



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Graeme Dey MSP  
Minister for Parliamentary  
Business and Veterans

Via email only

Health and Sport Committee  
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Dear Graeme,

We have discussed issues the Health and Sport Committee have been having as it scrutinises the Forensic Medical Services Bill (Victims of Sexual Offences) at stage 1.

The Committee, in light of the need to cancel today's oral evidence sessions, discussed our progress and asked that I write to you with some of the issues being faced.

Scrutiny is being hampered by the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis which is preventing witnesses from attending meetings. To date three panels of witnesses have been cancelled and a further session substantially reduced in number and thus content. One of the remaining panels of witnesses consists of representatives from the justice field including police, prosecutors and the legal fraternity and this cannot at the present time proceed.

All members of the Committee are concerned they are thus unable to undertake stage 1 scrutiny to any meaningful extent. Aside from undermining the democratic parliamentary process members are worried we are not doing justice to survivors of rape and other sexual assaults. It is important the Scottish Parliament is able to give such an important piece of legislation due time and attention.

The Committee are also mindful they should not distract any of the required witnesses from tackling the current COVID-19 crisis in the areas they respectively represent.

The Committee are agreed meeting the current stage 1 timetable is not feasible. The Committee therefore request the stage 1 deadline be paused and once the current crisis has eased appropriate time is given for the inquiry to resume, allowing the sessions not taken and those curtailed to be held.

There is recognition of the importance of this piece of legislation and it would be the intention to afford scrutiny due priority once circumstances permit.

The Committee therefore requests the Scottish Government to ask the Parliamentary Bureau to recommend the extension of the stage 1 deadline until a period beyond the easing of current restrictions.

Yours sincerely

Lewis Macdonald

Convener, Health and Sport Committee