

Response to the Petitions Committee – Petition P-06-1539

Dear Carolyn,

Thank you for inviting my comments ahead of the Committee's consideration of petition P-06-1539. I appreciate the response from the First Minister and wish to highlight the following points.

The letter sets out the legal framework of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and the aim of the Welsh Language Standards to ensure Welsh is not treated less favourably than English. I recognise the cultural importance of this, but the response does not address the petition's central concern: the safety and accessibility risks that arise when English is not prioritised in important public messaging.

The 2021 Census shows that around 80% of people in Wales cannot speak Welsh. Yet examples such as billboards, variable message road signs, NHS TV adverts, and public service phonelines demonstrate cases where Welsh is placed before, or instead of, English. In urgent or time-sensitive situations, this risks confusion, delay, or exclusion for the majority. Comparisons with bilingual signage in other European countries do not address the specific issue of safety-critical communications.

The First Minister notes that “there is nothing to prevent a body from providing information or services in Welsh only.” However, English is the primary language in Wales, and this approach has the effect of treating English less favourably than Welsh. Instead of protecting both languages equally, the standards risk creating the perception that there is no right to speak or receive services in English, despite it being the main language for most residents.

I therefore respectfully ask the Committee to consider: - Has research been undertaken into comprehension and response times to urgent messages when Welsh is shown first? - If not, will the Government commit to commissioning such research? - What safeguards exist to ensure that urgent public information reaches all residents quickly and clearly?

This petition is not about diminishing Welsh, but about ensuring safety, accessibility, and inclusion. In situations where comprehension and speed are critical, English should be prioritised to reflect the reality that it is the main language of daily life for the vast majority of people in Wales.

Thank you for your continued consideration of this matter.

Yours sincerely, C. Thorpe