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Ministers Make Concessions on Welfare Bill to Avoid Backlash as Commons Approves Reforms

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The government's flagship welfare bill has passed the House of Commons following another round of concessions aimed at easing concerns over disability support. Ministers agreed to enshrine safeguards for disabled claimants, though critics say the amendments are too slow and leave room for uncertainty.

Under pressure from campaigners and Labour MPs, the government accepted elements of a proposed amendment from MP Marie Tidball, pledging to give disabled people a stronger voice in shaping future changes to Personal Independence Payment (PIP). While the government stopped short of adopting Tidball's full proposal, including a firm 12-month deadline for the review, it did confirm that a dedicated group would be formed to oversee reforms. This taskforce, to be led by Disabilities Minister Sir Stephen Timms, will include a majority of representatives from disability organisations.

The review, which relates to future eligibility rules for PIP, is due to conclude by autumn 2026 and will be conducted as part of a broader consultation launched this summer. Ministers say the aim is to ensure any policy shift is informed by those most affected, though they insist decisions must remain grounded in fiscal responsibility and long-term reform.

This marks the second major retreat in less than a fortnight. Last week, ministers backed down on plans to immediately tighten PIP criteria and scrapped changes that would have affected existing claimants. Proposed cuts to the health-related Universal Credit (UC) element were also diluted. UC is a means-tested benefit paid to individuals on low incomes or out of work, while PIP supports people with long-term physical or mental health conditions, regardless of income or savings.

Despite the government's U-turn, 47 Labour MPs still opposed the final bill, with some demanding stronger guarantees for those whose health conditions fluctuate over time. York MP Rachael Maskell warned that new claimants could receive less support than those assessed before April

2026, calling it an unfair two-tier system. Her amendment to guarantee consistent support for relapsing claimants was defeated.

The bill passed with 336 votes to 242, marking a victory for ministers seeking to modernise the welfare system without provoking a wider rebellion. However, the government continues to face criticism from both sides. Labour MPs say the changes don't go far enough, while fiscal conservatives warn that weakened reforms will reduce expected savings.

The Department for Work and Pensions had initially projected savings of up to £5 billion annually by 2030. With key elements watered down, those forecasts have been significantly reduced. The United Nations (UN) has also weighed in, asking the government to clarify how the proposals would avoid pushing more disabled people into poverty. No formal response has yet been issued.

While the concessions have placated some MPs, questions remain over whether the final version of the bill delivers meaningful reform or simply delays difficult decisions. For now, the government has managed to push the legislation through, but the road ahead promises more scrutiny, particularly as the 2026 review deadline approaches.