

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

Committee Office House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

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Justin Tomlinson MP
Minister of State for Disabled People
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
SW1H 9NA

15 January 2021

Dear Justin,

You may be aware that the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee is currently holding an inquiry into the Northern Ireland Protocol. It has recently been brought to the Committee's attention that the Protocol has created an issue for assistance dog users and for the training of assistance dogs in Northern Ireland.

As you know, the Protocol requires Northern Ireland to remain aligned with certain areas of EU law. These include the EU Pet Travel Regulation (EU) 576/2013, which requires that pets moved into a relevant jurisdiction must have received an anti-rabies vaccination when over the age of 12 weeks, and that 21 days must have passed since that vaccination was administered. The effect of this regulation is that dogs will not be able to move from Great Britain into Northern Ireland until they are at least 15 weeks of age.

This creates an issue for the placement and training of guide dogs in Northern Ireland, as it is considerably more difficult to train puppies as assistance dogs at that age. The Guide Dog National Breeding Centre has announced that it will suspend travel for its puppies to Northern Ireland as a result of the change. This suspension will make it more difficult to pair assistance dog users with animals in Northern Ireland.

A further issue affects individuals travelling with assistance dogs between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. As of January pets, including assistance dogs, will no longer be able to travel from the UK into the EU's regulatory area on an EU Pet Passport. Instead, they will need to acquire an Animal Health Certificate for their pet within ten days of travel. For assistance dog users who make frequent journeys between Great Britain and Northern Ireland this will be costly and burdensome.

The Committee notes that some temporary flexibility has already been granted in the application of these regulations, and that pets travelling from Great Britain to Northern Ireland will not be subject to routine compliance checks until 1 February 2021. However, in the longer term we believe that this situation will be an unnecessary barrier to training assistance dogs in Northern Ireland, and cause needless disruption to the lives of assistance dog users.

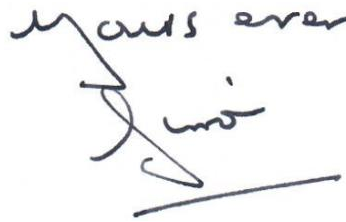
The Northern Ireland Protocol was designed with the intention that it should "impact as little as possible on the everyday life of communities in both Ireland and Northern Ireland." The Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee has the power to agree flexibilities that allow the Northern Ireland Protocol to be implemented in a proportionate way, and could therefore reach an agreement to permit unhindered travel for assistance dogs. The Committee urges the Government to explore this possibility in the Joint Committee at the earliest opportunity.

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I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Simon Hoare', with a horizontal line drawn underneath.

Simon Hoare MP

Chairman, Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

Cc Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

Cc Rt Hon. Brandon Lewis MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland