

03 September 2013

Dear Members of Parliament for Northern Ireland,

I am writing to state Include Youth's concerns with regards to the proposals in Part 2 of the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill due to have its second reading in Westminster on 3rd September.

As you may be aware charities are already bound by charity law as well as numerous conditions placed on them by funders and therefore cannot be party political. However if the proposals included in the draft Bill were to become law then many charities would be curtailed from getting involved in campaigning and advocacy work on issues that are important to the people they work with.

Include Youth was established in 1979 essentially to promote best practice for disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people. Whilst working directly with young people much of our work has concentrated on a range of policy advocacy and lobbying activities. We know from independent evaluations that politicians and decision makers often find our interventions helpful if challenging. They rely on the views of the young people we represent and the analysis we offer. A recent independent evaluation found that:

MLAS have described the lobbying work on youth justice that Include Youth does as 'extremely important' and while some acknowledge that they may not always agree with Include Youth's position, they are as a result 'more knowledgeable and sensitised to youth justice issues.'

As one MLA put it, while written briefings are useful, 'statistics don't speak as loud as young people's direct experience'.

We would strongly argue that the work of genuine advocates is vital in any democracy to ensure that the voices and experiences of our most marginalised communities are heard.

The proposals in the bill are complex and unclear and therefore Include Youth endorses the concerns identified by NICVA, the umbrella organisation for the voluntary and community sectors in Northern Ireland. The proposed scope of the bill is so broad it could capture a range of the day-to-day activities charities, like Include Youth, carry out, entirely legitimately, as part of their campaigning and advocacy work.

In addition the bill proposes a regulation and reporting framework which would place a vastly disproportionate administrative burden on both charitable organisations and the regulatory bodies.

I hope that this letter and those from NICVA and its sister organisation NCVO will assist you in your deliberations on this Bill. Should require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Koulla Yiasouma

Director