

SEANAD NEWSLETTER

LABOUR

SPRING/SUMMER
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Web: www.ivanabacik.com

Email: ivana.bacik@oireachtas.ie

Facebook Page: [Ivana Bacik](#)

Twitter: [@ivanabacik](#)

Instagram: [@ivanabacik](#)

Phone: +353 1 618 3136



Welcome to the Spring/Summer 2021 Newsletter from Senator Ivana Bacik.

I was honoured to be re-elected in March 2020 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.

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

Dear Graduate,

Welcome to my latest Newsletter from the Seanad. I would like to say thank you very much for all the support I have received from Trinity alumni over the years; I was honoured to be re-elected to the Seanad in 2020, and delighted to have been appointed Labour Spokesperson for Children, Disability, Equality and Integration, and reappointed leader of the Labour group in the Seanad.

Over the past year and more, the global COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in immense difficulties for us all. As vaccinations are rolled out, the most important priority remains to support the national public health effort. I will do all I can to help with this, as I know we all will.

Best wishes.

Ivana



Submitting my Seanad Election nomination papers in Trinity College last year



With US President Joe Biden at Dublin Castle in 2016.



Launching a petition in support of our citizenship bill with the family of Cormac Ó Braonáin

Due to current COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings, tours of Leinster House have been suspended indefinitely. Once these restrictions have been lifted, I would be happy to welcome you to Leinster House for a tour – just contact my office. In the meantime, I am delighted to invite graduates to join me online! I update my website and social media regularly and have transcripts of my Seanad contributions made available every week so that you can keep up with the work that I am doing on your behalf in the Seanad.



At a socially distant demonstration last summer to protest the closure of St. Mary's Nursing Home Telford

BORN HERE BELONG HERE CAMPAIGN

In memory of former Labour Youth Chairperson, Cormac Ó Braonáin, who died tragically in 2019, the Labour Party and Labour Youth launched the 'Born Here Belong Here' campaign in November 2020. This campaign seeks to achieve greater generosity in Irish citizenship law and support for Labour's Irish Nationality and Citizenship (Naturalisation of Minors Born in Ireland) Bill 2018. I first introduced this Bill in the Seanad in late 2018 to provide a pathway to citizenship for all children born in Ireland. It passed Second Stage in November 2018, and is now progressing through the Seanad. I have recently secured agreement with the Minister for Justice to further its passage and achieve important changes in citizenship law.



Launching the Organisation of Working Time (Reproductive Health Related Leave) Bill 2021

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH-RELATED LEAVE

I have brought forward a new Bill to provide employees with paid leave for early miscarriage or other reproductive health-related reasons; to ensure greater support from employers for those facing difficult and sensitive issues around fertility and reproductive health. If enacted, my Organisation of Working Time (Reproductive Health Related Leave) Bill 2021, inspired by the work of Councillor Alison Gilliland and the INTO, would provide an entitlement to reproductive leave of up to 20 days for women who suffer an early miscarriage, and up to 10 days leave for employees to receive treatments like IVF.

THE MOTHER AND BABY HOMES REPORT

The publication of the Mother and Baby Homes Commission report in early 2021 has marked an important moment of reckoning with Ireland's dark and shameful history, providing new insights into the appalling treatment of women and children over many decades. In the Seanad, I have emphasised that we must stand with survivors and ensure that their voices are heard. In January 2021, I introduced a Labour Party bill to the Seanad – the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2021 – which would provide all adopted persons with the right to access their birth certificates; and I have renewed calls for passage of legislation on illegal adoptions.

KEY PRIORITIES

CHILDREN AND CHILDCARE – The lack of a cohesive national childcare policy has resulted in the emergence of a piecemeal, laissez-faire system in Ireland, with the highest proportion of private providers in the OECD. I have called for the introduction of a pilot childcare scheme to cover 2% of all children aged 0-4 whose parents cannot afford to pay current childcare fees. This proposed scheme would pay a living wage to childcare workers, use not-for-profit providers, and could be expanded to introduce universal, public childcare in Ireland. On education, I have long advocated for greater secularisation, and pioneered the establishment of a multi-denominational school in my area. In light of prolonged school closures due to COVID-19, I am calling for a €100m 'Catch up for Children' scheme to make up for lost class time, with supports targeted at vulnerable children and those with additional needs.

DISABILITY – I am a member of the Oireachtas Disability Matters Committee, which monitors implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. I have been advocating for: specific focus on rights of women in disability service provision; accessible transport measures; a move away from institutional settings; and the full implementation of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015, spearheaded by former Minister Kathleen Lynch, among other issues.

WORKERS' RIGHTS – I introduced the Competition (Amendment) Act 2017, which provides collective bargaining rights for vulnerable self-employed workers like freelance journalists, actors and musicians. My Bill prohibiting discrimination against LGBT teachers and hospital workers became law in 2015. In September 2020, Labour tabled a bill providing for statutory paid sick leave. I will continue to work to secure the rights of workers over the coming term, particularly in the context of the terrible unemployment rates that we are seeing as a result of COVID-19.

EQUALITY – I have campaigned tirelessly for marriage equality; equality in education; recognition of Traveller ethnicity and the rights of migrant communities. I authored a groundbreaking report on penal reform in 2013, and my Bills to legalise Humanist weddings, prohibit Female Genital Mutilation and ensure pension equality for same-sex couples, have all become law. I am continuing to work on Labour's Pardons Bill which would overturn historical convictions for consensual sex between adult men.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS – I have a long track record on feminist campaigns and achievements, was highly prominent in the 2018 Repeal campaign for abortion rights; led on the introduction of gender quota laws in politics; and also on progressive changes to prostitution law. In this term, I am focusing on women's economic inequality: women in Ireland still earn on average 14.4% less than men. I have already succeeded in getting my Gender Pay Gap bill through all stages in the Seanad. It is now before the Dáil; would require all companies with 50 or more staff to publish gendered pay rates; and would empower the Human Rights and Equality Commission to ensure that employers take steps to tackle any gender pay gap disclosed.

CLIMATE ACTION – I served on the board of Friends of the Earth when it was initially established in Ireland and introduced the first Climate Protection Bill in 2007 to set annual and long-term emissions targets for Ireland. As a committed cyclist, I chair the Oireachtas All-Party Cyclists group which works to promote greater safety and improved cycling infrastructure, particularly important as more people make the switch to bikes during the pandemic. I will continue to advocate for urgent climate action policy; the ending of our reliance on fossil fuels and the introduction of a 'Green New Deal'.

For more on my work in the Seanad, see www.ivanabacik.com