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Welcome to the summer 2017 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 summer 2017 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

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 committed to including the provisions of my Bill in the Social Welfare Bill 2017 to provide equal pension rights for individuals in this situation.

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 first three are: the Criminal Justice (Female Genital Mutilation) Act 2012, which for the first time created a specific offence of FGM; the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2012,

which enables non-religious solemnisers like those from the Humanist Association of Ireland to conduct legal wedding ceremonies; and the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015, which amends section 37 of the Employment Equality Act to prohibit discrimination against LGBT teachers or hospital workers.

More recently, my bill to give collective bargaining rights to vulnerable freelance workers - the Competition (Amendment) Bill 2016 - developed in conjunction with trade unions including NUJ, Equity and SIPTU, was accepted by the government and passed through the Seanad in November 2016, the first private member's bill to pass either House of the Oireachtas since the general election. In September 2016, I was invited to speak at a major European trade union conference in Brussels on atypical work in the arts sector, bringing this important Bill to international attention. The Bill passed final stage in the Dail on 31st May 2017, the first private members bill to become law under the current Government.

In May 2017, I introduced the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (Gender Pay Gap Information) Bill 2017 which will address the ongoing gender pay gap – women still earn 14.8% less than men, despite decades of equal pay legislation. The Bill's purpose is to require large employers to publish information relating to employee pay, for the purpose of exposing any differences in pay between women and men workers. It was not opposed by Government and I will work to see it passed.

LEGAL CASES THAT CHANGED IRELAND

In June 2017, former Judge and Senator Catherine McGuinness officially 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.



WOMEN IN POLITICS – THE CENTENARY OF WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE

The positive impact of our new gender quota law, the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012, was clearly evident in the 2016 general election, which saw an increase of female representation from 15% to 22%, with 35 women TDs elected. This law stemmed from a 2009 report on ‘Women’s Participation in Politics’ which I authored for the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice.

However, there is still much room for improvement. I will continue working to increase the presence of women in politics. I am delighted to have been elected Chairperson of the Oireachtas steering group co-ordinating the ‘Vótáil 100’ Project, a cross-party grouping which will work with libraries, national cultural institutions and others 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.

REPEAL OF THE EIGHTH AMENDMENT



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. Now that the Citizens’ Assembly has given its very positive

recommendations for change, I will continue campaigning for repeal of the eighth amendment. On 27th April 2017, my opinion piece analysing the Assembly recommendations was published in the Irish Times. 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. I am a member of the All-Party Oireachtas Group on Sexual and Reproductive Rights - we have called on the government to expedite the work of the Oireachtas Committee set up to implement the Citizens’ Assembly report, and also called on them to set a date for the holding of the referendum on the Eighth Amendment, which we want to see take place by March 2018.



Speakers at Brexit seminar. From left: Director of Policy Network Matthew Laza, Deputy Secretary General of the Party of European Socialists (PES) Marije Laffey, CEO of Enterprise Ireland Julie Sinnamon, Labour leader Brendan Howlin TD, Senator Ivana Bacik, Claire Hanna SDLP MLA for South Belfast

FOREIGN AFFAIRS & BREXIT

In June 2016, I was delighted to be appointed Labour Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs by Labour leader Brendan Howlin T.D. Naturally the aftermath of the Brexit vote has been a key focus of my work in this area. In December 2016, I chaired a PES (Party of European Socialists)/Labour Party seminar with speakers including Hilary Benn, British Labour MP and Chair of the Exiting the EU Committee; Claire Hanna, SDLP MLA; and Julie Sinnamon, Enterprise Ireland CEO. As we face into a period of uncertainty over the Brexit negotiations, Labour supports the SDLP call for a ‘bespoke deal’ for Northern Ireland, and will continue to support the Peace Process and to ensure the retention of the Common Travel Area. We will also work to develop the ‘Social Europe’ model, while campaigning for greater levels of democratisation, accountability and transparency within the EU institutions.

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 Labour spokesperson on Foreign Affairs, and 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.

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; our thriving new school is called Canal Way Educate Together National School. I am actively involved in the campaign for a new multi-denominational secondary school for South inner city Dublin, and was delighted when we got the go-ahead to open this school with Educate Together in Sept 2018.

See <http://www.educatetogether.ie/dublin-south-city-etss?gclid=CNak-s39INQCFYK77QodZLKPVQ> for more details.

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LABOUR