

Dear [name] MLA,

24th May 2021

I am writing on behalf of the [Women's Resource and Development Agency](#) and the [Women's Policy Group NI](#) to ask you and your party colleagues to provide Executive agreement for the introduction of the Justice Bill as a matter of urgency. The Women's Policy Group has lobbied and campaigned extensively on a number of issues relating to gender-based violence, which the Justice Bill will go some way to address.

Given the vast rise of Violence against Women and Girls throughout the pandemic, we would like to urge the Northern Ireland Executive to approve the introduction of the Justice Bill this week to ensure that this Bill can be moved to the next stage and be legislated for in this Assembly mandate. If this Bill is not progressed this week, many victims and survivors in Northern Ireland will be afforded less protections than other jurisdictions at a time when gender-based violence should be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Specifically, this Bill would address a number of priority provisions that the WPG and our membership organisations have campaigned extensively on including:

- Measures to increase public safety and help create a more efficient and effective justice system,
- Provisions to address a number of priority issues including provisions arising from the Gillen review to exclude the public from all serious sexual offence hearings and to introduce anonymity for defendants pre-charge,
- Removing the "rough sex" defence,
- Provisions to give effect to the outcome of a review of the law on child sexual exploitation and sexual offences against children, to include live streamed images in the definition of exploitation for sexual purposes and to create a new offence of adults masquerading as children online,
- A new offence of up-skirting and down-blousing alongside a number of other measures to ensure the law operates as intended in these areas,

Given the severity of the crimes included in this Bill, and the ongoing campaigning from the women's sector on many of the issues included within the Bill, it would be extremely disappointing if Executive approval is not reached, and the legislation cannot progress as a result. If you have any questions or queries regarding this message from the Women's Policy Group, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Kind regards,

Rachel Powell

[She/Her]

Women's Sector Lobbyist

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