

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE JUSTICE MINISTER



Department of
Justice

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt

Mánnystrie O tha Laa

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Paul Frew MLA
Chair, Committee for Justice
Room 242
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26 June 2026

Dear Paul,

Deepfake Amendment: way forward

Thank you for your letter of 18 May 2026 and to the Committee for considering this matter further.

I am grateful for the Committee's continued support of this important work area and I very much welcome its willingness to continue work with my Department as constructively as possible. This is important to ensuring that a robust and comprehensive approach can be taken to dealing with the range of associated behaviours involved and which the legislative proposals would seek to address.

I am conscious of the independence of the Speaker to determine scope and the uncertainty this brings to progressing provision as planned.

However, my hope would be that with full and constructive engagement of the provision with the Committee and together with the significant support for the need to legislate in this important area across the Assembly more generally, this might assist matters going forward. I know of the urgency expressed by some in providing protection to victims of

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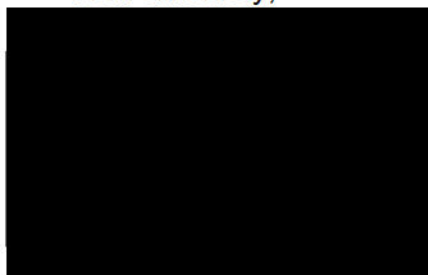
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deepfakes in this jurisdiction so as to ensure they are afforded no lesser protection than that currently available across the wider UK. Societal attitudes to this behaviour are becoming ever more normalised and cases continue to increase at a worrying rate due to our evolving technological landscape.

I would, therefore, be keen to progress the provision for inclusion in the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill at this stage and I look forward to discussing this with you and wider Committee members on 2 July.

Your sincerely,



**NAOMI LONG
MINISTER OF JUSTICE**



**Northern Ireland Assembly
Committee for Justice**

Naomi Long MLA
Minister of Justice
Department of Justice
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18 May 2026

Dear Minister

Deepfake Amendment

Thank you for your letter of 11 May 2026 providing an update on the way forward in respect of the deepfake amendment. The Committee discussed the update and your proposed approach at its meeting on 14 May.

Members welcomed the high level overview of the responses to the consultation and what it is intended will be captured in the deepfake provisions. The Committee reiterated its intention to work as constructively with the Department as possible on this matter, and recognises that your proposal to bring the provisions as an amendment to the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill may allow time for consideration that the Committee would not have had if the amendment had been brought at the Further Consideration Stage of the Justice Bill. In the context of general discussion, my intent was to convey that if you were proceeding with deepfake law, at the very least the Committee would want as much sight of amendments as possible, as opposed to signifying this approach would work.

As you have noted, this is a complex issue, and the Committee will not be able to begin its detailed consideration until the full outcome of the consultation and the text of the draft amendment are available.

Turning to your proposed approach, I mentioned in my letter of 1 May that the Committee believed that each of the options outlined at our informal meeting of 28 April carried risks. With regard to the Sentencing Bill, a key risk may be that the amendment may not fall within scope of that Bill unless the ultimate purpose is sentencing.

While criminal offences are inserted in the Bill as introduced, these appear to be for the intention of paving the way for aggravators for sentencing or are otherwise linked to sentencing matters. It is not clear if that would be the case for a standalone amendment to create a new criminal offence for deepfake. The Committee suggested that you may wish to ensure that this risk has been robustly considered before proceeding.

The scope of legislation is ultimately a matter for the Speaker and it is not for the Committee to fetter his discretion. It appears to us that the risk of carrying out work which may not be able to progress in the manner set out is a real one. It is not unprecedented for ministerial amendments to be deemed beyond the scope of a Bill and therefore inadmissible to be selected for debate at Consideration Stage.

Finally, Members agreed to invite you to attend Committee to discuss the deepfake provisions and proposed approach further. I would be grateful if your officials could contact the Clerk to make the necessary arrangements.

Yours sincerely



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Chair of the Committee for Justice

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