



Department of
Justice

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt

Männystrie O tha Laa

www.justice-ni.gov.uk

The Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill

What do you think about our ideas?



**Easy
Read**

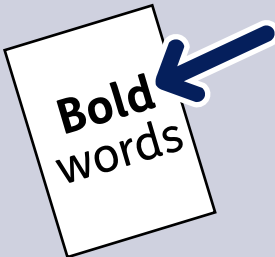
Easy Read



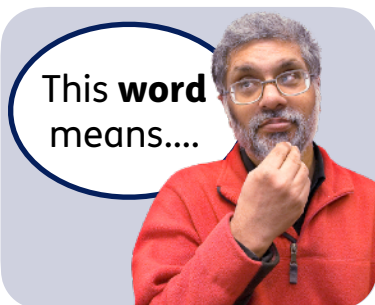
This is an Easy Read version of some information. It may not include all of the information but it will tell you about the important parts.



This Easy Read booklet uses easier words and pictures. Some people may still want help to read it.



Some words are in **bold** - this means the writing is thicker and darker. These are important words in the booklet.



Sometimes if a bold word is hard to understand, we will explain what it means.



Blue and underlined words show links to websites and email addresses. You can click on these links on a computer.

What is in this booklet

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About this booklet



This booklet is from the Department of Justice of Northern Ireland.



We are part of the government of Northern Ireland.



We want to make a new law to help **victims** and **witnesses** of crimes get the help they need when they need it.

A **victim** is someone who is harmed or injured because of a crime.

A **witness** is someone who saw a crime or has information about a crime.



We are writing a document about what the new law should include. This document is called the **Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill**.



We want to know what you think about our ideas for the new law.

Please tell us what you think by:



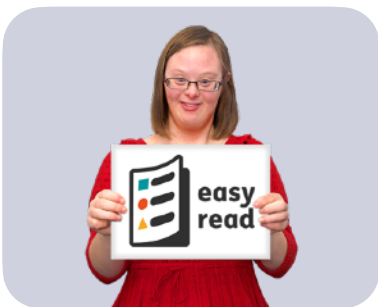
- Reading the information in this booklet.



- Answering the questions in this booklet.



You do not have to answer all of the questions if you do not want to.



This is an Easy Read document which is easier to understand for people with learning disabilities, children and young people.

About the questions



The questions in this booklet will ask you what you think about our ideas for the new law.

We would like to hear from:



- Victims, witnesses and their families.



- Groups and organisations who work with victims and witnesses.



- Professionals from lots of different services, like health and social care, and education services.



You have until 20 February 2025 to send us your answers.

If you need these questions in a different format, like large print, you can contact us by:



- Email:

DOJVictimsWitnesses@justice-ni.gov.uk



- Post:

Victims and Witnesses Branch
Access to Justice Directorate
Department of Justice
Massey House
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SX

Your answers



We will use your answers to write a **report** about what people in Northern Ireland think about the new law.

A **report** is a document which explains information or findings about something.



This means some of your answers may be used in our report.



But nobody will know that your answers came from you.



We will keep any personal information you give us safe.



If you would like to know more about how we keep your information safe, please go to our website:

www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk

Making a complaint



A **complaint** is when you tell us you are unhappy with what we have done.



If you would like to make a complaint about the way we have used your personal information, you can contact us by email:

DataProtectionOfficer@justice-ni.gov.uk



If you would like to make a complaint about the way we have asked you these questions, you can contact us by email:

Governance.Unit@justice-ni.gov.uk



Or you can contact us by posting to:
Governance Unit Corporate
Engagement and Communications
Division
Justice Delivery Directorate
Department of Justice
Room C4
4th Floor
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SG

Questions for you to answer

Idea 1



Our first idea for the new law is to make a new job called the **Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses of Crime**.



A **commissioner** is in charge of checking that certain organisations are doing their work well.



The Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses of Crime will check that the **criminal justice system** is meeting the needs of victims and witnesses.



The **criminal justice system** is all the different organisations involved in dealing with people who have broken the law.



The Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses of Crime will focus on checking that the needs of **vulnerable** victims and witnesses are being met.



Extra support

Vulnerable people are people who need extra support to stay safe.



Commissioner

In this booklet, we will call the Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses of Crime, '**Commissioner**'.



Question 1: Do you agree that the Commissioner should check that the needs of **both** victims and witnesses are being met by the criminal justice system?

Yes

No

Please explain why:



Question 1b: Do you agree that the Commissioner should focus on checking that the needs of **vulnerable** victims and witnesses are being met?

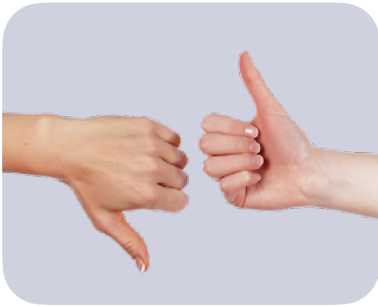
Yes

No

Please explain why:



In the future, we think the Commissioner could check that other organisations are meeting the needs of victims and witnesses.



Question 1c: Do you think this is a good idea?

Yes

No

Please explain why:



Question 1d: Please tell us any other thoughts you have about the Commissioner's job:

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The Commissioner will have tasks that they must do.

We call these **duties**.

The Commissioner's duties will include:



- Speaking up about the issues that victims and witnesses deal with.



- Writing and sharing plans that explain the work they will do.



- Writing reports.



- Speaking to victims and witnesses to find out about their needs.

The Commissioner's duties will also include:



- Checking that laws meet the needs of victims and witnesses.



- Setting up a group who can help them with their work.



Question 2: Do you agree with these duties for the Commissioner?

Yes

No

Please explain why:



Question 2b: Please tell us about any other duties you think the Commissioner should have and why:



Question 2c: Please tell us any other thoughts you have about the Commissioner's duties:

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The Commissioner will have the power to:



- Check whether organisations are following rules about meeting the needs of victims and witnesses.



- Tell organisations how they can meet the needs of victims and witnesses.



- Give the government advice about what is best for victims and witnesses.



- Set up new projects and activities to learn more about what affects victims and witnesses.



- Collect and share information about issues that victims and witnesses deal with.

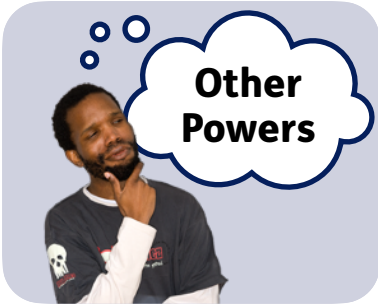


Question 3: Do you agree that the Commissioner should have the power to do these things?

Yes

No

Please explain why:



Question 3b: Please tell us what else you think the Commissioner should have the power to do and why:

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Question 3c: Please tell us any other thoughts you have about the Commissioner's powers:

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The Commissioner may also **review** the new rules every few years.

Review means checking the rules working and being followed.



The Commissioner will share what they find out with the public.

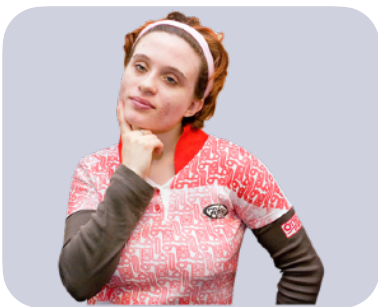


Question 4: Do you think it is a good idea for the Commissioner to review the new rules every few years?

Yes

No

Please explain why:



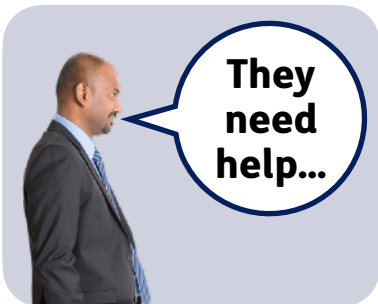
Question 4b: Please tell us any other thoughts you have about the Commissioner reviewing the new law:



The Commissioner will not be involved in victims' and witnesses' individual issues.



Instead, they will look at bigger issues that most victims and witnesses deal with.



If the Commissioner thinks a victim or witness is in danger, they can tell an organisation about it, who can help the victim or witness.



Question 5: Do you agree that the Commissioner should **not** be involved in individual issues?

Yes

No

Please explain why:



Question 5b: Please tell us what else you think the Commissioner should **not** be involved in and why:



Question 5c: Please tell us any other thoughts you have about what the Commissioner should **not** be involved in:

A large, empty rectangular box with a dark blue border and rounded corners, intended for the user to provide their response to the question.



We think that when the Commissioner writes official documents, they should not get in trouble for **defamation**.



Defamation is when someone says something about another person or group that might make the person or group look bad.



This means the Commissioner can share information they have found out, even if it makes an organisation look bad.



This is as long as the information is correct and true.



Question 6: Do you agree that the Commissioner should not get in trouble for defamation when they write documents?

Yes

No



Question 6b: Please tell us about any changes you would make to this idea about defamation and why:



Question 6c: Please tell us any other thoughts you have about this idea:

A large, empty rectangular box with a dark blue border, intended for the respondent to write their thoughts.

As the Department of Justice, we will have the power to change:



- The Commissioner's duties.



- What the Commissioner has the power to do.



- Which organisations the Commissioner can check on.



Question 7: Do you agree that we should have the power to do this?

Yes

No

Please explain why:



Question 7b: Please tell us what else you think we should be able to change about the Commissioner's job:



Question 7c: Please tell us any other thoughts you have about our powers:

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In the future, we think that the Commissioner should be involved in **Domestic Homicide Reviews**.



Domestic homicide is when someone is killed by someone they are close to.



A **Domestic Homicide Review** is when we look into why a domestic homicide has happened.



Question 8: How do you think the Commissioner should be involved in Domestic Homicide Reviews and why?

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Question 8b: Please tell us any other thoughts you have about the Commissioner being involved in Domestic Homicide Reviews:

A large, empty rectangular box with a dark blue border, intended for the respondent to provide their thoughts on the Commissioner's involvement in Domestic Homicide Reviews.



To help the Commissioner do their job, organisations in the criminal justice system will have new duties.

These new duties include:



- Listening to any advice the Commissioner has given them.

The organisation will need to tell the Commissioner what they are going to do about the advice they were given.



- Sharing some details about the complaints they get from victims or witnesses with the Commissioner.



- Working with the Commissioner when they need to.



Question 9: Do you agree that organisations in the criminal justice system should have these new duties?

Yes

No

Please explain why:



Question 9b: Please tell us any other duties you think organisations should have to help the Commissioner do their job and why:

A large, empty rectangular box with a dark blue border, intended for the respondent to write their answer to Question 9b.



Question 9c: Please tell us any other thoughts you have about the new duties for organisations in the criminal justice system:

A large, empty rectangular box with a dark blue border and rounded corners, intended for the user to provide their answer to the question.

Idea 2



Our second idea for the new law is to ask organisations in the criminal justice system to share more information with us.



We will ask organisations to show us that they are following the new rules for meeting the needs of victims and witnesses.

If they do not do this, they will be breaking the rules.

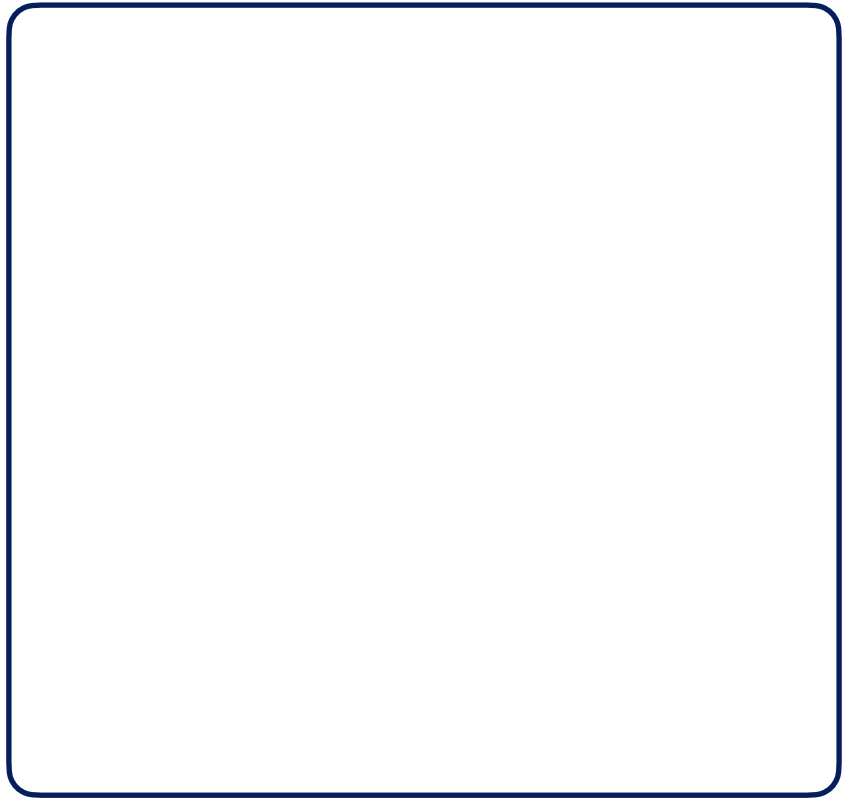


Question 10: Do you agree with idea 2?

Yes

No

Please explain why:

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Question 10b: Please tell us any other thoughts you have about idea 2:

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Idea 3



Our third idea for the new law is to give more support to people who say they have been the victim of a serious sexual crime.



We would do this by giving the person a free lawyer for certain **pre-trial hearings**.



A **pre-trial hearing** is where a court makes decisions about a **trial** before it happens, like what information can be included in the trial.



A **trial** is where a court listens to all the information in a crime case and makes a decision about whether someone did a crime or not.

We will give people a free lawyer if they are:



- Asking the court for some information to be removed from the trial.



- Asking the court to not allow their past sexual activities to be mentioned at the trial.



Question 11: Do you agree with idea 3?

Yes

No

Please explain why:



Question 11b: Do you think we will have any problems because of idea 3?

Yes

No

Please explain what problems and why:

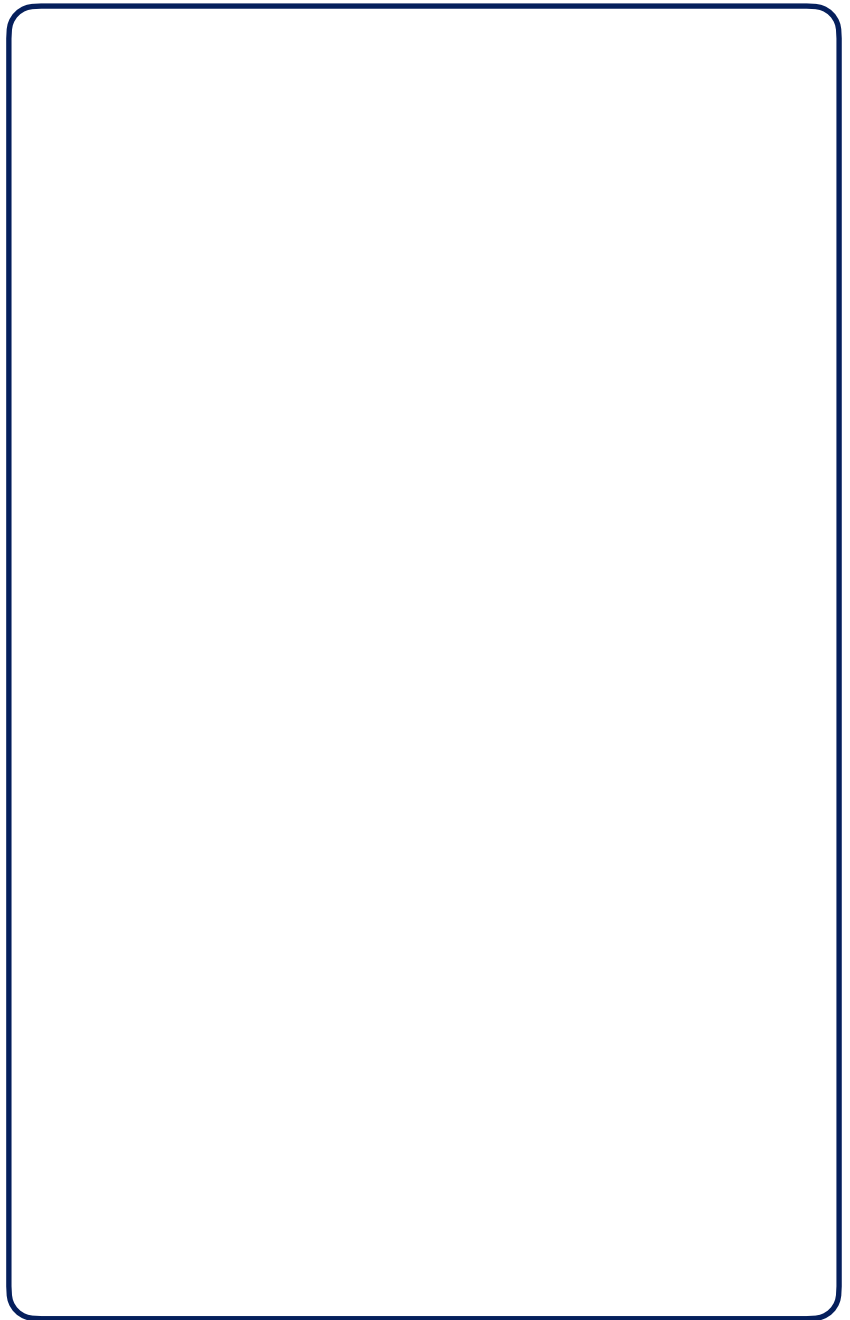


Question 11c: Can you think of any other ideas for how we can make sure people are supported during pre-trial hearings?

Yes

No

Please tell us about your ideas below:





Question 11d: Please tell us any other thoughts you have about giving people lawyers at pre-trial hearings:

A large, empty rectangular box with a dark blue border, intended for the user to provide their response to the question.



We want the new law to give people who say they are victims of serious sexual crimes the **right** to a lawyer at pre-trial hearings.



Rights are things that every person should have by law.



We will pay for lawyers using money from our Sexual Offences Legal Adviser (SOLA) savings.



Question 12: Do you agree that having a lawyer at pre-trial hearings should be a right?

Yes

No

Please explain why:



Question 12b: Please tell us about anything you would add to or remove from idea 3 and why:



Question 12c: Please tell us any other thoughts you have about idea 3:

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Idea 4



Idea 4 is another way we will give more support to people who say they have been the victim of a serious sexual crime.



We will do this by having stricter laws about what information about the person can be used in the trial.



This is so that very personal and private information about the person cannot be mentioned in the trial.

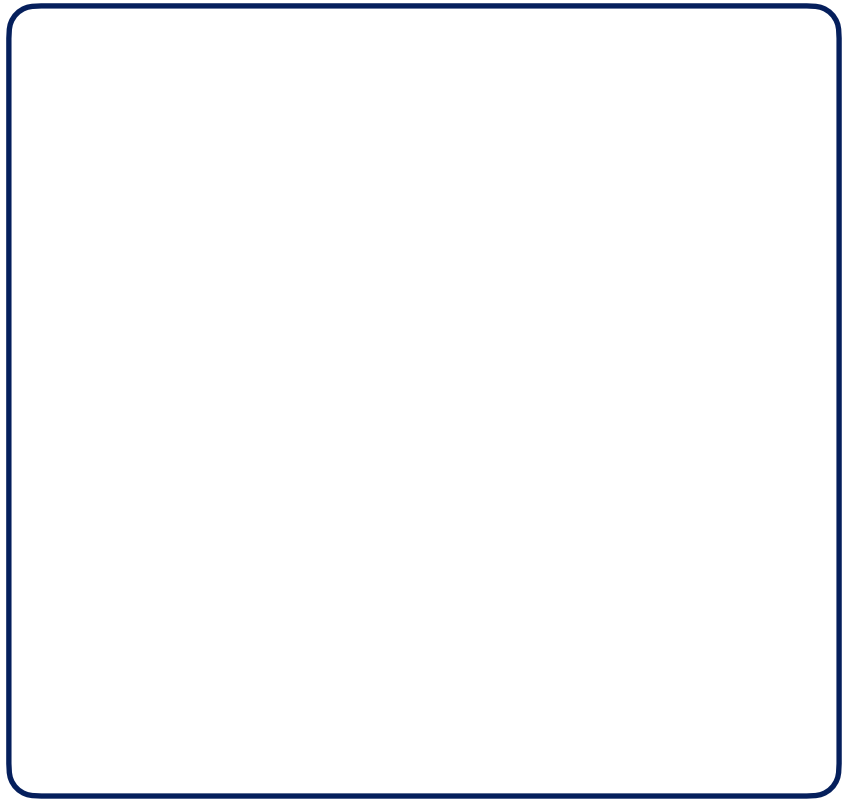


Question 13: Do you agree with idea 4?

Yes

No

Please explain why:

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Question 13b: Please tell us any other thoughts you have about idea 4:

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When a crime case goes to trial, the person who is being accused of doing the crime is called the **defendant**.



They will have their own lawyers. They are called the **defence team**.



Defence teams can use information that organisations have about the person who says they are a victim in the trial.

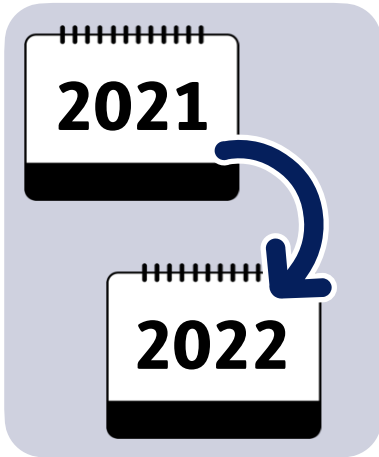


They can use this information to support the defendant.



But defence teams have to ask organisations for this information.

When asking organisations for information, we think defence teams should have to:



- Ask for the information the organisation has collected about the person within a certain time, for example between 2021 and 2022.

This is instead of asking for **all** the information they have about the person.



- Explain why they need the information and what it has to do with the crime case.



This will be part of the new law.



Question 13c: Do you agree that defence teams should have to do these things when they ask organisations for information?

Yes

No

Please explain why:



Question 13d: Please tell us any other thoughts you have about defence teams asking for information:

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