

Petition of Concern

The SDLP believe that the Petition of Concern should be restored to its original purpose, reforming the petition of concern is key to unlocking some of the political difficulties we face.

The original intention of the Petition of Concern was to act as a mechanism to ensure Assembly proofing against adverse impacts on rights and equality issues as laid out in the Good Friday Agreement.

The SDLP believe that the Petition of Concern should be restored to its original purpose – a tool to defend minority communities, not a weapon to be used against them.

The reform of the Petition of Concern can break the deadlock on other issues like Equal Marriage, the Irish Language and others that have been intractable for too long.

As long as the Petition of Concern continues to be abused it will discredit the democratic integrity and reputation of the Assembly and will be seen as a bar to transparency and accountability.

Our position is that the Petition of Concern must be deployed only as it was intended under the Good Friday Agreement to protect equality and human rights.

We believe that it should be reset to meet the terms of the Agreement as outlined in Paras 11-13 of the Good Friday Agreement.

How would it work:

- The threat to rights and equality issues should act as a trigger to its deployment.
- Mechanisms such as the ECHR already exist as a measuring tool in assessing whether or not rights or equality have been infringed upon.
- Additionally, Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act can be used as guidance in assessing whether a threat has been made to the rights of minorities or whether equality is being withheld, and if so, rendering the deployment of the petition of concern applicable.