

SEANAD NEWSLETTER

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Welcome to the end-of-term
Newsletter from Senator Ivana
Bacik.

It has been an honour to represent the Dublin University constituency in Seanad Éireann during the last five years. Below you will see an overview setting out some of the work that I have been doing over that time.

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Dear Graduate,

Welcome to my end-of-term Newsletter from the 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. 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, and re-election in 2011. I am especially grateful for all the matters you have asked me to raise, as well as the provision of feedback from you.

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

Best wishes,

In 2011 I became Leader of the Labour Party group in the Seanad, and Deputy Leader of the Seanad. Since 2011, I have also 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 2012. 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; the sex offences bill; and firearms legislation.



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

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



L-R With Dr. Peter Boylan, Ciara Conway TD, former Senator Dr. Mary Henry (Labour Women Commission Chairperson), Catherine McGuinness, Emmet Stagg TD, and Minister Aodhán Ó Ríordáin TD outside Buswells for the launch of the Labour Women Commission Report,

In November 2014, I announced the establishment of a Labour Women Commission on Repeal of the Eighth Amendment, to work on drafting legislation to replace the Eighth Amendment, assisted by a panel of independent legal and medical experts including former Senator Mary Henry (our Chairperson) and Drs Peter Boylan and Veronica O'Keane. I was Rapporteur to the Commission. On 27th February 2015, Labour Party members voted unanimously to endorse the Commission's Report and to support 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. Labour Women have prepared draft legislation – and the Labour manifesto includes a commitment to hold a referendum on repeal of the Eighth Amendment.



Pictured L-R Labour Women at the March for Choice and with Cllr Rebecca Moynihan, Tara Flynn and Minister Aodhán Ó Ríordáin, September 2015.

*Thank you for all
your support,
invitations and
feedback!*

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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 January 2014, I invited all current women TDs and Senators to the Seanad Chamber for the taking of another photo to celebrate the contribution women members have made to the Oireachtas. The 2009 report on women in politics that I wrote for the Justice Committee led to the passage of the gender quota legislation now in place for the 2016 General Election.

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

As leader of the Labour delegation to the Constitutional Convention, which took place over 2012-2014, I was delighted to see strong Convention support for the inclusion of economic, social and cultural rights in the Constitution. Other highlights included the 79% majority in favour of marriage equality, and strong majorities in favour of extending voting rights to those aged 16-17; and to support removal of the constitutional blasphemy offence.

SEANAD DEBATES ON LEGISLATION

The extensive list of the debates, amendments, bills and reports that I and my colleagues have worked on over the past five years in both Houses can be accessed easily on the Oireachtas website or via my own website and web links. <http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/>

This last term has seen a particularly large quantity of legislation passing through both Dáil and Seanad. The bills that I led on or contributed to include: the Children and Family Relationships Bill; the 34th Amendment of the Constitution (Marriage Equality) Bill; the Gender Recognition Bill; the Workplace Relations Bill; the Garda Síochána (Amendment)(No 3) Bill; the Social Welfare and Pensions (No. 2) bill; the Health Insurance Amendment bill; the Finance bill; the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 2015; Criminal Justice (Burglary of Dwellings) Bill 2015 and the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill 2015.

SEANAD REFORM – 'CHECK THE REGISTER'

In 2013 I supported the campaign to retain the Seanad, and opposed the Government referendum that sought to abolish the upper house. However I have called for wide-ranging reform of the Seanad, and have contributed extensively to the ongoing debate, in particular during Seanad debates on the topic on 5th May and 8th July 2015. I have made constructive proposals based upon the 2015 Report of the Working Group on Seanad Reform. I have also recommended that the existing registers of voters on the University Seanad panels - the registers kept by the NUI and by Dublin University- should be accessible online by graduates, in the same way that the General Election register is accessible online at www.checktheregister.ie.

MARRIAGE EQUALITY AND OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

There have been many highlights over the past five years. These range from supporting Michael D. Higgins' successful Presidential campaign in November 2011, the introduction and passage of several of my Private Members Bills as detailed above; 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. I had campaigned for many years on marriage equality and was very active on the referendum campaign too. We witnessed record numbers of younger voters in particular becoming registered, and the great success of the #Hometovote movement in getting Irish citizens to travel from many countries to get back for canvassing and voting. The results were extraordinary – the national Yes vote was 62%, with most Dublin constituencies voting Yes at levels of 70% or higher. A truly wonderful result for equality.



Marriage Equality Referendum 2015 Clockwise L-R Out on the canvass, with Labour canvassers in Portobello, Dublin; with Michael D. Higgins during the Presidential campaign; at an AIMS Ireland rally; and with my fellow cyclist colleagues at the launch of the Labour Party Marriage Equality campaign in 2015.

MULTI-DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLING AND EDUCATION EQUALITY

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



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

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.

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