

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.

No. Need cultured history and the community and rich linguistics

I believe this should not be limited solely to language. It is essential to also include awareness, heritage, history, culture, and linguistics as key components in this context.

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.

The emphasis on education here is welcome, but what deaf children truly need is exposure to a wide range of deaf adults - not only to acquire the language, but to

immerse themselves in the culture and linguistics that are foundational to sign language. Deaf history, culture, and language are carefully and meaningfully passed down across generations. This process requires a strong sense of community and connection. The only effective way for deaf children and their families to understand and embrace the deaf community, and for the child to develop a strong deaf identity, is through deep, ongoing engagement within a vibrant and empowered deaf community.

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

The critical question here is: what is considered “reasonable”? Rather than allowing individual organisations to set their own interpretations, there must be a minimum requirement established. This would help ensure consistency and standardisation. Many deaf sign language users whether BSL or ISL - prefer accessing information through sign language rather than written formats. A mandated minimum for translation of materials into sign languages is essential.

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.

It's unclear who the designated organisations are, or how they've been selected. At this stage, it's difficult to offer a complete response. However, both the public and private sectors must provide interpreters - whether in-person or via VRS. Currently, we face significant barriers in private settings such as hospitals and solicitors, where interpreter services are often unavailable. The term “some” is insufficient; we need comprehensive, consistent access. It is also apparent from this wording that deaf people have not been sufficiently involved in drafting this bill. Greater inclusion of lived experience is essential to address the real-world challenges we face daily.

Clause 4

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Staff who are currently in DfC have no experience of being deaf, which raises the question: how can they make informed decisions on our behalf? The deaf community must be actively and meaningfully involved in this process. We know where access is lacking and what improvements are needed. Decision-making must involve deaf-led organisations and deaf individuals from within the community.

Clause 5

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

My concern is that DFC may proceed without robust deaf representation. All decision-making must be informed by the voices and experiences of deaf individuals. In theory, consultation with organisations is appropriate - but only if it includes strong deaf leadership. It is alarming to read that consultation could involve just one deaf person or one group. A single voice cannot represent the diversity within the deaf community. We are a broad demographic across age, background, experience, and consultation must reflect that diversity.

Clause 6

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

The term "reasonable" again raises concerns. We need enforceable minimum standards to ensure access is guaranteed. Each organisation is being asked to develop its own action plan, but without adequate deaf representation, there is a risk those plans will lack relevance and specificity. This is concerning. There must be close collaboration with deaf organisations and communities throughout. Furthermore, transparency is critical and we must be able to see and understand the guidelines, regulations, and action plans being developed.

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

To reiterate: any final agreements or policies must be created in close partnership with the deaf community. At this point, it is difficult to support proposals when we have not been given access to drafts or any indication of their direction.

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 clause stating the department will have the power to make regulations is deeply concerning. This suggests decisions may be made without collaboration with the deaf community and the Assembly. The language here feels disconnected from our lived reality. Additionally, it appears organisations may be able to cite “affordability” or “practicality” as a reason not to comply and this undermines the entire purpose of regulation. Deaf people are a linguistic minority, not just a disability group, and we often face complete exclusion from information access. Deaf leadership is essential in shaping these regulations to ensure equity and understanding.

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Broad consultation is non-negotiable. The idea that one person could be selected as a sole representative is unacceptable. We would also question the transparency of that process and whether that individual would share information with the wider community to ensure collective input.

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.

Any consultation without deaf presence risks being ineffective or tokenistic. It is becoming increasingly clear from going through the bill that DFC must employ deaf staff members to lead this work. Again, I stress: one individual cannot speak for an entire community. Consultation must involve a diverse and representative group of deaf individuals who reflect the full spectrum of our community.

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

While regular reporting is necessary, I recommend reducing the reporting cycle to every four years to ensure progress is monitored and issues are addressed in a timely manner.

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.

Teachers and interpreters should be considered separately. When it comes to teachers, I strongly advocate for them to be deaf individuals. They possess the cultural, linguistic, and lived expertise that cannot be replicated by hearing educators. Historically, when hearing people have taught sign language without this cultural competence, the outcomes have often been poor. Both hearing and deaf interpreters must be accredited and registered. DFC should collaborate closely with examination and accreditation bodies to uphold standards.

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

We must expand the pool of qualified deaf teachers. This is essential to sustaining high-quality sign language education.

Clause 11

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

Yes

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

This is a complex issue. The term “sign language community” might be more appropriate, referring to those who have a deep connection to the language and use it as their primary mode of communication, whether deaf or deafblind. Ultimately, community membership should be defined by active use and cultural engagement with sign language.

Clause 12

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

No

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

It is crucial to recognise the richness of sign language, including its unique grammar, syntax, and features such as spatial referencing, facial expression, body language, and multi-channel communication. Additionally, we must remember that deafblind individuals access sign language through tactile methods. Their needs and modes of communication are different but equally valid and must be accounted for.

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.

I rely on sign language every day. It is my first and only natural language. Without it, communication becomes extremely difficult. Lip reading is unreliable and taxing, and writing is inefficient and effortful. Sign language is a fundamental necessity for me in all areas of life.

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.

If you consider your daily life, you are constantly receiving information. Deaf individuals, however, miss out on much of this. A simple example is train station announcements - changes to platforms, delays, etc. - which can leave us completely uninformed. While these may seem minor, they have a significant impact. Implementing sign language in public spaces would dramatically improve our ability to access information. There are existing solutions for displaying sign language on screens, and we need to see more of this visibility in public settings.

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

As deaf individuals, we must have equitable access to information and services across society. We know where the gaps are, and we must now focus on creating sustainable solutions but our voices need to be heard. Visibility of our language and consistent access must become the standard as we go about our daily lives - just like anyone else.