



WRDA Stormont and Westminster Update – July 2021

Summary

In July 2021 it should be noted that both Westminster and Stormont are in the midst of their summer recess and therefore there is much less to report on than usual in regards updates to Bills and Question Time. However, despite this there has been a number of political developments surrounding the thematic issues highlighted within the [Women's Policy Group \(WPG\) Covid-19 Feminist Recovery Plan](#). This summary reflects Bills and oral questions answered by both the Stormont and Westminster Executives.

The issue of **reproductive health** and **access to abortion** featured prominently this month in Stormont as both Paul Givan and Clare Bailey's Non-Executive Bills begin/continue their legislative journeys. Further, both Doug Beattie and Clare Bailey raised questions in relation to much needed funding for Informing Choices NI to be able to continue to carry out its early medical abortion services. This comes prior to the announcement from the Secretary of State Brandon Lewis who has issued a direction that the full commissioning of abortion services must be completed no later than 31st March 2022. This has been met with outright resistance by First Minister Paul Givan who has asserted he will challenge the Secretary of State in the courts.

The issue of **violence against women and girls** featured prominently in legislation in both Stormont and Westminster. Naomi Long's Protection from Stalking Bill remains at Committee stage alongside the introduction of a Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims Bill. In Westminster there has been no movement on the Private Member's Bills in relation to Intimate Images (Offences) Bill and Unsolicited Explicit Images and Deepfake Pornography Bill – however, they remain ones to watch.

The issue of **women's economic justice** remained prominent at Stormont and Westminster with legislation in relation to childcare, maternity protections, and increasing rights of parents to take absence in tragic circumstances such as miscarriages and bereavement.

This update has been put together by Courtney Girvin (WRDA volunteer)

Stormont

Executive Bills – July 2021

Issue	Proposed by	Stage	Comments	Links to the feminist recovery plan (FRP)
Protection from Stalking Bill	Naomi Long, Minister for Justice	Committee Stage	<p>A Bill to provide protection from threatening or abusive behaviours, and from stalking behaviours. This new legislation will have greater penalties and protections from stalking behaviour compared to current legislation.</p> <p>The introduction of stalking protection orders (SPOs) will enable the police to intervene prior to any conviction to address stalking behaviours before they become entrenched or escalate in severity, therefore, protecting victims when there is an immediate risk of harm.</p> <p>The Bill is divided into three parts. Part 1 creates the specific offence of stalking and creates the offence of threatening and abusive behaviour, which can be triggered by a single incident. Part 2 provides for the introduction of SPOs. Part 3 deals with the interpretation, commencement, and short title of the Bill.</p>	<p>Stalking is an inherently gendered crime, with women representing a disproportionate number of victims. Stalking commonly happens within a context of domestic abuse and is linked to elements of coercive control.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill here</p>
Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Bill	Diane Dodds (previous), Minister for Economy – continued by Paul Frew (current)	Committee Stage	<p>A Bill to make provision about leave and pay for employees who have lost their children.</p> <p>The Bill is divided into two main sections. Firstly, parental bereavement leave, which will curate the right of parents who have lost their child to be absent from work, regardless of how long they have worked for their employer.</p>	<p>The FRP highlights the importance of employment protections for mothers and fathers who will undoubtedly be affected by the Parental Bereavement Bill.</p>

	Minister for Economy		Secondly, parental bereavement pay in which those eligible will receive a fixed or earnings-related weekly rate of pay.	Parental leave is recommended as a day one employment right within the FRP. Link to information on the Bill here
Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims Bill	Naomi Long, Minister for Justice	Second Stage	<p>A Bill to make provision about and in connection with sexual offences; regulate particular matters relating to cases of trafficking or exploitation; and amend rules applying with respect to certain sexual or violent offences prevention orders.</p> <p>The Bill is divided into four parts. Part 1 legislates for the sexual offences covered within this Bill and the right to anonymity and privacy for both victims and perpetrators. Part 2 details trafficking and slavery offences separately. Part 3 detail what offences qualify for sexual offences prevention orders. The final part deals with the interpretation, commencement, and short title of the Bill.</p>	<p>Tackling sexual violence is a key aspect of tackling gendered violence and violence against women. However, to truly tackle rape culture will need to address issues of victim-blaming, identification and tackling of rape myths, and how the media reports on cases of sexual violence.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill here</p>

Non-Executive Bills – July 2021

Issue	Proposed by	Stage	Comments	Link to Feminist Recovery Plan (FRP)
Safe Access Zones Bill (Public Health)	Clare Bailey (Green Party NI – South Belfast)	Bill with NI Speaker's Office – ready to	This Bill aims to provide safe access to healthcare facilities including buffer zones around reproductive healthcare facilities.	This would enhance the ability of women and others to access healthcare services

and Well Being Bill)		begin its legislative journey		<p>without fear of harassment and intimidation.</p> <p>The FRP recognises the importance of safe access and buffer zones.</p>
Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill	Paul Givan (First Minister – Lagan Valley)	Committee Stage	<p>A Bill attempting to restrict access to abortion by amending the Abortion (Northern Ireland) (No. 2) Regulations 2020 to remove the ground for abortion in cases of severe non-fatal fetal disability.</p> <p>There has been no public consultation for this Bill, and it should be noted that the Northern Ireland Office conducted a public consultation when developing abortion law reform which resulted in the current 2020 legislation.</p> <p>Should be noted that new FM has this month stated he will challenge the Secretary of State Brandon Lewis in the courts over his direction that Stormont must commission full abortion services by next March.</p>	<p>This would infringe upon the bodily autonomy of women and others, and violates the reproductive justice principle of the right to not have a child.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill here</p> <p>Link to FM Paul Givan’s position on the issue here</p>
Climate Change Bill	Clare Bailey (Green Party NI – South Belfast)	Committee Stage	<p>A Bill attempting to mitigate the effects of climate change in Northern Ireland. The Bill seeks to establish a legally binding net-zero carbon target for NI, establish an NI Climate Commissioner and resultant Climate Office, achieve a climate sustainable economy by 2045, and guarantee existing climate and environmental protections.</p> <p>This Bill would declare a climate emergency until the threshold of the global temperature as defined by the Paris Agreement has been met.</p>	<p>The move to a “Green Economy” and a more environmentally sustainable job market is reflected in the FRP. The effects of climate change are disproportionately gendered globally.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill to here</p>

Questions Asked – July 2021

Issue	Date	Asked by:	Notes	Link to Feminist Recovery Plan (FRP)
Informing Choices NI: DOF funding	05/07/21	Doug Beattie (UUP – Upper Bann) to Finance Minister, Conor Murphy	<p>The Question: “Will the Minister consider funding Informing Choices, which is the central access point for abortion here in Northern Ireland and is running out of funding.”</p> <p>Funding requests come from the relevant Department that has a relationship or responsibility for the organisation (in this case Health or Justice). If such a request from the relevant Department comes through the Minister would be happy to consider it.</p>	<p>Sexual and reproductive rights constitute an important theme within the FRP.</p> <p>The FRP explicitly recommends there are free, safe, legal, and local abortion services available to all who may need it.</p> <p>Link to full question here</p>
Follow Up – Informing Choices NI: DOF funding	05/07/21	Doug Beattie (UUP – Upper Bann) to Finance Minister, Conor Murphy	<p>The Question: “We are talking about a relatively small amount of money: £150,000 for the year. The health service is under pressure with regard to waiting lists and the mental health strategy; I take what the Minister has said on board.”</p> <p>It is not just Departments that are sources of funding. There are voluntary and community sector groups, and the National Lottery delivers the dormant accounts fund, which looks at resilience to make sure that organisations do not go out of existence because of a lack of support. By all means, I am happy to look at that, but Informing Choices NI should look at other sources of funding.</p>	<p>Sexual and reproductive rights constitute an important theme within the FRP.</p> <p>The FRP explicitly recommends there are free, safe, legal, and local abortion services available to all who may need it.</p> <p>Link to full question here</p>

Working from Home Policies	05/07/21	Robbie Butler (UUP – Lagan Valley) to Finance Minister, Conor Murphy	<p>The Question: “Whilst there is a balance to be struck that enables the benefits that he explained come from working from home, there may also be benefits for those who find it hard to gain employment, particularly single-parent families, and women, and that there may be benefits beyond those that he has already identified?”</p> <p>It is recognised that unfortunately a lot of the burden of the home falls upon women. The opportunity to a more blended approach to working may provide more accessibility for women, parents, and carers. The regional hubs will also help open up civil service jobs to those women in rural areas.</p>	<p>Flexible working has been recommended by the FRP as particularly important for engaging women in general into the workforce.</p> <p>Recognition of how women are socialised and expected to shoulder the majority of caring responsibilities.</p> <p>Link to full answer here</p>
Early Medical Abortion Services: Funding	05/07/21	Clare Bailey (Green Party NI – South Belfast) to Robin Swann, Health Minister	<p>The Question: “Will the Minister provide an update on the funding request from Informing Choices NI to continue the central access point into early medical abortion services.”</p> <p>The Department of Health is currently considering a request for further funding to support its decision to provide a central access point into the early medical abortion (EMA) services that trusts began to provide from April 2020 in line with their statutory responsibilities under law.</p> <p>In light of extreme funding pressures the Minister has written to the NI Office Minister of State to request more funding.</p>	<p>The right to not have a child and bodily autonomy is an important aspect of reproductive justice, which is a central theme of the FRP. Decriminalisation is not enough until abortion is accessible to all, one key barrier to accessibility is lack of funding leading to closures of local trusts services.</p> <p>Link to full answer here</p>

Consultations

Issue	Women's Policy Group response (WPG)	Link to Feminist Recovery plan
Climate Change	<p>Women's Policy Group NI Submission to Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs on the Climate Change Bill.</p> <p>The Climate Change Bill is a welcome step towards addressing the climate crisis and important mitigation and prevention measures. Further, WRDA welcome the inclusion of legal experts, scientists, academics and environmentalists in the development of the Bill, beyond just political opinions. However, WRDA is critical that some of the targets within the Bill are lacklustre:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NI remains the only part of the UK/Ireland without any binding greenhouse gas reduction targets. • UK target to be net zero by 2050 is inadequate, research by Tyndall Centre for Climate Action shows NI could be net zero by 2042. <p>Further, WRDA recommends inclusion of a gendered lens to eliminate gendered inequalities during the implementation of the Bill.</p>	<p>Addressing climate change via a gendered lens and recognising its disproportionate impact on women globally is an issue of increasing importance for WRDA.</p> <p>The FRP contains a wide range of recommendations relating to the climate crisis and creating a caring economy.</p> <p>Link to WRDA response here</p> <p>Link to WPG response here</p>
Pregnancy and Inducing Labour	<p>Women's Policy Group NI Endorsement of Women's Resource and Development Agency Response to NICE Inducing Labour Update Consultation on Draft Guideline.</p> <p>WRDA are critical of the inherent racism within the recommendations of this guideline, as there is a suggestion that being black or brown is a physical risk during pregnancy. This ignores the structural violence and root causes of inequality within our medical professionals and society as a whole – namely racism and histories of colonialism.</p>	<p>Addressing inequalities within the healthcare provision on an intersectional basis is a key pillar of the FRP.</p> <p>Issues of reproductive healthcare, autonomy, choice, and informed consent are key themes within the FRP.</p> <p>Link to WRDA response here</p> <p>Link to WPG response here</p>

	WRDA does not wish to see these guidelines being published as they adopt a clinical and short-term lens, a more holistic approach to the needs of women and birthing people on a more intersectional basis.	
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Westminster

Bills – July 2021

Issue	Date	Sponsored by	Stage	Notes	Links to Feminist Recovery Plan
Police, Crime and Sentencing Bill	21/07/2021	Robert Buckley, Ministry for Justice (House of Commons) Baroness Williams of House Trafford, Conservative Life Peer (House of Lords)	House of Commons passage completed; moved to Second Reading (House of Lords)	<p>A Bill to make provision about the police and other emergency workers; to make provision about collaboration between authorities to prevent and reduce serious violence; to make provision about the powers of the police and other authorities for the purposes of preventing, detecting, investigating or prosecuting crime or investigating other matters; to make provision about the maintenance of public order; to make provision about sentencing, detention, release, management and rehabilitation of offenders; etc.</p> <p>This has been controversial as it is viewed as an attack on the right to protest.</p> <p>Debates have highlighted that the impact of violence against women, particularly domestic violence, sexual violence, controlling and coercive behaviour by men and their impact on the</p>	<p>This is a very broad Bill covering a range of topics including gender and sexual based violence. However, the right to protest has also been essential in furthering women's legislation.</p> <p>Read full details of the Bill here.</p>

				community is included in that strategy to reduce violence against women and girls.	
Northern Ireland (Ministers, Elections and Petitions of Concern) Bill	07/07/2021	Brandon Lewis, Ministry for Northern Ireland Office	Report Stage (House of Commons)	<p>A Bill to make provision about Ministerial appointments, extraordinary Assembly elections, the Ministerial Code of Conduct and petitions of concern in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>This Bill will deliver aspects of the New Decade, New Approach Agreement which was agreed by the five main NI political parties in January 2020. The Bill is concerned with the sustainability and transparency of the Northern Ireland institutions.</p> <p>Some key changes include requiring petitioners to come from more than one Northern Irish political party and updating the code of conduct for Northern Ireland Ministers.</p>	<p>These new provisions reform the Petition of Concern mechanism in order to reduce misuse</p> <p>Previously the Petition of Concern has been abused and used to block socially progressive legislation such as equal marriage. Such reforms go some ways in ensuring one party cannot override the democratic process.</p> <p>Read full details of the Bill here.</p>
Childcare Bill	18/06/2021 (No change since previous update)	Matt Rodda (Labour)	Second Reading (House of Commons)	A Bill to enable provision to be made for appeals relating to free childcare for young children of working parents to be settled by agreement; to make further provision designed to increase efficiency in the administration of free childcare schemes; to make provision about the promotion of free childcare, including to disadvantaged groups.	Childcare is recognised as an important aspect when the economic justice pillar of the FRP. Social expectations in which women are the predominate carers of children place barriers on their ability to access and progress within the

					workforce. Read full details of the Bill here.
Conversion Therapy (Prohibition) Bill	22/06/2021 (No change since previous update)	Wera Hobhouse (Liberal Democrat)		<p>A Bill to prohibit sexual orientation and gender identity conversion therapy.</p> <p>There is little detail about this Bill currently given its early stages, however, it will be interesting to keep an eye given similar legislation is in conversation in the Northern Ireland Executive.</p>	<p>This is a gendered offence, in which people were targeted as a result of their sexual orientation and gender identity. It is important to support victims/survivors and future generations deserve to be free from the repetition of similar gendered violence.</p> <p>Read full details of the Bill here.</p>
Miscarriage Leave Bill	23/06/2021 (No change since previous update)	Angela Crawley (SNP)	Second Reading (House of Commons)	<p>A Bill to make provision for paid leave for people who have experienced a miscarriage.</p> <p>There is little detail on the Bill in its current stages; however given the introductions of a Parental Bereavement Bill within Stormont this will be worth keeping an eye on</p>	<p>The FRP highlights the importance of employment protections for mothers and fathers who will undoubtedly be affected by the Miscarriage Leave Bill.</p> <p>Read full details of the</p>

					Bill here .
Pregnancy and Maternity (Redundancy Protection) Bill	24/06/2021 (No change since previous update)	Maria Miller (Conservative)	Second Reading (House of Commons)	A Bill to prohibit redundancy during pregnancy and maternity leave, including up to six months after the end of pregnancy or leave; except in specified circumstances.	<p>The FRP highlights the importance of employment protections for mothers and fathers who will undoubtedly be affected by the Bill.</p> <p>Read full details of the Bill here.</p>