

# Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

32<sup>nd</sup> Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Tuesday, 13 December 2022

Note by the clerk

## Petition PE1787: The Use of Makaton Sign Language

### Background

1. [PE1787 The Use of Makaton Sign Language](#) was lodged on 15 January 2020. It calls on the Scottish Parliament “to urge the Scottish Government to ensure that all parts of the legal system use Makaton Sign Language”.
2. In the previous session of the Parliament (Session 5), the Public Petitions Committee considered this petition and wrote to the Scottish Government. It received written submissions from the [Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service](#), [Police Scotland](#) and from the [Scottish Government](#).
3. In its submission, the Scottish Government stated that it is committed to ensuring a fair and effective justice system that is accessible to all and recognises that supporting effective communication is needed to achieve this. It also stated that it recognises that people with learning disabilities may require additional support, and that it is vital to involve them and their representative organisations in work to develop policies relating to this support.
4. However, it noted that while Makaton can be used to support an individual’s understanding of what is happening, it may not be possible to translate all justice proceedings into Makaton and considers that it should not be seen in isolation as a solution but rather as part of a range of support available.
5. On 29 October 2020, the Session 5 Public Petitions Committee agreed to refer the petition to the Equalities and Human Rights Committee under Rule 15.6.2 of Standing Orders. That Committee agreed to keep the petition open and to refer it to its successor committee for this parliamentary session.

### Consideration by the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

6. At its business planning day, the session 6 Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee agreed to hold a session with the petitioner in order to gather further information on the issue and reasons why the petition was lodged with the Scottish Parliament.

## Oral evidence

7. At its meeting on Tuesday 13 December the Committee will take evidence from –
  - Sandra Docherty, Petitioner

## Next steps

8. The Committee will consider the evidence heard and decide whether it wishes to keep the petition open and to undertake further work or whether it wishes the petition to be closed.

**Committee Clerks  
December 2022**

## Annexes

The following documents are included for this meeting—

Annexe A [Petition 1787](#) as lodged (considered from 15 January 2020)

## Annexe A

Petition 1787 as lodged (considered from 15 January 2020)

# PE1787: The use of Makaton sign language in the legal system

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ensure that all parts of the legal system use Makaton sign language

## Previous action taken

I have raised this issue with my MSP.

## Background information

At present, people with speech disabilities, who are unable to use British Sign Language (BSL), struggle to access the legal system. Social work departments can carry out adult protection enquires, which is fair enough but getting an incident to court is impossible for people with speech disabilities.

People with communication problems need to be supported to access the justice system when they require it. If people are unable to give days, dates, times, places of a crime, they cannot get full police involvement in a case, so the legal system needs to be able to come to their level of ability, to give them a power to be heard. For many, Makaton, which is a language programme that uses symbols, signs and speech, is an easier way to communicate than BSL.

All parts of the justice system should ensure that people of all abilities can access them. Ensuring that the legal system can use Makaton sign language will allow people with speech disabilities to be heard and more importantly understood.

- Created by Sandra Docherty
- Considered from 15 January 2020

This petition is now under consideration by the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

[Find out about the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee's discussion of this petition](#)

This petition did not collect signatures