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Welcome to the summer 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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## REPEAL OF THE EIGHTH AMENDMENT – 25th MAY 2018

Following the historic 66% majority in support of repeal of the Eighth Amendment on 25th May 2018, after 35 years we will now be able to provide women in Ireland with access to the reproductive healthcare we need. Irish women will no longer need to travel abroad to access abortions, or to import abortion pills illegally and without access to medical care or support.

Over the many weeks of the Referendum campaign, I was canvassing extensively for a Yes vote, in Dublin and elsewhere. I was also on the national steering group of the Together for Yes civic society campaign.

During the campaign, along with other Oireachtas members, I also formed Women's Health in Ireland (WHI) - a cross-political, cross-professional group supporting the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Eighth Amendment, which in December 2017 had called for repeal of the Amendment and for the introduction of legislation providing for abortion. We worked to gain support from as many Oireachtas members as possible for the referendum and also held fundraisers for 'Together for Yes'. For more information see <https://www.womenshealthireland.ie/>

I am continuing to work on shaping the forthcoming abortion legislation. As President of Trinity College Dublin Students' Union in 1989, I was taken to court and threatened with prison, along with my three fellow officers, for distributing information to Irish women on where to access abortion. I am very grateful now, nearly 30 years later, that my fellow Irish citizens have voted so overwhelmingly for a more democratic, equal and progressive Ireland.



With Joan Burton TD and Donna Cooney, activist, in Dublin Castle on 26 May 2018

## VÓTÁIL 100 – THE CENTENARY OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE



At the launch of Vótáil 100 with former prominent Oireachtas members, including the late Monica Barnes, 30 January 2018.

I was delighted to have been elected Chairperson of the Oireachtas Vótáil 100 programme for 2018. This is the official cross-party steering committee within Leinster House which is working together with other institutions to organise a series of events in the Oireachtas over 2018 to mark the centenary of women's suffrage – women in Ireland first obtained the right to vote in 1918. The first General Election in which women could vote took place in December 1918, when Constance Markievicz was elected as the first woman TD and MP. \

Our programme has included a Díospóireacht na nÓg youth debate, involving Transition Year students from all over Ireland; a seminar held in conjunction with the Royal Irish Academy, and an exhibition in Leinster House with the National Museum, showcasing objects like the Irish Women's Franchise League banner. We visited the Houses of Parliament in Westminster in July 2018 to present a portrait of Constance Markievicz to MPs for display there. An online exhibition to mark the centenary curated by Jane Maxwell of Trinity College Dublin Library entitled 'Violence, Ridicule and Silence' is accessible at <https://www.tcd.ie/library/exhibitions/suffrage/>

You can find out more online about the Vótáil 100 programme and exhibition at <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/visit-and-learn/votail-100/>

**This year 2018 is highly significant, as we mark both the centenary of women's suffrage and the repeal of the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution. I have been very actively involved on both; I am Chairperson of the Oireachtas Vótáil 100 Programme to celebrate the centenary; and played a leading role over many years in the campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment.**

## ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE SEANAD

Since my first election in 2007, I have had six private member's 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 (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 will become law in coming months: on pension equality for gay couples; and on the gender pay gap.

## PENSIONS EQUALITY LEGISLATION

In March 2017, the government accepted a private member's 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, taken by David Parris, a retired Trinity lecturer, before the EU Court of Justice. David had argued 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 before turning 60, but he was unable to marry his same-sex partner before that age, as marriage equality had not yet been passed. The Court rejected his claim, but my bill would rectify this discrimination – it would make a real difference to a small number of LGBT individuals facing continued discrimination in pension benefits. I am delighted that the wording of my bill has now been incorporated into the Social Welfare Bill 2017 to provide equal pension rights.

## GENDER PAY GAP LEGISLATION

On 25th October 2017, a bill that I had introduced in the Seanad in May 2017 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. 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.

Women in Ireland earn on average 14% less than men, despite equal pay legislation having been in place for over 40 years. Newer laws that require wage transparency have reduced the gap between the earnings of women and men in other countries. My bill is supported by the National Women's Council and Fórsa trade union, among other organisations. I have spoken on the Gender Pay Gap issue at a series of events, including a June 2018 'Women in Research Ireland' seminar at Trinity College Dublin.



Speaking at the Women in Research Seen & Heard series at the Long Room Hub



Speaking at the ICCL event, "Under the 8th" the week of the referendum

## WOMEN IN POLITICS – GENDER QUOTAS & WOMEN'S CAUCUSES

Six years ago, we passed a new gender quota law, the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012. The positive effect of this Act was clearly evident in the 2016 General Election, which saw an increase in the proportion of women TDs from 16% to 22%, with 35 women elected to the Dáil out of 158 TDs – an historic high. This new law stemmed from a 2009 report on 'Women's Participation in Politics' which I authored for the Joint Oireachtas Justice Committee. However, there is still much room for improvement, and I will continue working to increase the presence of women in politics.

Since 2016, we have established a Women's Caucus within Leinster House, and I am on its Working Group. We are seeking to achieve greater numbers of women entering politics; the introduction of quotas for local elections; and we will be hosting the first international conference of Women's Parliamentary Caucuses in Dublin Castle in September 2018.

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