



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs**

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**From:** Dr Janice Thomson, Clerk to the Committee for Agriculture,  
Environment and Rural Affairs

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

**Date:** 1 May 2026

**Subject:** The Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill

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**Dear Kathy O'Hanlon**

The Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs met on 16 April 2026 and considered your memo in respect of The Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill, seeking any response the Committee wishes to make by 7 May 2026. The Committee further met on 30 April 2026 and agree to provide the following response.

The Committee noted that there are no provisions relating specifically to agriculture, rural development or environmental protection in the Bill and that rural impacts were screened out during the policy development process, with the Department concluding that the Bill applies equally across urban and rural areas. However, the Committee requests that the Justice Committee consider the following matters during its Committee Stage.

**Rural Communities and Sentencing Reform**

The expansion of community-based requirements within suspended sentences is provided for in Part 2 of the Bill, in particular clause 4(2) and clauses 8–10, together with Schedules 1 and 2, which broaden the range of eligible requirements and strengthen the courts' powers to impose, vary and add such requirements to suspended sentence orders.

The Committee wish to highlight that the provisions expanding the use of community-based requirements within suspended sentences may have practical implications for rural communities, particularly around availability of unpaid work placements and access to supervision and rehabilitative services.

### **Public Workers**

Provision for assaults on public workers is made in Part 6 of the Bill, in particular clauses 37 to 39, supported by consequential amendments in Schedule 7.

The new offence of assaulting a public worker and related aggravating factors apply broadly to those providing public services and the Committee wishes to highlight that this will include delivering services in rural areas and in agricultural or environmental contexts, such as inspectors or enforcement officers.

Regards

**Dr Janice Thompson**

Clerk to the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs