

SEANAD NEWSLETTER

2017-2018

LABOUR

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Welcome to the 2017-2018 newsletter from Senator Ivana Bacik.

I was honoured to be re-elected in April 2016 to represent Dublin University graduates 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 there on your behalf.

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Dear Graduate,

Welcome to my 2017-2018 Newsletter, which provides you with an update on some of the work I have been doing over the last year, and my priorities for the coming year. 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 April 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



At NWCI event "No Small Change" 23 November 2017: Ellen O'Malley-Dunlop, Orla O'Connor, Martina Fitzgerald, Sarah Durcan, Emma O'Kelly, and Ivana Bacik

GENDER PAY GAP LEGISLATION

On 25th October 2017, a bill that I had introduced in the Seanad in May was passed through Committee stage with government support. My gender pay gap bill would require all companies with 50 or more staff to publish anonymised data showing pay levels and gender breakdown in their organisations, in order to see if a gender pay gap exists. The bill would then empower the Human Rights and Equality Commission to take action against companies which continue to pay men more than women. The gender pay gap is a significant workplace equality issue; serious pay inequalities in the BBC and RTE, among other organisations, have recently been exposed. Overall, women in Ireland earn on average 14% less than men, despite having had equal pay legislation in place for over 40 years. Those laws have been ineffective because they required individual women to sue their employers in order to achieve equal pay; but newer laws that require wage transparency have reduced the gap between what women and men earn in other countries. My bill is supported by the National Women's Council and by IMPACT trade union, among other organisations, and is likely to become law in 2018. The issue of equal pay remains highly topical, and there is real momentum to create change. On 10th November 2017, I spoke alongside Sonya Lennon and others at an equal pay event organised by the Dress for Success charity, and on 23rd November 2017 I was one of the speakers at a National Women's Council forum on the gender pay gap.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE SEANAD

Since my first election in 2007, I have had six private members' bills accepted by Government; four of which have become law. The four which have become law already are: (1) Criminal Justice (Female Genital Mutilation) Act 2012, which for the first time created a specific offence of FGM; (2) Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2012, which enables non-religious solemnisers like those from the Humanist Association of Ireland to conduct legal wedding ceremonies; (3) Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015, which amends section 37 of the Employment Equality Act to prohibit discrimination against LGBT teachers or hospital workers; and (4) Competition



With Minister Mary Mitchell-O'Connor at the passing of the Competition (Amendment) Bill 2016

(Amendment) Act 2017, which provides collective bargaining rights to vulnerable self-employed workers like freelance journalists, actors and musicians. This was developed in conjunction with trade unions including NUJ, Equity and SIPTU, and was the first private member's bill to become law since the general election 2016. Two other bills that I have proposed are likely to become law in coming months: on pension equality for gay couples; and on the gender pay gap.



With Jan O'Sullivan TD, Stella Creasy MP, and Rhonda Donaghey at the March for Choice 2017

REPEAL THE 8th

For many years, I have campaigned for Repeal of the Eighth Amendment; ever since my student days when I was taken to court and threatened with prison by SPUC (Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child) for providing women

with information on where to access abortion. Following on from the Citizens' Assembly's positive recommendations for a change in the constitutional provision, I have been closely following the constructive deliberations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Eighth Amendment and working with my colleague, Jan O'Sullivan TD, who is the Labour representative on the Committee, to ensure that we see a referendum to repeal the 8th Amendment put to the people in 2018.

I believe that the Constitution is no place to regulate a complex and sensitive matter like abortion - I want to see the Eighth Amendment repealed in its entirety, so that the Oireachtas may legislate to regulate the conditions under which abortion can legally be provided in Ireland.



At the launch of Vótáil 100 21 November 2017, with Catherine Murphy TD, Leas-Cheann Comhairle Pat the Cope Gallagher, Cathaoirleach of the Seanad Denis O'Donovan, Senator Alice-Mary Higgins, and Fiona O'Loughlin TD.

WOMEN IN POLITICS – THE CENTENARY OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

As chairperson of the Vótáil100 committee which is organising the celebrations around the 2018 centenary of women's suffrage in Ireland, I am delighted that we will have so many exciting events and exhibitions taking place in Leinster House. The first year that Irish women had the right to vote and run in parliamentary elections was 1918. Over the course of 2018, the Houses of the Oireachtas will commemorate this important centenary with a programme of cultural, historical and educational events marking the work of the suffrage movement in Ireland going back to the early 19th century.

Our programme will celebrate the lives of the women most closely involved in the campaign leading up to legislative reform and will also focus on the representation of women in parliament, leading up to the present day. Although we have recently achieved a significant increase in women's representation following the introduction of gender quotas for the 2016 general election, women remain greatly under-represented in the Oireachtas. Today, there are only 35 women out of 158 TDs in the Dáil (22%) and only 19 women out of a total of 60 Senators (32%). Clearly, much more needs to be done to bring women forward in politics. We hope that our Vótáil100 programme will encourage and inspire more women to become politically involved, and will remind us all about the importance of the right to vote.

See more here: <https://beta.oireachtas.ie/en/visit-and-learn/votail-100/>

PENSIONS EQUALITY LEGISLATION

In March 2017, the government accepted another private members bill that I introduced in the Seanad - the Pensions (Equal Pension Treatment in Occupational Benefit Schemes) (Amendment) Bill 2016. This Bill deals with the case of Parris v TCD, which David Parris, a retired Trinity lecturer, had taken before the EU Court of Justice. The Court did not accept his argument that the pension scheme was discriminatory, as it provided that a TCD employee's partner would only be entitled to a survivor's pension where the employee had married or entered a civil partnership before turning 60 – he was unable to marry his same-sex partner before that age, as marriage equality had not yet been passed.

This Bill would rectify this discrimination – while representing only a minor change to pension law, it would make a real difference to a small number of LGBT individuals facing continued discrimination in pension benefits, despite Constitutional recognition of marriage equality. I am delighted that Minister Regina Doherty has now replicated the wording of my Bill in the Social Welfare Bill 2017 to provide equal pension rights for individuals in this situation.

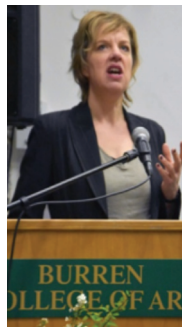


With Nedal Izddenm, representative of the Syrian White Helmets, at a tree planting ceremony organised by the Irish Syrian Solidarity Movement

THE CRISIS IN SYRIA and WELCOMING REFUGEES

Like all of us, I have been appalled and distressed at the horrific scenes of bombing in Aleppo and other towns and cities across Syria, and disgusted at the brutality towards Syrian civilians displayed both by the Syrian regime of Assad and his Russian allies; and by ISIS/Daesh. As a member of the Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs, Trade and Defence, I have been to the fore in raising concerns about the war in Syria and calling for a speedier process to welcome refugees to Ireland. I initiated an all-party motion condemning the bombardment of Aleppo which was passed unanimously in the Seanad in November 2016, met with the Russian Ambassador to Ireland to present this motion to him; and have also taken a

leading role in the questioning of witnesses on Syria at Oireachtas Foreign Affairs Committee meetings. Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of meeting with representatives of the courageous White Helmets group who work to save the lives of Syrian civilians under bombardment, and of joining them in a ceremonial tree-planting ceremony at Stephen's Green, Dublin.



LEGAL CASES THAT CHANGED IRELAND

In June 2017, former Judge and Senator Catherine McGuinness launched a new book co-edited by my colleague Dr Mary Rogan of TCD and myself, *Legal Cases that Changed Ireland*, by Clarus Press. This book examines key legal cases which have brought about significant social change in Ireland, based on the 2015 'Changing Ireland, Changing Law' (CICL) project that Mary and I organised.

The themes and cases covered include women's rights, LGBT rights, immigration rights and public interest cases generally. Contributors include Senator David Norris; Minister Katherine Zappone; Dr Lydia Foy; and Professor Gerry Whyte from TCD Law School.

MULTI-DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLING AND EDUCATION EQUALITY



At the launch of the 'Education Equality' campaign, December

I was a founding member and Chairperson of the campaign for a new multi-denominational school in Dublin 8 (the Portobello school campaign). 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. I have been actively engaged in the campaign for a

new Educate Together secondary school in Dublin South City centre and was delighted at the announcement earlier this year that this school will be opening in September 2018 – see www.educatetogether.ie for details.

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