



WRDA Stormont Update – March 2022

Summary

There has been much to celebrate in terms of the passing of feminist legislation and gendered governance. Issues such as the implementation of safe access zones, the passing of the period poverty bill, and justice issues such as the protection from stalking bill and safe leave for domestic abuse victims/survivors. These are incredible strides, but there is so much more to be done. With elections coming up it is important that we take a minute to appreciate who is going to fight for change and implement continued feminist and progressive legislation.

Make sure to register to vote so that we can continue to see great legislation such as these in the next parliamentary programme for government.

Update put together by WRDA Volunteer Courtney Girvin

| Issue | Proposed by | Comments | Links to the feminist recovery plan (FRP) |
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| Protection from Stalking Bill | Naomi Long, Minister for Justice | <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. 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.</p> <p>Domestic homicide is linked to high-risk indicators such as coercive and controlling behaviour, stalking and domestic violence. The FRP also notes NI specific considerations such as the link between paramilitarism and stalking behaviours.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill here</p> |
| Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill | Naomi Long, Minister for Justice | <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>The FRP is pleased to see the implementation of the Gillen Review recommendations and believes they have the potential to transform the experience of those reporting their experience of rape and other sexual offences.</p> <p>This is vital given that recent research found that 97% of women have been sexually harassed and 96% chose not to report as they believed it would not do anything.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill here</p> |

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| | | <p>At its core this Bill has two key aims. Firstly, to enhance public safety by implementing elements of the Gillen review of serious sexual offence cases and from a review of the law on child sexual exploitation and sexual offences against children. Secondly, to improve services for victims of trafficking and exploitation.</p> <p>The Bill also creates new sexual offences and penalties such as behaviours of upskirting and downblousing.</p> | |
| Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Bill | Diane Dodds (previous), Minister for Economy – continued by Gordon Lions (current) | <p>A Bill to make provision about leave and pay for employees who have lost their children. 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. Secondly, parental bereavement pay in which those eligible will receive a fixed or earnings-related weekly rate of pay.</p> <p>Consideration stage debate highlighted three divergences of opinion among members. Firstly, when the Bill was first introduced there was no inclusion of bereavement pay and leave in the case of miscarriage. Second, how soon to implement this legislation, and finally how much the implementation of this Bill will cost – with the figure of £100 million being estimated.</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> <p>Parental leave is recommended as a day one employment right within the FRP.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill here</p> |
| Safe Access Zones Bill (Public Health and Well Being Bill) | Clare Bailey (Green Party NI – South Belfast) | <p>This Bill requires the Department of Health to provide safe access to healthcare facilities including buffer zones/safe access zones around reproductive healthcare facilities.</p> <p>Such zones would mean anti-abortion protesting and harassment that would cause distress to those accessing healthcare would be unable to occur, and it would be a criminal offence to do so. The Bill also creates obligations on the Department of Health to liaise</p> | <p>This would enhance the ability of women and others, including the medical professionals who work within these buildings, to access healthcare services such as abortion and accessing contraception without fear of harassment and intimidation.</p> |

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| | | with police services to monitor and enforce safe access zones, alongside the requirement that the Department publish annual reporting in relation to effectiveness of the usage of safe access zones. | The FRP recognises the importance of enacting safe access and buffer zones. Link to information on the Bill here |
| Period Products (Free Provision) Bill | Pat Catney (SDLP – Lagan Valley) | <p>A Bill to secure the provision throughout Northern Ireland of free period products; and for connected purposes. England, Scotland, and Wales each have varying schemes in place to provide sanitary products free of charge in schools and some other public buildings. Northern Ireland has been the only place in the United Kingdom where such products are not provided free of charge in schools.</p> <p>This Bill strives to place a duty on the Department of Health to ensure that period products are available free of charge on a universal basis in appropriate locations; and to create regulations which specify which public service bodies have said duty to ensure access to free period products.</p> | <p>The FRP has highlighted the importance of good, gendered governance elsewhere globally –highlighting policies related to free period products as an example of this.</p> <p>Furthermore, WRDA and the Women’s Policy Group have been vocal in their support of movement towards free period products in past consultations.</p> <p>Link to information on the Bill here</p> |
| Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Bill | Rachel Woods (Green Party NI – North Down) | <p>A Bill to make provision for an entitlement to 10 days paid safe leave in each year for victims of domestic abuse; and for connected purposes. The Bill makes this a day one right to be guaranteed to all employees.</p> <p>Safe Leave can help mitigate some of the barriers that victims/ survivors face when attempting to seek help and support. It can also help address some of the costs of domestic abuse for employers.</p> | <p>The FRP has highlighted the good practice of similar policies elsewhere globally such as in New Zealand.</p> <p>The FRP supports this legislation but would like to see up to 20 days paid safe leave as a day one right which should be available to take either as a block or more flexibly.</p> <p>Link to more information on the Bill here</p> |

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| Preservation of Documents (Historical Institutions) Bill | Alan Chambers (Ulster Unionist Party – North Down) | <p>A Bill to make provision for the preservation of documents relating to certain institutions and residents of those institutions between 1922 and 1995, and to certain children of those residents. The Bill outlines the definitions of what is meant and understood by relevant documentation, relevant information, and relevant institutions.</p> <p>This promotes a pathway to justice for both the women and children who were abused by institutions such as the Mary Magdalene Homes by preserving information they may wish to access in the future. The keeping of historical records is also a mechanism of transitional justice to ensure non-recurrence and the potential for future truth telling projects.</p> | <p>The mother and baby homes which existed in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland was an inherently gendered abuse and trauma which was reinforced by gendered stereotypes and assumptions such as fallen women.</p> <p>Victims and survivors, and their families deserve the truth of the institutional abuse that occurred; future generations deserve to be free from the repetition of similar gendered violence.</p> <p>Link to more information on the Bill here</p> |
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