

Appeal: Wales Autism Bill 2019 (For the Few, Not the Many)

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 14 July 2025
Petitions Committee | 14 Gorffennaf 2025

Reference: SR25/11625-3

Petition Number: P-06-1513

Petition title: Appeal: Wales Autism Bill 2019 (For the Few, Not the Many)

Text of petition:

The majority of Labour MSs rejected the Autism (Wales) Bill, despite its potential to significantly improve the lives of autistic people. This petition calls on the Welsh Government to reconsider its stance and prioritize the rights and needs of autistic individuals.

Don't let autistic people be ignored! The Welsh Government must take action to improve their lives. Sign now to demand change and support the rights of autistic individuals

The Autism (Wales) Bill offered crucial protections for autistic people, including a legal framework for autism services, a mandated autism strategy, and an awareness campaign. The Bill aligned with the Human Rights Act, the Wellbeing & Future Generations Act 2015, and UN Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, emphasizing a rights-based approach to autism.

The current Code of Practice lacks the enforcement mechanisms and specific penalties needed to ensure compliance, leaving autistic individuals vulnerable. The Bill's rejection leaves a significant gap in protecting autistic rights and addressing the challenges they face in accessing services and support.



We urge the Welsh Government to reconsider the Autism (Wales) Bill and prioritize the needs of autistic people. By enacting this legislation, Wales can demonstrate its commitment to inclusivity and the well-being of all its citizens.

1. Background

The [Autism \(Wales\) Bill](#) was a Member Bill introduced by Paul Davies AM in 2018. The Bill aimed to ensure the needs of children and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Wales are met, and to protect and promote their rights. The Bill was [scrutinised by the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee](#) but did not progress to Stage 2 of the scrutiny process, following the [Stage 1 vote in the Senedd](#) in January 2019.

The Committee was unable to reach a consensus on whether the Bill was the most appropriate way to achieve the necessary improvements to support services for people with Autism and their families. Some Members believed it was both timely and necessary to put services on a statutory footing to deliver improvements where previous strategies had failed to do so. Other Members felt that more time was needed for existing initiatives and legislation to take effect. There were also concerns about the focus of the Bill, which some stakeholders believed was 'diagnosis-led' rather than 'needs-based'.

Senedd Research has published [a summary of the Autism Bill](#) which sets out the Welsh Government's position on the Bill, and the views of other stakeholders.

2. Welsh Government action

The Welsh Government did not support the Autism Bill. During [the debate on the general principles of the Bill](#), the then Minister for Health and Social Services said he believed the Welsh Government already had the legislative powers they needed to deliver the required improvement in autism services.

He also noted concerns from representatives of other neurodevelopmental conditions about the impact that legislation focusing only on autism could have on wider neurodevelopmental services.

Title:

Since 2018, the Welsh Government has taken a number of steps to deliver improvements to autism and wider neurodivergence services. These include:

- publishing an [updated ASD strategy delivery plan](#);
- introducing a statutory [Code of Practice on the delivery of autism services](#); and
- establishing a [Neurodivergence Improvement Programme](#).

The Welsh Government has provided a detailed list of actions taken since September 2021 in their response to the Committee.

In June 2025, the Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing [gave an update](#) on activity and progress made through the Neurodivergence Improvement Programme, and her priorities for its next phase.

3. Welsh Parliament action

A short debate on the [Women's Institute \(WI\) campaign to support autistic and ADHD women and girls](#) was held in the Senedd on 26 March 2025. Responding to the debate, the Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing said:

“Our goal is to drive down waiting times for children's neurodevelopmental assessments, and to continue the transformation work to create sustainable, integrated services that better serve neurodivergent individuals and their families”

The Cabinet Secretary for Education was [asked about the support being provided in schools for neurodiverse boys](#) in April 2025. She said:

“One of the things that we're doing at the moment is working with Education Support to develop a new professional learning programme for schools that's focused on developing education practitioners' understanding of neurodivergence, child development, and our whole-school approach to mental health.”

4. Response to the petition

In her response to the Committee on 29 May 2025, the Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing wrote:

“The Welsh Government does not support the introduction of autism specific legislation as we already have the legislative levers to deliver improvements to autism and wider neurodivergence services.”

She said the Welsh Government had delivered on its commitment to publish a Statutory Code of Practice on the Delivery of Autism Services, and provided an update on developments since September 2021.

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.