

Summary of Written Submission – Peter Dolan

Criminal Justice (Sentencing, Etc.) Bill 2026 – Part 7 (Road Traffic Offences), clause 41

Key Recommendation

- Amend Clause 41 to increase the maximum sentence for:
 - Causing death by dangerous driving, and
 - Causing death by careless driving while under the influence of drink or drugs
- Increase the current maximum sentence from 14 years' imprisonment to:
 - Life imprisonment (preferred option), or
 - At least 20 years' imprisonment if life imprisonment is not supported.

1. Background and Personal Context

- The tragic death of our son Enda Dolan, aged 18, who was killed by a drunk driver while walking on a pavement in Belfast.

2. Parity with England and Wales

- Northern Ireland's maximum sentence currently remains 14 years, while England and Wales have increased the maximum penalty to life imprisonment.

3. Developments in England and Wales

- The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 increased maximum sentences to life imprisonment for:
 - Causing death by dangerous driving.
 - Causing death by careless driving while under the influence of drink or drugs.

4. Seriousness of the Offence

- A vehicle operated by a grossly intoxicated, drug-impaired or recklessly dangerous driver can be as lethal as a conventional weapon.

5. Sentencing Should Reflect Culpability

- Courts should have access to stronger sentencing powers for the most serious cases.

6. Strengthening Public Trust in the Justice System

- Current sentencing levels can be perceived as disproportionate when compared with the loss of life caused.

7. Safeguarding Communities and Deterring Offending.

- Stronger sentencing.

Conclusion

- Support the amendment to the Bill to provide a maximum penalty of at least 20 years, and preferably LIFE, for the most serious cases involving death caused by dangerous driving.