

Response ID ANON-8P3M-7W9G-P

Submitted to Display of Flags and Emblems - Call for Evidence
Submitted on 2026-07-29 11:04:38

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 strongly agree with Clause 1 because the current system allows public bodies to completely abandon mixed communities facing intimidation.

Recently, in my neighbourhood of Drumnagoon Park, Craigavon, outside groups bussed in individuals to aggressively erect territorial flags on public lampposts along our main approach road. Our estate is a new-build, entirely mixed, and shared space. These flags were erected specifically to mark territory and intimidate minority and cross-community residents.

When residents and local representatives asked for them to be removed, we experienced a total failure of the current legal framework. The PSNI stated that while an offence under the Roads Order (NI) 1993 had likely occurred, enforcement was strictly a matter for the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and washed their hands of it.

The DfI then completely refused to act, hiding behind the excuse of a "potential risk to staff." They used this excuse even though the PSNI explicitly stated there was no intelligence suggesting a risk to contractors and no threat of civil disorder.

Currently, because there is no strict duty on the Department to remove these items, they simply pass the buck and use hypothetical health and safety concerns as a shield to avoid making difficult decisions. Clause 1 is absolutely essential because it places a mandatory legal duty on the Department to act when it is in the public interest. It will finally stop public bodies from passing responsibility back and forth while residents are left to deal with the fallout of illegal intimidation on public property.

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 strongly agree with Clause 2, particularly its inclusion of a "shared communal place" and "arterial roads" in the definition of a sensitive place.

My neighbourhood of Drumnagoon Park is a mixed, shared space. Recently, outside groups deliberately erected flags along Drumnagoon Road, which is the main arterial route serving our entire estate. Because this arterial road is the primary shared communal infrastructure we all must use, placing flags here acts as a territorial chokepoint. It is designed to intimidate residents and force them to drive under these symbols every time they leave or return to their homes.

Explicitly defining shared communal places and arterial roads as "sensitive places" is absolutely crucial. It prevents outside groups from exploiting essential public infrastructure to harass integrated communities. Furthermore, it gives authorities clear, unambiguous legal grounds to remove these items, stopping them from claiming that flags on main roads do not impact the local residents.

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 agree with Clause 3 because the current system for residents to register their concerns is completely broken and places an unfair burden on the community.

When unauthorized flags were recently erected in our mixed neighbourhood of Drumnagoon Park, residents were forced to navigate a maze of bureaucracy to object. We had to log incidents on the PSNI hate crime portal, contact local councillors, and lobby multiple MLAs just to get our voices heard. Despite this massive community effort, public bodies still used a lack of formal "community impact assessments" as an excuse for inaction.

Implementing a dedicated, official online portal managed by the Department would provide a direct, transparent mechanism for residents to express their views safely. Crucially, it would create an undeniable, recorded evidence trail of community opposition. This would prevent authorities from claiming ignorance about a community's wishes and stop them from using bureaucratic loopholes to avoid conducting public interest tests in shared 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 strongly agree with Clause 4 because the current lack of a standardized, statutory framework allows public bodies to easily shirk their responsibilities.

In our recent experience at Drumnagoon Park, the PSNI and the Department for Infrastructure offered completely conflicting excuses for why they could not remove illegally erected flags, effectively passing the blame back and forth. By legally requiring the Department to issue a clear Code of Practice, there will finally be a set of unambiguous rules that all agencies must follow. This will remove their ability to invent bureaucratic loopholes or use hypothetical "health and safety" risks to avoid taking action.

Furthermore, I strongly support the obligation to consult with key stakeholders like the Equality Commission for NI and the NI Human Rights Commission. It is vital that these bodies have a say, as this will ensure the final Code of Practice prioritizes the rights of residents in mixed, shared communities to live free from sectarian territorial marking, harassment, and intimidation.

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:

I strongly agree with Clause 5 because it directly eliminates the primary excuse currently used by the Department to avoid taking action in shared spaces.

In the recent incident at Drumnagoon Park, the Department for Infrastructure refused to remove illegally erected flags, citing a hypothetical "potential risk to staff and contractors"—even though the PSNI explicitly confirmed there was no intelligence to suggest such a risk.

By making it a specific, punishable legal offence to obstruct the Department during the removal of flags or emblems, Clause 5 provides statutory

protection for Dfl workers. More importantly, it forces the PSNI's hand. If outside groups attempt to intimidate or block Dfl contractors from clearing our shared arterial roads, they will be committing a clear, undeniable offence, requiring the police to actively intervene rather than standing by.

This clause ensures that the mere threat of obstruction can no longer be used as a convenient bureaucratic shield by public bodies to abandon mixed communities to intimidation.

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 strongly agree with Clause 6 because it directly closes the exact loophole the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) recently used to abandon our community in Drumnagoon Park.

When illegal flags were aggressively erected to mark territory in our mixed estate, the DfI completely refused to remove them. Their official excuse was a hypothetical "potential risk" to their staff and contractors, despite the PSNI explicitly confirming they had no intelligence of any such risk.

Clause 6 explicitly permits the Department to request PSNI assistance if they feel there is a potential breach of the peace or a concern that their staff may be obstructed. This is a vital addition to the law. It means that if the DfI genuinely fears for their contractors' safety, they now have a clear, statutory mechanism to bring the police with them to ensure the job gets done.

It completely removes the DfI's ability to use "health and safety" as an excuse to cancel a removal job and leave illegal flags up. It forces the PSNI and DfI to actually work together to protect shared spaces, rather than passing responsibility back and forth while residents are intimidated.

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 because having strict, unambiguous legal interpretations for the terms used in Clauses one to six is essential to making this Bill work.

As my community experienced firsthand in Drumnagoon Park, public bodies like the Department for Infrastructure and the PSNI will use any ambiguity or grey area in existing laws to pass the buck and avoid taking action against intimidation. By locking in clear, robust definitions for what constitutes a sensitive place, a public interest test, and the exact duties of the Department, Clause 7 ensures there are no interpretative loopholes left for these agencies to exploit. Strict definitions mean strict enforcement, which is exactly what shared neighbourhoods need to be protected.

Clause 8: Commencement

20 Do you agree with Clause 8 of the Bill?

No

21 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

I do NOT agree with Clause 8, specifically regarding the delayed commencement date of 1 January 2028 for the most critical enforcement clauses (Clauses 1, 5, and 6).

As residents of Drumnagoon Park who are currently dealing with the immediate reality of illegal territorial marking and community intimidation, waiting another year and a half for these crucial enforcement mechanisms to take effect is completely unacceptable.

Pushing the commencement date to 2028 leaves shared and mixed communities vulnerable to harassment for the foreseeable future. It essentially gives public bodies like the DfI and PSNI a free pass to continue using their bureaucratic loopholes to ignore the issue through at least one more entire summer season.

The intimidation of mixed neighbourhoods is happening right now. Clauses 1, 5, and 6 are the teeth of this Bill, and they need to be enacted immediately upon Royal Assent, or as quickly as legally possible. Communities are being targeted today, and they need the law to protect them today, not in 2028.

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 short title is appropriate and accurately reflects the scope and intent of the legislation.