

I oppose the Welsh Government "Senedd Reform Bill", published 18 September 2023, becoming law

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 20 Mai 2024
Petitions Committee | 20 May 2024




Reference: SR24/8458/3

Petition Number: P-06-1411

Petition title: I oppose the Welsh Government "Senedd Reform Bill",
published 18 September 2023, becoming law.

Text of petition:

The Senedd propose 96 Members to be elected in place of the current 60.
Labour and Plaid Cymru want to spend up to £120 million creating more
unwanted and unnecessary politicians instead of spending money to fix:

-  Our NHS
-  Our schools
-  Our roads

Do you want to pay more taxes in Wales to fund these new bureaucrats?



1. Background

The Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill was introduced on 17 September 2023.

The Bill addresses some of the recommendations made by the Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform, which reported in May 2022.

The changes proposed by the Bill include:

- Increasing the number of Members of the Senedd from 60 to 96;
- Introducing a closed-list proportional electoral system to elect Members;
- A return to the Senedd being elected for four-year terms;
- Enabling the Senedd to elect a second Deputy Presiding Officer;
- Increasing the maximum number of Welsh Ministers from 12 to 17 (with potential to increase to 19);
- Putting provisions in place for reviews of Senedd constituency boundaries to be undertaken; and
- Making it a requirement for candidates to, and Members of, the Senedd to be registered to vote at an address in Wales.

The Senedd voted by 43 to 16 to approve the Bill at its Stage 4 proceedings on 8 May 2024.

The Bill's Regulatory Impact Assessment estimates the total net cost of implementing the Bill at £99,683,800 to £119,631,700 over the eight-year appraisal period between 2024-25 and 2031-32. It adds that it has not been possible to monetise the benefits that will result from the Bill, but that the Senedd will be better equipped to:

- hold the Executive to account;
- scrutinise policy and legislation in greater detail; and
- engage with the electorate.

The Senedd Commission has subsequently provided revised cost estimates based on the Determination on Members' Pay and Allowances for 2023-24 instead of the 2022-23 Determination used for the purposes of the Bill's explanatory memorandum. This would add between £4,055,500 and £4,198,800 to the estimated cost of the Bill over the eight-year appraisal period.

2. Welsh Government action

The Counsel General, Mick Antoniw MS, is the member in charge of the Bill.

Has has said that the Bill presents the people of Wales with a “once-in-a-generation opportunity to make the changes necessary to modernise the Senedd, reflecting our 21st Century Wales”.

The Bill’s Regulatory Impact Assessment notes that overall cost savings are not envisaged as a result of the Bill, but it does highlight a number of “non-monetary benefits” arising from the Bill. These include:

- The Senedd will be better equipped to hold the Welsh Government to account
- The new electoral system will “remove confusion for the electorate” of having Members elected by one system instead of two and it will provide a more proportional vote than the current system
- Members would be more accessible to the people they represent due to increased capacity to engage with the electorate, communities and stakeholder groups
- Members will be “subject to the laws of the Senedd” as a result of the residency requirement and there will be greater “democratic renewal” as a result of the Senedd being elected every four years instead of five.

The RIA references evidence given by the Auditor General for Wales to the Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform regarding quantifying the scale of gains required in order to offset the potential additional costs from having a larger Senedd. Applying his calculations to the costs set out in the RIA, it estimates that an improvement in value or financial savings (arising from improved capacity for scrutiny) of less than 0.1% of the Welsh Consolidated Fund would offset the additional costs arising from the Bill.

3. Welsh Parliament action

The Reform Bill Committee was established on 12 July 2023 and led on the Stage 1 scrutiny of the Bill.

As per the standard legislative process, the Bill was also scrutinised by the Finance Committee (focusing on the financial implications of the Bill) and the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee, who looked at the quality and legality of the legislation.

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The Reform Bill Committee published its stage 1 report in January 2024, with 50 recommendations made.

The Committee's report highlighted that many of the people who responded to its consultation in a personal capacity were concerned about the costs, referring to the challenging economic climate and cost of living pressures. Some respondents suggested other spending priorities, including health, education and transport.

The Committee explored whether the costs of the Bill are proportionate to the benefits expected to accrue from the increased capacity of the Senedd. Professor Alan Renwick, a former member of the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform, told the Committee that:

"[...] when we're thinking about the merits of a larger Senedd, it seems to me, in the grand scheme of things, these are fairly small sums of money, and the benefits of a well-functioning legislature are very, very considerable. So, it's absolutely right to be careful about the costs, but I'm just wary of placing too much emphasis on those when we're looking at the Bill as a whole"

The Committee noted the challenges involved in quantifying the benefits that may accrue from the "enhanced effectiveness of the Senedd" as a result of the increase in the number of Members and that evaluating and quantifying the impact of scrutiny is difficult.

It stated that if there is to be growth in public and stakeholder understanding of the role of the Senedd, and the rationale for the Bill's reforms, the Senedd, its committees and Members of the Senedd "must continue to find way to understand, measure and communicate the impact of their scrutiny and representative work".

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.