



6 Mount Charles
Belfast BT7 1NZ
2 September 2013

Dear

I am writing to you in connection with the 'Transparency, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill'. The Second Reading of this Bill is timetabled for the 3 September 2013, to be followed by a Committee Stage on 9, 10 and 11 September, so this matter is extremely urgent.

The scope of activities contained within the Bill are extremely wide, and as it stands it will include activities carried out by charities as part of their work in representing the interests of their members. The complexity regarding registration of activities, financial thresholds, having to account for staff time in addition to other expenses, and a bureaucratic burden in terms of reporting will mean that civil society groups will be forced to curtail their activities, to the detriment of their members and of wider society.

The Women's Resource and Development Agency works collaboratively with a number of organisations in the 'Women's ad hoc Policy Group'. Before elections the group produces a 'Women's Election Manifesto', containing demands that represent key concerns of women across Northern Ireland. The group also organises election events, to which female candidates from all political parties are invited to speak. In this way the group works to give a public platform to women who might otherwise have little exposure, given the male-dominated nature of public life and media in Northern Ireland. This initiative has been undertaken before every election and we believe that it has been significant in raising women's issues and highlighting the inadequate representation of women in our political institutions. As the terms of the Bill stand currently, the Women's ad hoc Policy Group would no longer be able to engage in this work, to the detriment of our developing democracy.

When the terms of this Bill are being scrutinised we would ask MPs to look again at the status of unaligned civil society groups and their need for registration. The rules must be made less restrictive so that charities are able to undertake legitimate campaigning in furtherance of their aims.

Yours sincerely

Dr Margaret Ward