

Response ID ANON-2T9C-3V3W-N

Submitted to Display of Flags and Emblems - Call for Evidence
Submitted on 2026-08-15 20:07:01

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 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.

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

6 Do you agree with Clause 1 of the Bill?

Yes

7 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

I agree with Clause 1 and support the principle that flags and emblems displayed in public places should be capable of being removed where this is in the public interest.

In my view, public spaces should be welcoming and accessible to everyone in Northern Ireland, regardless of their political, national or religious background. The permanent or prominent display of flags and emblems associated with particular political or community identities on public infrastructure such as lampposts can contribute to a sense that an area belongs to one particular group rather than being a shared public space.

I do not believe this should be applied selectively to flags or emblems associated with either side of the community. I would support a consistent and impartial approach to all such displays. In particular, I do not think that the fact that a flag is associated with one community rather than another should determine whether it is acceptable on public infrastructure.

While I recognise that flags and emblems can have significant cultural and historical meaning, I do not believe that this justifies their unrestricted display in shared public places. In a society seeking to become more cohesive, I believe public spaces should emphasise what people have in common rather than symbols that can reinforce division or territorial identity.

I therefore support Clause 1 as an important step towards creating a more consistent, neutral and inclusive approach to the display of flags and emblems in public places.

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:

I agree with Clause 2 and support the inclusion of sensitive places within the Bill.

I particularly support the principle that places where public services are provided, such as schools, medical facilities, libraries and leisure centres, should be welcoming and accessible to everyone. These are shared services, funded and used by the whole community, and I do not believe that people should feel that they are entering a space associated with one particular political, national or community identity.

I also support the inclusion of shared communal places such as public parks, shopping centres and arterial roads. These are spaces that everyone should be able to use without feeling that they are entering an area that has been marked as belonging to one particular community.

I recognise that flags and emblems can have cultural and historical significance, but I believe there is an important distinction between displaying such symbols in appropriate private or community settings and attaching them to public infrastructure or displaying them prominently in shared public spaces.

The approach should be consistent and impartial, applying equally to flags and emblems associated with all communities and political traditions. I believe this would help create public spaces that are genuinely shared, neutral and welcoming, and would make a positive contribution to building a more cohesive society in Northern Ireland.

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

10 Do you agree with Clause 3 of the Bill?

Yes

11 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

I agree with Clause 3 and support the introduction of an accessible and transparent process for notifying the display of flags and emblems and for members of the public to express their views.

I believe there should be a clear and consistent process through which concerns about flags or emblems displayed in public places can be raised and considered. An online portal would provide a straightforward way for members of the public to engage with the process and would help ensure that decisions are based on evidence and the views of those affected.

I would, however, encourage the Department to give careful consideration to the way in which anonymity and verification are handled. People who wish to report a flag or emblem that they believe contravenes the Act should be able to do so anonymously, or at least have their identity protected from disclosure. In some areas, individuals may reasonably fear intimidation, harassment or reprisals if it became known that they had reported a particular display. People should not be deterred from reporting potential breaches because of concerns about their personal safety or relationships within their local community.

At the same time, there should be appropriate safeguards against the portal being misused or manipulated. In particular, anyone seeking to formally submit views in support of retaining a flag or emblem should be required to provide their details and undergo appropriate verification. This would help prevent individuals or groups from submitting large numbers of anonymous or fabricated responses in an attempt to influence the public interest assessment.

I therefore believe the system should distinguish between the need to protect people who are reporting potential breaches and the need to ensure that representations supporting a display are genuine and accountable. The Department should also ensure that any personal information collected is appropriately protected and is not unnecessarily disclosed.

I particularly support the fact that the views of both those wishing to erect or retain flags or emblems and those who have concerns about their display can be taken into account. It is important that this process is applied equally to flags and emblems associated with all political, national, cultural and community traditions, with the same standards applying regardless of which side of the community a particular symbol is associated with.

Overall, I believe Clause 3 would provide greater transparency, accountability and consistency in how displays are considered, provided that the notification system is designed with both appropriate protections for individuals and robust safeguards against misuse.

Clause 4: Code of Practice

12 Do you agree with Clause 4 of the Bill?

Yes

13 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

I agree with Clause 4 and strongly support the requirement for the Department to produce a clear and comprehensive Code of Practice on the display of flags and emblems.

I believe a Code of Practice is essential to ensure that the legislation is applied consistently, transparently and fairly across Northern Ireland. Clear guidance should reduce the potential for different standards to be applied in different areas or depending on which community or tradition a particular flag or emblem is associated with.

I particularly welcome the requirement to consult organisations such as the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the PSNI. Their involvement should help ensure that the Code properly considers human rights, equality, public safety and the practical implications of enforcement.

In my view, the Code should establish clear and objective criteria for assessing displays and should make clear that the same principles apply regardless of whether a flag or emblem is associated with a unionist, nationalist, republican, loyalist, Irish, British or any other political, national or community tradition. A consistent approach is important if the legislation is to command confidence across the community.

I also support the requirement for the Code to be reviewed periodically. Attitudes, circumstances and the use of public spaces can change over time, and regular review would provide an opportunity to consider whether the Code remains effective and whether any unintended consequences have emerged.

I would encourage the Department to ensure that the final Code is written in clear and accessible language and that there is sufficient transparency around both its development and subsequent reviews. Overall, I believe Clause 4 is an important part of ensuring that the wider legislation operates consistently and fairly in practice.

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

14 Do you agree with Clause 5 of the Bill?

Unsure

15 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

I do not agree with Clause 5 in its current form.

I support the principle that it should be an offence to obstruct the Department in carrying out a lawful removal of a flag or emblem. However, I do not believe that a maximum penalty limited to a fine is likely to provide a sufficient deterrent, particularly where an individual or group is deliberately and repeatedly obstructing the implementation of the legislation.

The Bill should provide stronger consequences for persistent or repeated offences. Where someone knowingly and repeatedly obstructs the removal of flags or emblems, there should be the possibility of a more significant penalty. Otherwise, there is a risk that individuals or groups may simply regard the fine as an acceptable cost of continuing to disregard the legislation.

I am also concerned that the Bill needs to address the situation where a flag or emblem is removed and is immediately re-erected. I can envisage circumstances in which multiple people deliberately take turns erecting or replacing flags in order to frustrate the Department's ability to enforce a removal decision. If the legislation only deals with the act of obstructing the physical removal, rather than the deliberate and repeated re-erection of a prohibited display, there may be a significant practical weakness in enforcement.

I would therefore encourage the Committee to consider whether the Bill should contain specific provisions dealing with repeated or organised attempts to circumvent a removal decision, including the immediate re-erection of a flag or emblem after it has been removed. There should be a clear mechanism to deal with persistent non-compliance rather than requiring the Department to repeatedly remove the same display.

In summary, I support having an offence for obstructing removal, but I do not believe Clause 5 provides a sufficiently strong or comprehensive enforcement mechanism in its current form. The legislation should provide meaningful consequences for repeated non-compliance and should specifically address deliberate attempts to frustrate the removal process.

Clause 6: Request for assistance from police

16 Do you agree with Clause 6 of the Bill?

Not Answered

17 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

I agree with Clause 6 and support the provision allowing the Department to request assistance from the PSNI where there is a potential risk of a breach of the peace or where Department officials or contractors may be obstructed in carrying out a lawful removal.

I believe this is an important practical safeguard. The removal of flags or emblems can be a sensitive and potentially contentious issue, and those responsible for carrying out a removal should not be placed in a position where they are expected to manage confrontation or intimidation themselves.

The involvement of the PSNI should help ensure that any removal can be carried out safely and that the legislation can be enforced without unnecessarily

placing Department employees, contractors, or members of the public at risk.

I also believe this provision is particularly important given the possibility of organised or repeated attempts to obstruct the implementation of the legislation. As outlined in my response to Clause 5, I am concerned that groups could potentially attempt to prevent a removal by gathering at the location or by repeatedly replacing flags after they have been removed. There should therefore be a clear mechanism for the Department to seek appropriate police assistance where there is a reasonable expectation that enforcement may result in confrontation or obstruction.

At the same time, I would expect any involvement by the PSNI to be proportionate and focused on maintaining public safety and enabling the lawful removal to take place, rather than on resolving the underlying political or cultural disagreement.

Overall, I believe Clause 6 provides a necessary and sensible safeguard to ensure that the legislation can be implemented safely and effectively.

Clause 7: Interpretation

18 Do you agree with Clause 7 of the Bill?

Yes

19 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

I agree with Clause 7.

I support the clear and broad definitions provided in this Clause, particularly the definition of “flag or emblem”, which includes bunting, posters, banners, billboards and similar forms of display. I believe this is important to ensure that the legislation cannot easily be circumvented by replacing a traditional flag with another form of display that has essentially the same purpose or effect.

I also welcome the broad definition of “public street furniture”, which explicitly includes lampposts, bus shelters, trees, bins, street signs, bollards, railings and fences. This provides greater clarity about the types of public infrastructure to which the legislation applies.

I believe it is important that the definitions are applied consistently and impartially to displays associated with all political, national, cultural and community traditions. The legislation should not distinguish between displays based on which side of the community they are associated with.

Overall, I believe Clause 7 provides useful clarity and helps ensure that the legislation is sufficiently comprehensive to achieve its intended purpose.

Clause 8: Commencement

20 Do you agree with Clause 8 of the Bill?

Yes

21 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

I agree with Clause 8 and support the proposed commencement arrangements.

I believe that allowing time between Royal Assent and the main provisions coming into operation is sensible. The Department will need sufficient time to establish the necessary procedures, develop the Code of Practice, establish the notification and consultation portal, and ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place for enforcement.

It is important, however, that this period is used effectively and that the necessary infrastructure and guidance are fully operational before the substantive provisions come into force. In particular, the Department should use this time to ensure that there are clear and practical procedures for dealing with repeated or deliberate attempts to circumvent removal decisions, including the immediate re-erection of flags or emblems.

I also believe that the Code of Practice and online notification system should be well established and publicly communicated before the removal provisions take effect. People should be able to understand what the rules are, how decisions will be made, and how they can raise concerns.

Overall, I support the proposed commencement arrangements because they provide a reasonable period for the Department to prepare for implementation. However, I would encourage the Department to use this period to ensure that the legislation is supported by effective, practical and enforceable procedures from the outset.

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:

I agree with Clause 9. The proposed short title, "Display of Flags and Emblems Act", is clear, concise and accurately describes the purpose and subject matter of the legislation.