



Irish Countrywomen's Association

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice and Equality

September 26th 2018

38th Amendment of the Constitution (Role of Women) Bill 2018

Presentation on behalf of the Irish Countrywomen's Association

*Ms Joan Canning, Federation President – Dublin and Ms Hilda Roche, Federation President – Wicklow
– Members of the ICA National Advisory Committee*

1. The ICA welcomes the opportunity to make this presentation and to contribute to the discussion on the proposed amendment to the Constitution addressing Article 41.2.
On behalf of the National Executive Board, my colleague and I will outline the observations of the ICA in this matter. We hope this will assist the Committee in its recommendations, and in the most effective next steps, to ensure that the Irish Constitution will be reflective of Irish society generally, and of the role of women in Ireland in the 21st century.
I will deal with points 1 –4 and my colleague with the remaining points.
2. The ICA is a well known and respected organisation in Ireland and has had a significant role since its foundation in 1910. In more than a century, the Association has been a vital support to women who gained personally, emotionally and vocationally in being part of a community based, but nationally representative, women's organisation. Our communities and our families benefitted from the personal development which we all experienced, and from the Association's attention to all aspects of women's lives.
3. The ICA has been a lead voice in campaigning for change to benefit women individually, as well as to enhance family life and that of the wider community.
We are a founding member of the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi) and a member of the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW), and active in both.
4. It is with this background and track record that we make the following observations on the matter at hand – Article 41.2 and its focus on a woman's 'life in the home' and 'duties in the home':
5. In the first instance we support the position of the National Women's Council of Ireland that this matter warrants an active and wide-ranging debate, with a focus on the intent of the wording in relation to care and nurture and how that intent can best be articulated in the 21st Century.
6. We believe that the wording in the Constitution has been interpreted in a narrow and restrictive way, rather than facilitating a rights-based approach, ensuring that the value of nurture and care would be resourced, supported and valued.

7. We take the view that as it stands, the wording confined women to the role of unpaid homemakers, although even in the 1930s this hardly reflected the reality of many women's lives. Whether in farming, family businesses, or other work, then as now thousands of women were also critical to the economic survival of families. The fact is that identifying women in their role in the home served to provide the basis for discriminations such as the Marriage Ban and differential wage rates for women and men.

We reject any intent or interpretation that fails to recognise women as equal citizens and contributors to our society.

8. Today we increasingly recognise the diverse roles of men and women within our families. We also have a much greater understanding of the shared and mutually enhancing roles of men and women in the caring responsibilities, whether of children or older relations, and in supporting healthy communities.

At the level of the family, care responsibilities involve huge strain. We have not managed to create the correct infrastructure, or an appropriate way of thinking about these realities as equally important economic sustainability and development.

9. These are just a few observations that we believe are relevant to a debate which should focus on care and nurture as a social necessity and an essential good. We would hope that a national conversation would pose many questions and provide a real opportunity to consider questions such as these:

- Does the Constitution require a statement which endorses and underpins the value of families and perhaps communities, as central to support, care, nurture and the development of us all?
- What difference do we want to make and what is required to realise that difference?
- How do we reflect the importance of men and women in the intergenerational care 'contract' – and is the Constitution the starting point?
- Do we need to be even more explicit about the equality of all citizens and the multiple roles that we all carry and have potential to achieve?

Go raibh maith agaibh as ucht éisteacht linn