

Submitted to Display of Flags and Emblems - Call for Evidence
Submitted on 2026-08-03 15:35:31

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?

Yes

7 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

The widespread display of flags in many parts of Northern Ireland can be intimidating and visually unwelcoming for both residents and visitors. While I recognise that these flags hold cultural and historical significance for many people, their use in public spaces can also give the impression that certain areas belong exclusively to one community or another.

In a modern, shared society, we should be moving away from symbols that reinforce division and territorial identity. Everyone, regardless of whether they identify as Unionist, Loyalist, Nationalist, Republican, or neither, should feel equally welcome and comfortable living in or visiting any part of Northern Ireland.

There are areas where the prominent display of flags makes me feel uneasy, as though I do not belong there. No one should experience that feeling simply because they are travelling through or choosing where to live. If we are serious about building a more inclusive and integrated future, we need to create shared public spaces that are welcoming to everyone. Reducing the display of divisive flags in shared areas would be a meaningful step towards fostering a society where people are defined by their shared citizenship rather than by historic divisions.

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:

In my view, sensitive public spaces are places that should be welcoming and accessible to everyone. These include arterial roads, town and village centres, shopping areas, schools, libraries, parks, leisure facilities, healthcare settings, public transport routes, and other shared spaces that people use as part of their everyday lives.

The prominent display of flags and other symbols in these locations can create an atmosphere of exclusion or intimidation, particularly where they appear to mark territory or signal that an area belongs to one community alone. For many people, including those from minority backgrounds or those who do not identify with either tradition, this can create a genuine sense of unease and discourage them from feeling that they belong.

I have experienced this feeling myself. As a white female, I am aware that I do not face many of the additional challenges experienced by ethnic minorities

or other marginalised groups, yet there are places where the display of flags still makes me feel uncomfortable and unwelcome. If I can experience that sense of apprehension, it is reasonable to recognise that others may feel it even more acutely. Shared public spaces should unite communities rather than reinforce division. Features such as painted kerbstones, lampposts, public buildings, bridges, and other public infrastructure should remain as neutral as possible so that everyone can travel, learn, work, shop, and enjoy public amenities without feeling that they are entering someone else's territory. Creating genuinely shared spaces is an important part of building a more inclusive, welcoming, and confident Northern Ireland for everyone. This version acknowledges that flags have significance to many people while clearly explaining why their display in shared public spaces can affect people's sense of safety and belonging. It also avoids making claims about others' experiences as fact, instead framing them as a reasonable concern, which is often more effective in consultation responses.

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 strongly believe that anyone wishing to display flags or emblems in public spaces should be required to seek permission from the relevant public authority. Public spaces belong to everyone and should not be used to display symbols without appropriate oversight and community consideration. I am aware of an example that illustrates why this is important. Someone I know lives on a residential street in the Stormont area of East Belfast. When flags were erected along the street, neither she nor one of her neighbours wanted them to be displayed. The neighbour attempted to remove the flag that had been placed outside his own home, but was told by those who had erected it that he was not permitted to do so. As a result, he felt intimidated and unable to challenge the situation further. My acquaintance also did not want the flags displayed on her street. She was concerned about the message this sent to her children and did not want them to grow up believing that the unauthorised erection of flags in shared residential spaces is a normal or acceptable feature of life in Northern Ireland. This example demonstrates the imbalance that can arise when a small number of individuals make decisions about shared public spaces without consultation or consent. Residents should never feel intimidated in their own neighbourhood or feel that they have no voice over what is placed outside their homes. Requiring permission from the relevant authority before flags or emblems are displayed in public spaces would help ensure that decisions are transparent, accountable, and respectful of everyone who shares those spaces.

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 support the introduction of a Code of Practice on the display of flags and emblems and believe it is an essential step towards creating more welcoming and inclusive shared spaces across Northern Ireland. The Code should provide clear, consistent guidance on where flags and emblems may be displayed, the process for obtaining permission, and the responsibilities of those wishing to erect them. It should make clear that public spaces belong to everyone and should not be used in a way that causes intimidation, exclusion, or the perception that an area belongs exclusively to one community. I welcome the requirement to consult organisations such as the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. However, I also believe it is important that the Department actively seeks the views of local residents, community organisations, schools, local councils, businesses, and groups representing minority communities, as they are often the people most directly affected by the display of flags in shared public spaces.

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

14 Do you agree with Clause 5 of the Bill?

No

15 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

I believe the maximum penalty for obstructing the lawful removal of a flag or emblem should be higher than a Level 3 fine. Where individuals or groups intimidate residents or prevent the lawful removal of unauthorised flags, the consequences can have a significant impact on people's sense of safety and wellbeing. A fine of up to £1,000 may not provide a sufficient deterrent, particularly where such actions are organised or involve intimidation. The penalty should be proportionate to the harm caused and should send a clear message that threatening behaviour, obstruction, and attempts to undermine the lawful

management of shared public spaces will not be tolerated.

Stronger penalties would reinforce the principle that public spaces belong to everyone and that the rule of law must be respected. They would also help protect residents, public officials, and contractors who are carrying out the lawful removal of unauthorised flags and emblems.

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:

I recognise that the removal of flags or emblems may, in some circumstances, lead to heightened tensions within certain communities and increase the risk of public disorder or a breach of the peace. For that reason, I believe it is appropriate that the Department has the ability to request assistance from the Police Service of Northern Ireland when necessary.

The presence of the PSNI can help ensure that lawful decisions are carried out safely, reduce the risk of intimidation or violence, and provide reassurance to residents, officials, and those responsible for removing the flags. While the removal of unauthorised flags may be contentious, this should not prevent the law from being applied fairly and consistently. Public safety and the rule of law must remain the priority.

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 support the inclusion of clear and unambiguous definitions within the Bill. It is important that the terms used are precise so that there is a consistent understanding of what constitutes a public space, a flag or emblem, and the circumstances in which the legislation applies.

Clear definitions will help ensure that the law is applied fairly and consistently across Northern Ireland, reducing uncertainty and the potential for disputes. They will also provide greater confidence for residents, public authorities, and those responsible for enforcing the legislation.

In particular, I believe the definitions should make it clear that shared public spaces include roads, footpaths, parks, schools, libraries, healthcare facilities, public buildings, and other places that are open to and used by everyone. This will help ensure that the purpose of the legislation to create welcoming and inclusive public spaces free from intimidation is achieved.

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 support the phased implementation of the Bill, provided it allows sufficient time to prepare the necessary guidance and ensure that the legislation can be applied consistently and effectively. However, I would not support unnecessary delays in bringing the key provisions into force.

The issues this Bill seeks to address have affected communities in Northern Ireland for many years. Many people continue to feel intimidated or excluded by the unauthorised display of flags and emblems in shared public spaces. It is therefore important that the legislation is implemented as soon as reasonably practicable, while allowing adequate time for the development of the Code of Practice, public consultation, and awareness-raising.

A clear implementation timetable will also provide certainty for public authorities, residents, and communities, ensuring that everyone understands when the new arrangements will take effect and what will be expected of them.

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: