



6 January 2011

Dr Kathryn Bell  
Committee for Health, Social  
Services & Public Safety  
Room 410, Parliament Buildings  
Ballymiscaw, Stormont  
Belfast, BT4 3XX

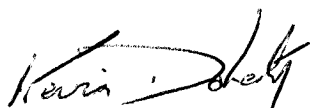
Dear Dr. Bell

**Re: Autism Bill**

Disability Action has endured an enforced closure due to inclement weather and at this point senior staff responsible for policy development, and commenting on draft legislation have not been available.

Consequently Disability Action is unable to respond to your recent request within the required timescale but I enclose a letter from our Chief Executive to Mr. Bradley MLA which outlines Disability Action's broad attitude to the draft Autism Bill.

Yours sincerely

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**Monica Wilson**  
Chief Executive



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19 April 2010

Mr Dominic Bradley  
Chairperson  
All Party Assembly Group on Autism  
Parliament Buildings  
Stormont  
Belfast, BT4 3X

Dear Dominic

**Re: Consultation on a draft Autism Bill for Northern Ireland**

Disability Action is a pioneering Northern Ireland charity working with and for people with disabilities. We work with our 167 member organisations to provide information, training, transport awareness programmes and representation for people regardless of their disability; whether that is a physical, mental, sensory, hidden or learning disability.

21% (369,390) of adults and 6% (105,540) of children in Northern Ireland has a disability and the incidence is higher here than in the rest of the United Kingdom. Over one quarter of all families here are affected.

As a campaigning body, we work to bring about positive change to the social, economic and cultural life of people with disabilities and consequently our entire community.

I apologise for the delay in responding to this important consultation and hope this letter of response will be accepted by the All Party Group. It is hoped that MLA's will recognise the value Disability Action places on an equality and rights based approach. Disability Action has considered the briefing paper and associated questions very carefully and would make the following comments in response:

- Disability Action recognises the personal, emotional and economic consequences that autism brings to individuals and their families.
- Issues concern not only service delivery but the broader social dimension of peoples' general attitudes to and awareness of autism.
- A key challenge is defining autism to ensure that all those on the broad spectrum of autism are included in an agreed definition.

The UK Independent Living Strategy (to be achieved by 2025) and similar innovations in the Republic are built on increasing personalisation of services around the needs of individuals which we believe is vital to the independence of all people with disabilities in Northern Ireland and is particularly so in the case of autism where the definition is so broad and the needs so varied.

Whilst recognising the importance of identification and assessment, Disability Action believes that policy should ensure that everyone gets treated as an individual and gets the support which meets their specific needs. Consequently we believe that the personalisation agenda must be integral to the Executive's thinking.

For many people with disabilities changes in practice are often as, or more, effective than policy change, we advise that the good practice models currently being delivered here should be the focus of developing best practice across Northern Ireland.

Structures and processes are a means to an end which should be a seamless, strong, responsive system, not just focussing on particular services but one which deals with all issues from the perspective of the mainstream.

Disability Action believes the best way to deliver social inclusion, and equality for all disabled people including those with autism is to support the introduction of "personalisation" which will give greater choice and

control over how and when one interacts with services and will support disabled people to participate in Northern Ireland society.

We believe that legislation such as this proposal, if put in place, should be framed in a way which provides positive support to **all** disabled people.

Yours sincerely

**Monica Wilson**  
Chief Executive