

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE JUSTICE MINISTER



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Kathy O'Hanlon
Clerk to the Justice Committee
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
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Our ref: JCP\25\120

23 May 2025

Dear Kathy,

Justice Bill: Reasonable Chastisement/Equal Protection

Thank you for your letter of 8 May 2025 in which you asked the Department for details of any engagement with colleagues in the Department of Health on the defence of reasonable chastisement and for an indication of whether this matter is likely to be progressed by the Department(s) in the future.

The Minister is fully supportive of changing the law here in Northern Ireland and met previously with both the Health Minister and the then Finance Minister in July 2024, who were supportive of her proposal. As the issue is broader than criminal justice and therefore cuts across the responsibilities of several departments, any change to the law will require Executive agreement, particularly in areas such as family support and family law. An Executive paper on proposals to remove the defence was circulated in October 2024. The paper received support from some Ministers but did not make it on to the agenda for any Executive meeting.

Despite these efforts, the Minister has not been able to secure the cross-Executive agreement needed to deliver a change in the law but will continue to work with Executive

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colleagues to seek their support to repeal the defence of reasonable chastisement here in Northern Ireland and move towards a position of equal protection for children.

The Department of Health continues to play an important role in supporting parents and carers of children and young people, in particular to promote positive parenting behaviours.

A range of family and parenting support services are already available across Northern Ireland, funded by the Department of Health. They include investment in the Parentline NI service, the family support online directory of services and the network of 29 Family Support Hubs.



**DAVID GRAHAM
DALO**



**Northern Ireland Assembly
Committee for Justice**

David Graham
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08 May 2025

Justice Bill – Reasonable Chastisement/Equal Protection

Dear David

At its meeting on 1 May 2025, the Committee considered a response from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) in follow up to the oral evidence session on the Justice Bill.

One issue in NICCY's response related to the defence of reasonable chastisement of children and affording children equal protection.

The Committee agreed to ask if the Department for details of any engagement with colleagues in the Department of Health on this issue and for an indication of whether this matter is likely to be progressed by the Department(s) in the future.

I should appreciate a response by 23 May 2025.

Yours sincerely

Kathy O'Hanlon

**Kathy O'Hanlon
Clerk to the Committee for Justice**