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**FROM: NAOMI LONG MLA
MINISTER OF JUSTICE**

DATE: 18 SEPTEMBER 2026

TO: PAUL FREW, CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

VICTIMS AND WITNESSES OF CRIME BILL – MOTION TO EXTEND COMMITTEE STAGE

I understand that, at its meeting on 10 September 2026, the Committee agreed to seek an extension to the Committee Stage of the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill until 22 January 2027, with a motion having been tabled on 11 September 2026 seeking Assembly approval.

I fully recognise and value the Committee's role in scrutinising the Bill thoroughly and understand the importance of members having adequate time to hear from victims, witnesses and other stakeholders. I am particularly grateful for the Committee's willingness to bring its return date forward by a week following recess, and to accommodate additional Committee meetings, in order to support the legislative timetable. This is especially appreciated given that members are simultaneously scrutinising the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc.) Bill. I know this represents a significant commitment of time and resources, and I do not underestimate it.

The Department, for its part, is also managing a demanding legislative programme this mandate. Just as the Committee must balance its scrutiny of the Bills, the Department must balance the progression of a number of significant legislative measures within a constrained timeframe. While I fully recognise the Committee's scrutiny role, I want to flag that the revised timetable leaves a narrower window for completion of the Bill's remaining Assembly stages before the end of the mandate, alongside other legislation expected to come before the Assembly during that period.

Given the importance of these provisions in strengthening support and protections for victims and witnesses of crime, I would welcome continued engagement between Departmental officials and the Committee through the usual channels to help ensure that, wherever possible, the Bill's remaining stages can be progressed in a manner that supports completion before the pre-election period, while ensuring that it receives the thorough scrutiny it deserves. These are provisions that stand to make a real difference



for victims and witnesses, which is why I'm keen we find a way through together that protects both the scrutiny process and the Bill's chances of completion.

I have greatly valued the constructive relationship between the Committee and the Department throughout the Bill's passage to date and look forward to this continuing in the months ahead. I would also like to place on record my thanks to the Clerk and her team for their work in supporting the Committee during what will no doubt be a particularly busy period.

Yours sincerely,



NAOMI LONG MLA
MINISTER OF JUSTICE