



Shane McAteer
Committee Clerk
Committee for Finance and Personnel
Room 419
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

Dear Mr McAteer,

Re: Legislative Consent Motion for Marriage (Same-sex Couples) Bill

The Rainbow Project is Northern Ireland's largest lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGB&T) organisation; rights based, holistic and non-partisan. We are the only organisation dedicated to promoting the health and well-being of LGB&T people, through the provision of a services including information and support, education and training, counselling, personal development courses, health promotion, advocacy, training, policy development and lobbying at political and official level.

We thank the committee for the opportunity to input into the committee's deliberations on the legislative consent motion.

The legislative consent motion poses serious issues for the consistency of the rule of law across the constituent regions of the United Kingdom. There are four main problems with the passage of the Marriage (Same-sex couples) Bill as it applies to Northern Ireland.

Adoption: This obviously remains the biggest difference between civil partnership in NI and GB. The language of the bill pre-supposes that there is no distinction between Northern Ireland and GB with regard to civil partnerships and very little consideration has been given to potential adopters in GB who will lose the ability to adopt if they enter a marriage in GB and move to Northern Ireland.

Civil and Religious Ceremonies: While the Civil Partnership Act was amended in England, Scotland and Wales to allow for civil partnerships to be held in registered religious venues with registered celebrants, this has not been extended to Northern Ireland. This highlights again that there are significant differences between civil partnership in Northern Ireland and GB which will only be exacerbated, not diminished, by the passage of the Marriage (same-sex couples) Bill.

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A charity registered with the Inland Revenue No. XR17450
A company limited by guarantee No. NI30101 Rainbow Health Ltd
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Internal Borders: We are very clear that, as a unitary state and party to the European convention, the UK government cannot create an internal frontier beyond which legally married spouses have their marriages reclassified. It is unreasonable, illogical and constitutionally unsustainable. If a British citizen is married anywhere in the UK, then it must be recognised as such everywhere in the UK.

Gender Reassignment: As the law stands, transgender people in Northern Ireland will still have to dissolve either their opposite sex marriage or civil partnership in order to obtain a gender recognition certificate. This places an emotional and costly burden on vulnerable people and creates additional bureaucracy without any discernible benefit.

Should members feel it to be appropriate, we are very willing to meet with the committee and provide oral evidence on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

John O'Doherty

Director, The Rainbow Project