



**Committee for the Office of First Minister and deputy
First Minister**

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**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

**From: Cathie White
Clerk to the Committee for the
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister**

Date: 3 February 2011

**To: Kathryn Bell
Clerk to the Committee for Health, Social Services and
Public Safety**

Subject: Autism Bill

At its meeting on 2 February 2011, the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister agreed to forward the attached response from the First Minister and deputy First Minister to the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

**Cathie White
Committee Clerk**



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Deputy First Minister**

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Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety
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Our Ref: COR/898/10

31 January 2011

AUTISM BILL

Thank you for your letter of 10 December regarding the Autism Bill which is currently before your Committee.

We are satisfied that the main scope of the proposed legislation falls within the remit of the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and that he will respond on most of these issues. For our part, we are supportive of the principles of the Bill to improve the lives of people with autism. We support the establishment of a statutory requirement for the formulation of an autism strategy.

However, the Bill also suggests amending existing anti-discrimination legislation, to include references to social and communication disability and/or Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). We believe that the scope of disability discrimination legislation is already broad enough to provide appropriate protection to people with a disability whatever its nature. However, we are committed to reviewing the extant legislation in the context of implementation of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and in taking forward implementation of the Report of the Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Disability. We expect that the first monitoring report on the UN Convention will issue for public consultation early in 2011. We would therefore suggest that this aspect of the proposals should only be progressed in light of that work together with the broader consideration of any changes to disability discrimination that may be required.

We trust the Committee agrees with our approach to reviewing the needs of all persons with disabilities.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Peter D. Robinson', written in a cursive style.

RT HON PETER D ROBINSON MLA
First Minister

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Martin', written in a cursive style.

MARTIN McGUINNESS MP MLA
deputy First Minister