

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.

Individual

(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)

Publish in full

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.

The bill is a significant step forward, but I question whether it will bring real change for us at this stage as currently, we don't feel it will. Recognising BSL and ISL as official languages is a positive move, but true progress requires ongoing commitment. Sign language needs to be promoted actively, and our rights must be realised through increased provision in both BSL and ISL. A major concern is the lack of clarity around funding. Without adequate funding, these ambitions will be difficult to achieve and risk becoming symbolic rather than impactful. It is essential to understand how funding will be allocated - will it go solely toward training more interpreters, or will it directly benefit the Deaf community?

Employment remains a critical issue. I personally face barriers at work due to a lack of ATW, and I'm not convinced the bill will address this. While it may be a good starting point, legal protections and enforcement mechanisms are vital as without them, it's just words. So far, what I've read seems promising in theory, but I see little evidence of meaningful changes that differ from current frameworks.

We need more professionals in the public sector with BSL skills. And we do not want solely an increase in interpreters but an increase in Deaf representation. The focus should be on creating opportunities for Deaf individuals to thrive, not just supporting them. We must see Deaf people in roles where they can lead, support, and inspire others within the community.

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.

This bill will help promote BSL, and I strongly believe it must include Deaf leadership at its core. Deaf sign language users should have a central role in all decision-making processes. Unfortunately, the bill lacks clear details on how resources will be allocated, and it does not adequately emphasize Deaf leadership or Deaf culture.

What has been outlined so far does not feel sufficient and I feel we haven't truly been heard. There is a concern that clauses such as "reasonable steps" provide organisations with too much flexibility to avoid real responsibility. We need to ensure that BSL and ISL are made more visible, with Deaf staff embedded across health, social care, and local government sectors, this is where change can take root.

If we are serious about promoting sign language, we must host more Deaf-led events where sign language is visible and celebrated. These should be organised by the Deaf community, and we need Deaf role models to inspire young Deaf children and their families.

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.

There are many ways we could further promote BSL and ISL for instance, ensuring interpreters are consistently available in public services, and increasing sign language visibility in media and on television. Currently, many interpreted programmes are shown late at night, which sends the wrong message about the value of our language.

Prime-time programming featuring BSL and ISL would be much more impactful. It would also be wonderful if more people were trained in BSL and ISL, particularly within public services, education, and business sectors. We need greater celebration

of sign language, as well as more funding for Deaf organisations such as BDA, ADY, and NDCS.

Young Deaf people today often feel disconnected due to a lack of access to older members of the Deaf community - those who serve as mentors and guides, like Deaf parents. Additionally, with advancements in technology such as video relay services (VRS), we must take full advantage of tools that can expand employment opportunities for Deaf individuals.

Creating everyday spaces such as BSL/ISL cafés can help normalise the use of sign language. Events like the Deaf Festival have proven effective in increasing awareness and participation, and it's essential that young children and their families are exposed to sign language early. We must challenge the notion that oralism is best, and help families understand research that shows sign language as a first language supports better literacy outcomes for Deaf children.

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.

Organisations do need to become more accessible to the Deaf community, and while this bill moves in the right direction, it remains weak without enforceable measures. There should be a minimum standard for Deaf access to services, and this must be non-negotiable. We also need strong Deaf representation in all decisions and discussions.

The lack of enforcement mechanisms raises doubts about the bill's potential to enact real change. The absence of clear guidance, regulations, and costing details further clouds what exactly we are agreeing to. We don't know what funds are available or how they will be used.

Monitoring and accountability must be defined, who will ensure that DfC spending is effective and fair? Personally, many of the barriers I face are in the private sector and daily life, not just within public services. We need to broaden the scope to ensure a wider range of organisations comply.

Simple solutions, such as QR codes in public spaces linked to centralised VRS platforms, could make a huge difference. Action plans are valuable, but they must be backed up with comprehensive training across all sectors.

Clause 4

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

Please give details to support your answer.

Clause 5

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

Please give details to support your answer.

Clause 6

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

Please give details to support your answer.

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

Please give details to support your answer.

Clause 7

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

Please give details to support your answer.

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

Please give details to support your answer.

Clause 8

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

Please give details to support your answer.

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

Please give details to support your answer.

Clause 10

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

Please give details to support your answer.

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

Please give details to support your answer.

Clause 11

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

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

Clause 12

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

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

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

Please give details to support your answer.

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