

Submitted to Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill
Submitted on 2026-07-07 19:48:14

Introduction

Confirmation of having read the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee's Privacy Notice.

I confirm that I have read the privacy notice.:

Yes

What is your name?

Name:

[REDACTED]

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If you are providing a submission on behalf of an organisation or business, please state its name.

Organisation:

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The Committee for Justice has agreed to publish all responses as part of the survey results. If you would like to have your survey results anonymised and for us not to publish your name or organisation, please indicate so here.

I am content for my information, including details of my name and organisation, to be published in the survey results., I would like my views to be anonymous and understand that my name and organisation details will be withheld, along with any identifiers in the response, but my views will still be published.

Clauses 1 and 2 - The Commissioner

Clause 1 establishes the Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses of Crime for Northern Ireland, who will be appointed by the Department of Justice. It introduces Schedule 1 which relates to the constitution and operation of the Commissioner and the office. Do you agree with Clause 1 and Schedule 1 of the Bill?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree with Clause 1 and the establishment of the Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses. However, I believe the role should explicitly consider victims and families affected by domestic abuse-related suicide. Current systems in Northern Ireland do not formally identify or record suicides where domestic abuse or coercive control may have been a contributing factor. This creates a gap in victim recognition and limits opportunities for learning, prevention and accountability. The Commissioner should have the ability to engage with and represent families affected by these deaths to ensure their experiences inform future policy and legislative development.

Clause 2 provides that the principal aim of the Commissioner is to promote the interests of victims and witnesses. Do you agree with Clause 2 of the Bill?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree with Clause 2 and the aim of promoting the interests of victims and witnesses. However, it is important that the definition of victims is broad enough to include families bereaved following a suicide where domestic abuse or coercive control may have been a contributing factor. These families often face significant barriers in seeking recognition, support and answers. The Commissioner should be empowered to identify emerging gaps in victim services and advocate for groups whose experiences are not currently recognised within existing criminal justice frameworks.

Do you have anything further to add on Clause 1 or 2 or Schedule 1 of the Bill?

Yes

Please provide any further information relating to Clause 1 here::

I welcome the creation of an independent Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses. I would encourage consideration of a specific function allowing the Commissioner to investigate, report on and make recommendations regarding categories of victims who may currently fall outside existing recognition

mechanisms. This would include families affected by domestic abuse-related suicide. Recent correspondence from the Department of Justice has confirmed that Northern Ireland currently has no single mechanism to identify, record or review such deaths. As a result, potential lessons for prevention, safeguarding and accountability may be missed. The Commissioner could play an important role in highlighting these gaps and ensuring that all victims are visible within the justice system.

☐ When abuse leads to suicide, the law must recognise it.

Clauses 3 to 8 - Functions of the Commissioner

Clause 3 provides that the Commissioner must: promote an understanding of the rights of victims and witnesses and an awareness of matters relating to their interest; keep the law and practice relating to victims and witnesses under review to ensure adequacy and effectiveness; advise the Northern Ireland Executive or Departments on issues concerning victims and witnesses; and must take steps to raise awareness of the role and functions of the Commissioner, encourage victims and witnesses to engage with their office and seek the views of victims and witnesses regarding the exercise of the Commissioner's functions. Do you agree with these as suitable for the general duties for the role of Commissioner?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree with the duties outlined in Clause 3. The Commissioner should promote awareness of victims' rights, review the effectiveness of laws and practices affecting victims, and engage directly with victims and bereaved families. I would encourage the Commissioner to pay particular attention to groups whose experiences may not currently be fully recognised within the justice system. This includes families bereaved following a suicide where domestic abuse or coercive control may have been a contributing factor. Recent correspondence from the Department of Justice has confirmed that Northern Ireland currently has no single mechanism to identify, record or review such deaths. The Commissioner could play an important role in highlighting these gaps and advocating for improvements.

Clause 4 provides the general powers of the Commissioner including the power to conduct, fund or support research or education activities; to compile information; provide advice and information; publish any matter concerning the interests of victims or witnesses of crime; and to make representations and recommendations to any body or person concerning the interest of victims or witnesses. Do you agree with the general powers as outlined in Clause 4?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree with the powers outlined in Clause 4. The ability to conduct research, publish findings and make recommendations is essential if the Commissioner is to identify gaps in support and improve outcomes for victims. These powers should be used to examine areas where victims or bereaved families may not currently receive adequate recognition, support or representation. Research into domestic abuse-related suicides and the experiences of affected families could contribute significantly to learning, prevention and policy development.

Are there any other powers that you believe the Commissioner should have?

Yes

If yes, what should they be?:

The Commissioner should have the explicit power to undertake thematic reviews into emerging or under-recognised victim issues and to make recommendations to government departments and criminal justice agencies. Consideration should also be given to allowing the Commissioner to request information from public bodies where necessary to investigate systemic concerns affecting victims and witnesses. This would help ensure that groups who may currently fall outside existing recognition mechanisms are not overlooked.

Clause 5 stipulates that the Commissioner must review the operation and the effectiveness of the Victim and the Witness Charters at least every 3 years or as directed by the Department; prepare a report and, in doing so, consulting the Department and any other person the Commissioner considers appropriate; and publish a report. . Do you agree with the provisions at Clause 5?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree with Clause 5. Regular reviews are essential to ensure that the Victim and Witness Charters remain effective and reflect the experiences of all victims. Reviews should consider whether any categories of victims or bereaved families are unintentionally excluded from support, recognition or engagement. This process should identify emerging issues and promote continuous improvement across victim services.

Clause 6 provides that the Commissioner may issue guidance on best practice in relation to any matter concerning the interests of victims and witnesses and that this must be taken into regard by persons exercising public functions; and makes provision in respect of revision, consultation and publication of the guidance. It also prohibits the Commissioner from issuing guidance to a court or tribunal. Do you agree with Clause 6 of the Bill?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree with Clause 6. The power to issue guidance will help improve consistency and standards across public services. Guidance should encourage agencies to identify gaps in victim support, promote trauma-informed approaches and improve understanding of complex forms of harm, including coercive control and domestic abuse. This can help ensure that victims and families receive appropriate recognition and support.

Clause 7 grants the Commissioner the power to establish advisory groups to provide support and information to the Commissioner on matters related to the Commissioner's functions. The Commissioner will determine membership of the group(s) and how expenses will be reimbursed. The Commissioner may also determine the procedure of any advisory group. Do you agree that the Commissioner should have the power to establish advisory groups?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree that the Commissioner should have the power to establish advisory groups. Advisory groups will provide valuable expertise, lived experience and independent perspectives that can strengthen the Commissioner's work. Membership should include a diverse range of organisations and individuals with direct experience of the issues affecting victims and witnesses.

Do you agree that the Commissioner should have the power to determine the membership of advisory groups?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree that the Commissioner should determine membership, provided the process is transparent and seeks balanced representation. Membership should include organisations supporting victims of crime, domestic abuse services, victim advocates, mental health organisations, legal experts and individuals with lived experience. This will help ensure that a broad range of victim experiences are represented.

Clause 8 provides that the Commissioner cannot become involved in an individual case or intervene in criminal or related proceedings. Do you support the restriction proposed in Clause 8?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I support the restriction proposed in Clause 8. The Commissioner should focus on strategic oversight, policy development and systemic improvement rather than involvement in individual cases. However, the Commissioner should be able to identify patterns and recurring issues arising from individual experiences and use this information to inform recommendations for change.

Do you have anything further to add in relation to Clauses 3 to 8 of the Bill?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I welcome the establishment of a Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses and believe the role has the potential to significantly strengthen the voice of victims within Northern Ireland's justice system.

As the Bill progresses, I would encourage consideration of how the Commissioner can identify and address gaps in victim recognition. Recent correspondence from the Department of Justice has confirmed that Northern Ireland currently has no single mechanism to identify, record or review suicides where domestic abuse or coercive control may have been a contributing factor.

This means that some bereaved families may struggle to obtain recognition, support and opportunities for learning and prevention.

The Commissioner could play an important role in identifying such gaps, promoting awareness and making recommendations to improve outcomes for victims and families.

A truly effective Commissioner should ensure that no victim, and no family affected by serious harm linked to crime or abuse, remains invisible within the justice system.

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Clauses 9 to 15 - Charter service providers

Clause 9 lists the criminal justice agencies which are specified as "charter service providers". Do you agree with the list of bodies specified in Clause 9?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree with the list of criminal justice agencies specified in Clause 9. However, consideration should be given to ensuring that all organisations with significant responsibilities towards victims and witnesses are appropriately represented. Effective collaboration between agencies is essential to delivering consistent support and ensuring that victims do not fall through gaps between services.

Do you believe that there are any other criminal justice agencies that should be added to the list?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

Consideration should be given to including relevant statutory bodies and organisations involved in supporting victims beyond the traditional criminal justice system, particularly where victims may interact with coronial, health, safeguarding or domestic abuse services. This may help ensure a more holistic approach to victim support and improve information sharing where appropriate.

Do you believe that any of the agencies listed should be removed from the list?

No

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I do not believe any agencies should be removed. Strong partnership working and accountability across all relevant organisations is necessary to ensure victims receive appropriate support and services.

Clause 10 requires the Commissioner to monitor compliance with the Victim Charter and enables the Commissioner to request information from a charter service provider. It requires charter service providers to comply with such a request as far as is practical. Do you agree with the purpose stated for Clause 10?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree with Clause 10. The Commissioner must have the ability to monitor compliance and request information in order to effectively assess whether victims' rights and entitlements are being delivered in practice. Meaningful oversight is only possible where accurate information can be obtained from relevant organisations.

Clause 11 provides that charter service providers must collect and retain data in relation to the provision of services set out in the Victims Charter and to provide statistical information to the Commissioner. The Department must make regulations setting out how the particular statistics, or category of statistics to be provided to the Commissioner are to be determined. The Department must consult with the Commissioner and charter services providers it considers appropriate before making regulations, which will be subject to the draft affirmative procedure. Do you agree with the intent behind Clause 11?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I strongly support Clause 11. Data collection is essential for understanding victim experiences, identifying trends, recognising gaps in services and informing future policy decisions. The absence of reliable data can result in certain victim groups remaining invisible within the system.

Where possible, data collection should support the identification of emerging issues and categories of victims whose experiences may not currently be fully recognised or understood.

Clause 12 allows the Department to extend the provisions regarding the Victim Charter at Clauses 10 and 11 to the Witness Charter. Are you content with Clause 12?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree with Clause 12. Witnesses play a vital role within the justice system and should benefit from the same commitment to accountability, monitoring and service improvement as victims.

Clause 13 relates to co-operation with the Commissioner and states a charter service provider must comply or provide the reasons for non-compliance. Do you have any comments on Clause 13?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree with Clause 13. The Commissioner's ability to carry out their functions depends on meaningful co-operation from charter service providers. Requiring organisations to comply or explain any refusal promotes transparency, accountability and public confidence.

Clause 14 relates to the duty to record and report on complaints received in each financial year that relate to alleged breaches of Victim or Witness Charter entitlements and the outcome of each complaint. Do you agree with Clause 14 of the Bill?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree with Clause 14. Recording and reporting complaints provides valuable insight into how effectively victim and witness rights are being upheld. Complaint data should be used not only to identify service failures but also to inform improvements and prevent recurring issues. Transparency in complaint reporting will help strengthen accountability across the system.

Clause 15 relates to the disclosure of information between charter service providers and the Commissioner if the information would assist or enable the Commissioner to carry out their functions. These disclosure powers are subject to restrictions set out in subsections (3) to (5) – namely, they do not override patient confidentiality, data protection legislation or prohibitions on disclosure in the Investigatory Powers Act 2016. The sharing of information does not affect any other power that exists to disclose information. Do you support the intention behind Clause 15?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree with Clause 15. The Commissioner requires access to appropriate information in order to carry out their functions effectively. The safeguards relating to patient confidentiality, data protection and legal restrictions appear appropriate and help balance accountability with privacy rights.

Do you believe that there should be other restrictions to the disclosure of information other than those set out in subsections (3) to (5)?

No

If yes, what other restrictions should be placed on the disclosure of information between charter service providers and the Commissioner?

Please provide information to support your answer here::

The restrictions currently outlined appear sufficient. It is important that the Commissioner can access the information necessary to identify systemic issues affecting victims and witnesses while continuing to comply with existing legal protections relating to privacy, confidentiality and ongoing proceedings.

Do you have anything further to add in relation to Clauses 9 to 15 of the Bill?

Not Answered

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I welcome the emphasis within these clauses on accountability, transparency, data collection and inter-agency co-operation. These measures will help ensure that the Commissioner is able to identify gaps in services, monitor compliance and make evidence-based recommendations for improvement.

In particular, robust data collection and reporting are essential if policymakers are to understand the experiences of all victims and bereaved families. Recent correspondence from the Department of Justice has confirmed that Northern Ireland currently has no single mechanism to identify, record or review suicides where domestic abuse or coercive control may have been a contributing factor.

This demonstrates how the absence of data can result in victims and families becoming effectively invisible within existing systems. The Commissioner should be empowered to identify such gaps and recommend improvements that strengthen recognition, support, learning and prevention.

Effective victim policy depends on accurate information. If harms are not recognised and recorded, opportunities for accountability, support and prevention can be lost.

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Clauses 16 to 19 - Strategic plan, business plans and annual reports

Clauses 16 requires the Commissioner to prepare a strategic plan setting out objectives and priorities, how they will be achieved and how the outcomes will be monitored. The Commissioner must specify groups of victims and witnesses to whom they will have particular regard and why. The Commissioner may review the strategic plan at any time during their tenure. Clause 17 requires the Commissioner to send an annual business plan to the Department of Justice setting out how they propose to carry out the Commissioner's functions. Do you agree with the provisions at Clauses 16 and 17?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree with Clauses 16 and 17. Strategic planning and annual business plans are important for ensuring accountability, transparency and measurable outcomes. I particularly welcome the requirement for the Commissioner to identify groups of victims and witnesses to whom particular regard will be given.

I would encourage the Commissioner to consider groups whose experiences may currently be under-recognised within the justice system. This includes families bereaved following a suicide where domestic abuse or coercive control may have been a contributing factor. Recent correspondence from the Department of Justice has confirmed that Northern Ireland currently has no single mechanism to identify, record or review such deaths. The strategic plan should allow the Commissioner to identify emerging issues, address gaps in victim recognition and ensure that overlooked groups are not excluded from future priorities.

Clause 18 requires the Commissioner to produce an annual report and sets out what it must include. Do you agree with Clause 18?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree with Clause 18. Annual reporting is essential for transparency and accountability. Reports should not only describe activities undertaken but also identify systemic issues affecting victims and witnesses, progress made against objectives and areas where further action is required.

The annual report should provide an opportunity to highlight gaps in recognition, support and services affecting victims and bereaved families. It should also identify areas where additional research, policy development or legislative reform may be required to improve outcomes.

Clause 19 places a duty on charter service providers to respond to recommendations made in the Commissioner's annual report and state how they will be addressed, or provide reasons why a charter service provider does not propose to act on a recommendation. The response must be published within 56 days of the publication of the Commissioner's report. Do you agree with the intent and purposes of Clause 19 of the Bill?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I strongly agree with Clause 19. Requiring charter service providers to formally respond to recommendations will help ensure that concerns raised by the Commissioner receive proper consideration and cannot simply be ignored.

The requirement to publish responses promotes transparency and accountability and allows victims, families and the wider public to understand what action is being taken. This provision will help drive meaningful improvements across the justice system and strengthen confidence in the Commissioner's role.

Do you have anything further to add on Clauses 16 to 19 of the Bill regarding strategic plans, business plans and annual reports?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I welcome the provisions relating to strategic plans, business plans and annual reporting. Together, these measures will help ensure that the Commissioner operates transparently, sets clear priorities and is able to demonstrate progress on behalf of victims and witnesses.

I would encourage consideration of how annual plans and reports can be used to identify groups whose experiences may not currently be fully recognised within existing systems. Recent correspondence from the Department of Justice has confirmed that Northern Ireland does not currently have a mechanism to identify, record or review suicides where domestic abuse or coercive control may have been a contributing factor.

As a result, opportunities for learning, prevention and accountability may be missed. The Commissioner could play an important role in highlighting such gaps, recommending improvements and ensuring that all victims and bereaved families have a voice within the justice system.

Effective reporting should not only record what has been achieved, but also identify where victims remain unseen, unheard or unsupported.

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Clauses 20 to 23 - Supplementary

Clause 20 provides that publications made by the Commissioner under the Act are privileged and exempt from challenge under the law of defamation. Do you support Clause 20 of the Act?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree with Clause 20. The Commissioner must be able to publish findings, recommendations and reports without fear of legal challenge, provided those publications are produced lawfully and in accordance with their statutory functions. This protection is important to ensure independence, transparency and accountability, particularly where systemic failures or areas requiring reform are identified.

Clauses 21 sets out the meaning of “victim” for the purposes of Part 1 of the Bill. Do you agree with Clause 21?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree with the need for a clear definition of "victim". However, it is important that the definition is interpreted broadly enough to recognise the experiences of bereaved family members who may be significantly affected by criminal behaviour, abuse or coercive control.

Consideration should be given to ensuring that families bereaved following a suicide where domestic abuse or coercive control may have been a contributing factor are not excluded from engagement, support or representation. Recent correspondence from the Department of Justice has confirmed that Northern Ireland currently has no single mechanism to identify, record or review such deaths. A broad and inclusive approach to victim recognition will help ensure that no affected families are left without a voice.

Clause 22 defines the terms used in Part 1; and Clause 23 introduces Schedule 2 which makes minor and consequential amendments in connection with Part 1 of the Bill. Do you have any comments to make on Clauses 22 or 23?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I have no specific concerns regarding the definitions and consequential amendments contained within Clauses 22 and 23. However, I would encourage ongoing review of legislative definitions to ensure that emerging forms of victimisation and harm are appropriately recognised and reflected within policy and practice.

Do you have anything further to add in relation to the supplementary provisions at Clauses 20 to 23 of the Bill?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I welcome the supplementary provisions contained within Clauses 20 to 23 and believe they help support the overall effectiveness of the Bill.

In particular, I would encourage continued consideration of how victims are defined and recognised across the justice system. Recognition is often the first step towards support, accountability and prevention.

Where categories of victims or bereaved families are not identified within existing systems, there is a risk that their experiences remain unseen and opportunities for learning are missed.

Recent correspondence from the Department of Justice has confirmed that Northern Ireland currently has no single mechanism to identify, record or review suicides where domestic abuse or coercive control may have been a contributing factor. This highlights the importance of ensuring that the Commissioner has the ability to identify gaps in victim recognition and bring attention to emerging issues affecting victims and families.

The success of this legislation should ultimately be measured not only by the structures it creates, but by its ability to ensure that every victim is heard, recognised and represented.

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Clauses 24 to 27 - Criminal evidence and procedure

Clause 24 of the Bill provides that witnesses are eligible for assistance with giving evidence in cases dealing with an offence involving aggravation by hostility. It inserts into the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 Order that the definition of “an offence involving aggravation by hostility” means an offence of any kind in respect of which an allegation that the offence is aggravated by hostility is specified alongside the offence in accordance with section 33(1) of the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Act 2027 [see more information]. Do you agree with the provisions in Clause 24?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree with Clause 24. Witnesses in cases involving hostility-aggravated offences can face significant anxiety, intimidation and fear when participating in the justice process. Extending eligibility for assistance and special measures is an important step in supporting witnesses, improving access to justice and encouraging participation in criminal proceedings.

Clause 25 provides that no person charged with an offence involving aggravation by hostility may cross examine in person a witness, including a child, who is the complainant in connection with the offence or any other offence with which that person is charged in the proceedings. Do you support the inclusion of Clause 25 in the Bill?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I strongly support Clause 25. Allowing an accused person to personally cross-examine a complainant can cause significant distress and may discourage victims and witnesses from engaging with the justice system. This provision helps protect victims from unnecessary trauma while maintaining the fairness of proceedings through legal representation and judicial oversight.

Clause 26 introduces provisions for complainants in sexual offence cases in the Crown Court, to make oral or written representations to the court, be legally represented and entitled to be present at any hearing of an application for documents or records which relate to the complainant and which they could have a reasonable expectation of privacy in relation to. It makes similar provisions in relation to applications made to the court relating to the complainant's sexual history. Do you agree with the inclusion of Clause 26 in the Bill?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I strongly support Clause 26. Complainants should have the opportunity to be represented when applications are made relating to personal records or sexual history evidence. These matters can have a significant impact on privacy, dignity and confidence in the justice system. Providing legal representation helps ensure that complainants' rights and interests are properly considered by the court.

Clause 27 is a technical fix required for the forthcoming introduction of committal reform provisions. It provides that, in cases involving death or serious harm of a child or vulnerable person, charges cannot be dismissed unless the charge of an offence under section 5 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 is also dismissed. Do you agree with Clause 27 being included in the Bill?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I agree with Clause 27. It is important that legal and procedural reforms operate consistently and that charges involving the death or serious harm of a child or vulnerable person are appropriately considered within criminal proceedings. This amendment appears necessary to ensure the effective operation of related legislation.

Do you have anything further to add on Clauses 24 to 27 of the Bill relating to Criminal Evidence and Procedure?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I welcome the measures contained within Clauses 24 to 27 as they strengthen protections for victims and witnesses and help promote confidence in the justice system.

These provisions recognise that participation in criminal proceedings can be a highly stressful and traumatic experience, particularly for vulnerable victims and witnesses. Measures that reduce unnecessary distress while maintaining fairness are essential.

More broadly, I would encourage continued consideration of how the justice system recognises and responds to victims whose experiences may not fit neatly within existing categories. Effective victim-centred justice depends not only on protecting those who engage with the system, but also on ensuring that all victims and bereaved families are recognised, heard and supported.

Recent correspondence from the Department of Justice has confirmed that Northern Ireland currently has no single mechanism to identify, record or review suicides where domestic abuse or coercive control may have been a contributing factor. This demonstrates the importance of continuing to examine gaps in victim recognition and ensuring that opportunities for learning, prevention and accountability are not missed.

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Clauses 28 to 30 - General

Clauses 28 to 30 provide for regulation making powers, the commencement of the parts of the Bill and the short title. Do you have any comments on Clauses 28 to 30 of the Bill?

Yes

Please provide information to support your answer here::

I have no specific concerns regarding the regulation-making powers, commencement provisions or short title contained within Clauses 28 to 30.

However, I would encourage the Assembly and Department of Justice to ensure that the provisions of this Bill are implemented without unnecessary

delay and are supported by adequate resources, guidance and oversight.

The effectiveness of this legislation will ultimately depend not only on the powers and duties set out within the Bill, but on how those powers are exercised in practice to improve outcomes for victims and witnesses across Northern Ireland.

As implementation progresses, consideration should be given to identifying gaps in victim recognition and support that may emerge through the Commissioner's work. Recent correspondence from the Department of Justice has confirmed that Northern Ireland currently has no single mechanism to identify, record or review suicides where domestic abuse or coercive control may have been a contributing factor.

<https://linktr.ee/DomesticAbuseSuicideLaw>

This highlights the importance of ensuring that the new Commissioner has the ability to identify overlooked groups, recommend improvements and help ensure that all victims and bereaved families have a voice within the justice system.

I welcome the Bill's overall objective of strengthening the rights, recognition and representation of victims and witnesses and look forward to seeing these provisions translated into meaningful improvements in practice.

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Any Other Comments on the Bill

Do you have any other comments or views on the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill?

Yes

Please provide any other comments or views you have on the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill here::

I welcome the overall intention of the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill and the steps being taken to strengthen the rights, representation and support available to victims and witnesses across Northern Ireland.

Throughout this consultation, I have highlighted the importance of ensuring that all victims are recognised within the justice system, including those whose experiences may currently fall outside existing recording, review or support mechanisms.

Recent correspondence from the Department of Justice has confirmed that Northern Ireland currently has no single mechanism to identify, record or review suicides where domestic abuse or coercive control may have been a contributing factor. This means opportunities for learning, prevention and accountability may be missed, while some bereaved families can struggle to obtain recognition and support.

As the new Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses develops their role, I would encourage consideration of how emerging and under-recognised forms of victimisation can be identified and addressed. A truly victim-centred justice system should ensure that no victim, and no bereaved family, becomes invisible.

Over the last several months, support for this issue has continued to grow, with engagement from elected representatives, victims' organisations, charities, campaigners and members of the public across Northern Ireland and the wider UK.

Further information regarding the campaign for recognition of domestic abuse-related suicides, supporting correspondence and stakeholder engagement can be found at:

☐ <https://linktr.ee/DomesticAbuseSuicideLaw>

I hope the Committee will consider how the principles contained within this Bill can help ensure that all victims are recognised, heard and represented.

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