



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

**Committee for Finance
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To: Kathy O’Hanlon, Clerk to the Justice Committee

From: Peter Hall, Clerk to the Finance Committee

Date: 30th April 2026

Subject: Jade’s law

Dear Kathy,

At its meeting of 29th April 2026, the Finance Committee noted your correspondence of 24th April regarding any potential policy development work in the area of Jade’s Law. The Committee has been working on this issue and considered a response from the Minister of Finance at that meeting in which he states that he is in support of the various calls for reform that have been presented to him and is committed to legislating to bring similar reform to bear in Northern Ireland.

The Committee agreed to copy the Minister’s correspondence to the Committee for Justice

You will wish to bring this to the attention of your Committee.

Regards,

**Peter Hall
Clerk to the Committee for Finance**

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From the Minister of Finance

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Matthew, a chara

JADE'S LAW – PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Finance Committee and my Department have both received correspondence recently relating to the introduction of what is known as Jade's Law in this jurisdiction. The issue has also been the subject of a number of recent Assembly questions from MLAs from a range of political parties, and I am aware of calls for reform from the family and friends of Amy Doherty, who was tragically killed in Derry. Jade's Law, in England and Wales, relates to provisions in that jurisdiction which suspend parental responsibility (PR) in cases where a person has been convicted of murder or voluntary manslaughter and the victim was a person with whom they shared PR.

I asked officials within my Department for detailed briefing on this issue and have now considered the matter further. I support the various calls for reform that have been presented to me recently and I am committed to legislating to bring similar reform to bear in the North.

The provisions in England and Wales were contained in an amendment to the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 (section 18). My officials have liaised with counterparts in the Ministry of Justice about this and it is apparent that a simple read across here will not be legally effective. Differences in our court structures, particularly on the family law side, will need to be considered carefully. In addition, whilst the provisions were placed on the statute books in England and Wales in 2024, some 2 years later they have yet to be commenced. I understand that implementation is proving to be complex, and involves a range of different stakeholders and agencies, and additional changes to procedures, that the Ministry of Justice are carefully working through. It is therefore

not a quick fix in that jurisdiction, and I have borne that in mind as I consider next steps here.

Suspending parental responsibility in cases of murder and voluntary manslaughter are not the only aspects of reform that have been considered in England. Amendments to the Victims and Courts Bill aim to extend similar provisions in cases relating to conviction of a person who has committed serious child sexual abuse and other related matters. Additionally, officials in my Department have been giving early consideration to other discrete areas of family law reform that could form part of future legislation.

Bearing all this in mind, I have asked my officials to undertake the detailed policy development that is required across a suite of parental responsibility/family law matters with a view to developing legislation that will be ready in the very early part of the next mandate. That mandate is not far off and I believe that with the correct engagement with the range of stakeholders being undertaken at this stage, we will achieve the necessary buy-in from all of those with an interest in these extremely important policy issues. It is right that we seek to make a meaningful difference to the lives of people affected – particularly those impacted by the scourge of femicide in our community. 30 women murdered over the past number of years is a damning statistic, and reform of this nature will hopefully send a very clear message as well as providing additional protections for grieving families.

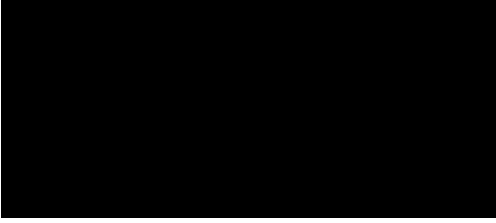
I consider that this approach – considered policy development, taking into account other related issues and developing a composite Bill for introduction in the new mandate – will create good and workable law. Part of sensible government is planning ahead to get things right, rather than rushing in to legislate and then considering the impacts later. The experience from England and Wales on this matter clearly shows this. While I appreciate there will be those who want to see action sooner, the reality is that the drafting of a Bill that would deal with Jade's law alone would still take time and something of this import needs careful consideration and consultation.

With the issue also being cross-cutting – we will, in relation to aspects of parental responsibility be asking criminal courts to consider family law matters – I will be corresponding shortly with the Justice Minister to get early agreement to proceed with work.

It is my view that this represents the most pragmatic way forward. With strong legislative provisions in mind, and careful engagement with the courts, the police, the PPS, and the judiciary, as well as victims and their representatives, I believe we can make a tangible difference and be ready to bring into operation a strong set of family law reforms.

The Civil Law Reform team within my Department will lead on developing the policy and will be available to brief the Committee as it frames proposals for my consideration over the coming months.

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**JOHN O'DOWD MLA
MINISTER OF FINANCE**