

Submitted to Display of Flags and Emblems - Call for Evidence
Submitted on 2026-09-15 20:45:03

Introduction

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

I confirm that I have read the privacy notice.

2 What is your name?

Name:

[REDACTED]

3 What is your email address?

Email:

[REDACTED]

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

Organisation:

5 The Committee for Infrastructure 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 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.

Clause 1: Removal of flags or emblems in the public interest

6 Do you agree with Clause 1 of the Bill?

Unsure

7 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

The proposed Bill states: "For the purposes of this Act, it is in the public interest to remove a flag or emblem if, in the opinion of the Department-

- (a) the flag or emblem is intimidatory or threatening,
- (b) the flag or emblem is likely to stir up hatred, or arouse fear,
- (c) the flag or emblem invites support for, or is the flag or emblem of, a proscribed organisation".

While (c) is easy to determine, I would have serious concerns if it is DfI themselves who would be left to determine (a) and (b), given that DfI have to date abdicated any responsibility for the appropriate management of this issue and the maintenance of their property.

DfI have consistently failed to act in the public interest. In response to a request to remove flags from a mixed middle-class area of South Belfast, a DfI official recently stated that "We will arrange for the removal of unauthorised attachments where there is clear community support for their removal and where we are satisfied that removing them will not raise local community tensions or present risks to the safety of our staff and contractors". To date, DfI have been unable to clarify how 'clear community support for their removal' is being investigated or measured, and have used the perceived threats of minority groupings to avoid acting on behalf of the majority of residents in this area and in the public interest. If this new legislation is to make any meaningful difference, DfI will need to be more transparent and held to account.

Clause 2: Sensitive places

8 Do you agree with Clause 2 of the Bill?

Yes

9 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

This is an essential element of the Bill, protecting shared spaces which should be welcoming to all and free from sectarian intimidation and territory-marking. The wording of the above consultation question however indicates that the Bill 'allows for the removal'. Does the Bill enforce legal responsibility on DfI for the removal of flags and emblems in these cases?

Clause 3: Procedure for / notification of, or giving views on, flags or emblems

10 Do you agree with Clause 3 of the Bill?

Unsure

11 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

DfI already receive many reports of unwanted flags on lampposts - but no action is taken. This clause will only be meaningful if submissions to the portal are properly investigated in a timely manner, and action taken by DfI. I would suggest an arrangement similar to the Parades Commission - whereby individuals wishing to fly flags from DfI property must apply to DfI for permission, and this permission can be accepted (if not in contravention of the other clauses re: sensitive places etc) or refused. Flags attached to lampposts without approval from DfI should be removed.

Clause 4: Code of Practice

12 Do you agree with Clause 4 of the Bill?

Unsure

13 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

What legal safeguards are in place to ensure that DfI meet this deadline? I would have serious concerns that this Bill will suffer a similar fate to the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition, which has faced ongoing delays, lack of consensus, and has failed to move the issues forward in any meaningful way.

Clause 5: Offence of obstructing the Department in removal of flag or emblem

14 Do you agree with Clause 5 of the Bill?

Yes

15 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

Clause 6: Request for assistance from police

16 Do you agree with Clause 6 of the Bill?

Yes

17 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

The PSNI have a duty to support statutory bodies in implementing this legislation. However, the threat or assumed threat of violence from paramilitary groupings has been used as an excuse for both DfI and PSNI in refusing to take action on flags and bonfires - including the contentious bonfire off the Donegall Road/Westlink, whereby the PSNI declined a request for support from Belfast City Council. This presents a dangerous precedent for this Bill. The PSNI should be expected to enforce the law.

Clause 7: Interpretation

18 Do you agree with Clause 7 of the Bill?

Yes

19 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

Clause 8: Commencement

20 Do you agree with Clause 8 of the Bill?

Yes

21 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

Clause 9: Short title

22 Do you agree with Clause 9 of the Bill?

Yes

23 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible: