

SEANAD NEWSLETTER

Summer 2016

Web: www.ivanabacik.com

Email: ivana.bacik@oireachtas.ie

 Ivana Bacik

 @ivanabacik

Phone: +353 1 618 3136


Labour



Thank you for all your support in re-electing me to the Seanad! Welcome to the first Newsletter from Senator Ivana Bacik, and the first of the 25th Seanad.

I am delighted and honoured to have been re-elected to represent the Dublin University constituency in Seanad Éireann. I will make sure to keep you up to date with the work that I am doing in the Seanad, and would be happy to raise issues with you on your behalf.

Email: ivana.bacik@oireachtas.ie or 01 618 3136.

Dear Graduate,

Welcome to my first Newsletter for the new term of the 25th Seanad.

This short newsletter provides you with an update on some of the work I have been doing over the past five years in the Seanad and my priorities for the coming term. For a more detailed look at my work, you can find full coverage on my website (including videos and written transcripts of my contributions in the Seanad). I am very grateful for all the support I have received from Trinity graduates since my election in 2007, re-election in 2011; and most recently my re-election in February 2016.

I also organise regular tours of Leinster House and would be delighted to invite you to join us on one of those over the coming months.

Do keep in touch on ivana.bacik@oireachtas.ie – and thanks again for your support.

Best wishes,

Ivana

JUSTICE COMMITTEE WORK



Pictured with Katherine Zappone, T.D., Alan Farrell TD, David Stanton TD (Committee Chair) at the launch of the Justice Committee Drug Report Nov 2015

Since 2011, I have been a member of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality. The work of this Committee has been most rewarding. In particular, I was Rapporteur on a Report on Penal Reform, unanimously endorsed by the Committee in 2013. I have also worked with the Committee on reform of prostitution law, on reforms for undocumented migrants living in Ireland, on a report recommending recognition of Traveller ethnicity; on a report on domestic and sexual violence; and on pre-legislative scrutiny of many Bills, including the assisted decision-making bill; and firearms legislation.

HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING

As we await the publication of Peter Cassell's expert report on higher education funding, I have done a good deal of research on this area and on 21st May 2016 spoke at a seminar at Trinity College, organised by CAVE, the Centre for Culture, Academic Values and Education, at the School of Education, at which I asserted the need for equality of access to university and college education; and my opposition to the re-introduction of fees or of any upfront payment or loan mechanism that would deter students from disadvantaged backgrounds from access. You will see the full text of my speech on my website <http://www.ivanabacik.com/priorities/education>.



MY PRIVATE MEMBERS' LEGISLATION

In the last five years, several of my private members' bills have been accepted by Government. These included my bill to criminalise Female Genital Mutilation; and my Civil Registration (Amendment) bill, which for the first time legalised the solemnisation of civil weddings by Humanists – until it passed, only State Registrars or members of religious bodies could legally solemnise marriage.

I also initiated the Equality (Miscellaneous Provision) Bill, which became an Act in 2015. This amends section 37 of the Employment Equality Act and prohibits discrimination against LGBT teachers or hospital workers. It has been welcomed by teachers' unions and LGBT groups - its final passage through the Dáil added to the great equality successes of 2015.

Finally, in early 2016 I introduced the Competition (Amendment) Bill 2016 which commits to ensure protection of the right to collectively bargain for freelance workers, including journalists, actors and others, who perform their work on a self-employed or contract-for-services basis. This bill was accepted by Government and passed second stage in the Seanad.

REPEAL OF THE EIGHTH AMENDMENT

I was very disappointed that the programme for government agreed in May 2016 does not include any commitment to hold a referendum for repeal of the Eighth Amendment. I will continue to campaign for such a referendum, as I have done for many years. In 2015, along with Labour Women, I published a bill seeking to achieve repeal of the Eighth Amendment, and its replacement with legislation allowing abortion on grounds of risk to life or health; rape; and fatal foetal abnormality.

WOMEN IN POLITICS



A framed picture is now on permanent display in Leinster House of the 'Oireachtas Women' event I organised in 2008 to mark the 90th anniversary of the first election in which women could vote in Ireland (December 1918).

In November 2009, I authored a report on 'Women's Participation in Politics' for the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice which found that the obstacles to women's equal participation in politics can be described as 'the five Cs' – Cash, Childcare, Confidence, Culture and Candidate selection procedures. A key recommendation in the Report was the introduction of legislation to require political parties to select a minimum proportion of 30% of women candidates for each election (an electoral gender quota). The positive impact of this legislation, which became law as the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012, was clearly evident in the latest election, which saw an increase of female representation from 16% to 22%. There are now 35 women in the Dáil, a marked improvement from before. However, Ireland is placed 79th internationally and 17th of all EU countries, with much room for improvement! I will continue to work passionately to increase the presence of women in politics.

MARRIAGE EQUALITY AND OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

Over the past five years, my personal political highlights range from supporting Michael D. Higgins' successful Presidential campaign in November 2011, the introduction and passage of several of my Private Members Bills; and launching and raising matters on behalf of numerous NGOs. However, 2015 was a particularly important year, when history was made on 22nd May 2015, as Ireland became the first country in the world to decide by popular vote to extend full civil marriage rights to gay and lesbian couples. A truly wonderful result for equality. I was proud to be present in May 2016 at Dublin Castle to celebrate the first anniversary of this truly historic vote.



Pictured at the One Year Anniversary of the Marriage Equality referendum at Dublin Castle, 22 May 2016

MY PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW SEANAD TERM

I am looking forward to working on a number of policy priorities over the coming Seanad Term focusing as always on issues of Justice, Equality, Education and Women's Rights.

I am co-ordinating the Vote 100 Project, which will see events in the Oireachtas to mark the centenary of women's suffrage in the 1918 election. I will also ensure that the new Sex Offences Bill progresses through the Oireachtas. This Bill will criminalise the purchase of sexual services - a fundamental reform of our law on prostitution. I will work to ensure the implementation of the two weeks paid paternity leave for September 2016 promised by the previous government.

I have campaigned for many years for greater provision of multi-denominational schooling and have been continually working on the establishment of a new Educate Together secondary school in the South inner city Dublin area. I will continue working on an initiative that I am proposing, which I have called the 'Bike to School' scheme, to incentivise the purchase of bicycles for children, along the lines of the Bike to Work scheme. Workers' rights were at the core of the Competition Amendment Bill which I introduced in January 2016 to provide freelance workers with collective bargaining rights and I aim to progress this further over the coming months.

Finally, Ireland needs to live up to its international responsibilities in relation to the refugee crisis. I will work to ensure Ireland plays a strong role in welcoming families and individuals fleeing the war in Syria and other territories currently afflicted by conflict. This includes reform of the Direct Provision system and I will call for implementation of the reforms proposed in the McMahon report.

MULTI-DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLING AND EDUCATION EQUALITY



Pictured at the launch of the 'Education Equality' campaign, December 2015

I was a founding member and Chairperson of the campaign for a new multi-denominational school in Dublin 8 (the Portobello school campaign); and was delighted when, after spending a year in temporary premises 2013-4 in Harcourt Terrace, the school moved in September 2014 to permanent premises in the former Christian Brothers school on Basin Lane, Rialto, Dublin 8. The school is now called Canal Way Educate Together National School.

See <http://www.portobelloetns.org/> for more details. The campaign for greater equality in education continues. In December 2015, I spoke at the launch of a new 'Education Equality' campaign to ensure greater access to multi-denominational education; and I am very involved in the campaign for a new multi-denominational secondary school in Dublin south city.

CONTACT SENATOR IVANA BACIK

Seanad Eireann, Leinster House, Dublin 2

Email: ivana.bacik@oireachtas.ie Phone: +353 1 618 3136

Web: www.ivanabacik.com

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 @ivanabacik


Labour