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Victims' group to hold public meetings

The Victims' Commission is to hold public meetings across Northern Ireland next month, it was revealed tonight.

Belfast, Derry, Newry, Enniskillen and Ballymoney will be visited by the four-member panel. Draft legislation creating the Commission for Victims and Survivors became law today.

A spokesman for the commission said: "After several months where attention has been elsewhere, we hope the focus can now be placed where it belongs, on the victims and survivors themselves.

"The four commissioners would like to restate the position we articulated when they were appointed on January 28, that we are committed to work for the benefit of victims and survivors and none of us will limit our involvement to any group, sector or geographical area."

They include broadcaster Mike Nesbitt and ex-interim victims' commissioner Bertha McDougall whose RUC Reservist husband was murdered by the republican INLA.

The others are Patricia MacBride, whose brother was killed by the SAS and whose father died 17 months after being shot by loyalists, and Brendan McAllister of Mediation NI.

Draft legislation was withdrawn twice in the Assembly amid political disagreement on the roles and decision-making processes of the body.

The Assembly has voted in favour of giving the first and deputy first ministers the option to appoint a Chief Victims' Commissioner in the future.

MLAs also backed a proposal which will only allow the commission to employ someone with a criminal conviction if the first and deputy first ministers give their prior approval.

Sinn Féin deputy first minister Martin McGuinness is meeting the group at Stormont tomorrow afternoon.

PA

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