4

Do you support the approach taken by Clause 4? YES/NO

No

Please give details to support your answer.

The greatest challenges █████ face are not within the public sector - which generally performs well - but in the private sector. For instance, █████ engaged the same solicitor, █████ bill was higher than that of a hearing client because the interpreter's fee was added █████. This is inappropriate - as a service provider, the solicitor should have absorbed that cost. We urgently need mechanisms to hold the private sector accountable in such instances.

I strongly disagree with DFC unilaterally deciding the list of prescribed bodies. The department does not have the depth of awareness required to understand the needs

of the deaf community. I strongly encourage the Assembly to ensure that such decisions are made only after wide and meaningful consultation with the deaf community, incorporating as many diverse voices as possible.

Clause 5

Do you support the approach to consultation required in clause 5? YES/NO

No

Please give details to support your answer.

While consultation is essential, past practices have demonstrated favouritism by DFC, which must not be allowed to continue. A wide range of voices must be included throughout the process to ensure fairness and transparency.

Clause 6

Do you support the approach taken in this clause? YES/NO

No

Please give details to support your answer.

I completely reject the notion that one person can represent the entire deaf community. What is needed is a strong, representative group with a mechanism to both gather feedback from and report back to the community. This cannot be the SLPG. It must be a restructured and impartial group that truly reflects the deaf community's diverse views.

To succeed, this group must be co-created with the deaf community through open meetings that allow broad participation. We must avoid closed-door decision-making and ensure full transparency. True representation only comes when the wider community is actively involved, especially during critical decision points.

Do you feel there is anything else this Clause should include? YES/NO

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Again, we cannot allow one person or group to speak on behalf of the entire community. There must be an inclusive and structured method to gather feedback from deaf individuals across Northern Ireland, identify key themes, and set priorities accordingly. While this may take time, it is long overdue and must be a priority for the Assembly.

Clause 7

Do you support the provision for the Department for Communities to make regulations detailed in clause 7? YES/NO

No

Please give details to support your answer.

The department does not possess the necessary expertise to make such decisions independently. The proposal to consult only one individual raises serious concerns. This Bill must include a legal requirement for full consultation and a clear accountability mechanism to ensure DFC engages meaningfully with the deaf community. Regulations must be developed in consultation with the community and subject to Assembly scrutiny both before and after implementation. Ongoing monitoring is essential.

Do you support the approach to consultation detailed in clause 7? YES/NO

No

Please give details to support your answer.

It is deeply troubling to suggest that one person could speak for the deaf community. Additionally, consultations must be conducted by deaf individuals with lived experience -without that, the process lacks authenticity and effectiveness.

Clause 8

Do you feel the level of consultation required in clause 8 is sufficient? YES/NO

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Once again, we must emphasise that no single person or group can represent all deaf people. The most appropriate individuals to consult are members of the deaf community themselves.

Clause 9

Do you think evaluating the impact of the Bill in a report every five years is an appropriate length of time? YES/NO

No

Please give details to support your answer.

A five-year reporting cycle is too long. It should be reduced to three years to allow for more timely feedback, evaluation, and improvements.

Clause 10

Do you support the creation of a scheme for accrediting BSL and ISL teachers? YES/NO

No

Please give details to support your answer.

It is critical that teachers of sign language are deaf and hold appropriate qualifications. Those qualifications must be obtained through courses taught by deaf professionals or individuals with deep expertise in sign language.

Do you support the creation of a scheme for accrediting BSL and ISL interpreters? YES/NO

No

Please give details to support your answer.

While the NRCPD functions well, any new training course developed in Northern Ireland must be led and taught by deaf individuals. Unfortunately, we are seeing an increasing number of hearing instructors leading such programmes, including at the MA level. This is concerning. The MA programme currently running at Queen's University is particularly troubling, having excluded the deaf community from key decisions. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] We must ensure a strong and respected deaf presence in any course that directly impacts our community.

Clause 11

Do you agree with the definition of the deaf community provided for in the Bill? YES/NO

No

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

I am unable to provide a response to this question due to lack of clarity.

Clause 12

Do you agree with the definition of BSL and ISL provided for in the Bill? YES/NO

Yes

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

Clause 13

Do you agree with the definition of “everyday reliance” provided in the Bill? YES/NO

Yes

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

Any other comments

Is there anything which you expected the Bill to make provision for which has not been included in the Bill? YES/NO

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

The Bill rightly highlights the importance of teaching deaf children sign language, but that is only one part of their developmental journey. It is equally important that they have access to deaf spaces - particularly in the arts and sports - where they can explore their identity, culture, and mental well-being. If deaf children are to remain in mainstream education, classroom assistants must be qualified to at least Level 6 in sign language. Additionally, we must address persistent issues in access to work, interpreter availability in the private sector, and educate businesses who still refuse to communicate via VRS providers. The private sector must be better informed, and we must create a strong, supportive community for future generations.

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

In healthcare settings, there is a recurring issue: staff often do not know how to book interpreters. This is especially problematic in A&E. Although services like SignVideo and SLI are available, the process remains unclear to staff. Interpreter booking should be straightforward, and relevant information must be easily accessible. Despite existing contracts, the lack of staff awareness results in avoidable complications, which must be addressed urgently.