



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE  
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

**DÁIL ÉIREANN**

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*  
(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

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## DÁIL ÉIREANN

*Dé Céadaoin, 18 Meitheamh 2025*

*Wednesday, 18 June 2025*

Chuaigh an Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan) i gceannas ar 9 a.m.

***Paidir agus Machnamh.  
Prayer and Reflection.***

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### **Ábhair Shaincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Matters**

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan):** I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 39 and the name of the Member in each case:

Deputy Catherine Ardagh - To discuss the need for all special schools to accept children at different levels on the autism spectrum.

Deputy Duncan Smith - To discuss a lack of primary school places in Portmarnock.

Deputy Paul Murphy - To discuss the merging of classes in St. Kevin's school in Kilnamanagh.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore - To discuss the funding promised for cancer support services across Wicklow.

Deputy Alan Kelly - To discuss the need for greater investment in An Garda Síochána.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae - To discuss when the promised appeal process will be implemented for business grants where a business was misclassified.

Deputy Louis O'Hara - To discuss the ongoing closure of Dunguaire Castle, Kinvara, County Galway.

Deputy Claire Kerrane - To discuss the Government response to recent wildfires in Gortaganny, County Roscommon.

Deputy Erin McGreehan - To discuss the use of Louth County Hospital in Dundalk as a surgical hub for the north east.

Deputy Donna McGettigan - To discuss the need to roll out Jigsaw in more locations in County Clare.

Deputy David Cullinane - To discuss the funding requirements of community specialist

neurorehabilitation services in the south east.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly - To discuss the need to expand services for people with disabilities in Lusk.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly - To discuss the provision of safer school routes and road safety arrangements on the regional roads network in north Kildare.

Deputy Colm Burke - To discuss the need to increase the number of training places for Irish students who wish to study dentistry.

Deputy Mattie McGrath - To discuss the funding of Cluain Training and Enterprise Centre in Clonmel, County Tipperary.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú - To discuss changes to the operation and funding of CAS and CALF schemes, and how this impacts on the provision of disability housing.

Deputy Darren O'Rourke - To discuss the need to improve the consumer protections of home buyers arising from a case in County Meath.

Deputy Albert Dolan - To discuss a change to the enrolment criteria for specific speech and language disorder special classes.

Deputy Séamus McGrath - To discuss the reduction of mortgage interest to be in line with EU average rates.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness - To discuss funding for fisheries ports and harbours in County Waterford.

Deputy Thomas Gould - To discuss the closure of the tenant in situ scheme in Cork city.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire - To discuss the issue of school secretary and caretaker pension entitlement.

Deputy Rory Hearne - To discuss the maintenance of council homes.

Deputy Conor Sheehan - To discuss policing and Garda resources in Limerick city.

Deputies Pearse Doherty and Pádraig Mac Lochlainn - To discuss the future of Letterkenny University Hospital and the necessity to provide a surgical hub.

Deputy John McGuinness - To discuss N25 road project.

Deputy John Lahart - To discuss the purchase of Citywest hotel by the State.

The matters raised by Deputies Alan Kelly, Rory Hearne, Danny Healy-Rae, Louis O'Hara and Colm Burke have been selected for discussion

## Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate

### An Garda Síochána

**Deputy Alan Kelly:** After the confusion of last week, I thank the Minister for coming in himself to deal with this issue. There are a range of issues relating to resources for An Garda Síochána that I discussed with the GRA and the AGSI yesterday. Today, I specifically ask about the resource the public knows as our Garda stations. In particular, is the Minister aware of the report done by the Office of Public Works, with the State Claims Agency and An Garda Síochána, in December 2016 on a review of asbestos surveys of Garda buildings? Will he confirm whether he is and whether the Commissioner or Department has informed him of this or not? The report states that 74 stations are affected by asbestos. The director of the State Claims Agency at the time, Mr. Pat Kirwan, said that 12 Garda stations in particular were very badly affected and remedial works would have to commence within three months. That was nine years ago. The work has not happened. The 12 stations are Mountjoy, Kevin Street, Naas, Santry, where some works have happened, Bandon, Kilmainham, Ashbourne, Newcastle West, Baltinglass, Tramore, Blackrock and Blessington.

On 3 January 2017, this report was sent to the head of Garda health and safety and copied to the head of the Garda estate. It was titled as “necessary attention”. We then had nothing. It went into the abyss. We then had an issue at Santry Garda station, which the Minister is probably aware of, where the station ended up having to be closed in January of this year because of an issue with asbestos. I have a query about the certificate given for reoccupation and where that stands. He might come back to me on that. There is a real issue here regarding health and safety, obviously, in the exposure to gardaí, the public, contractors, etc., but also in respect of the correspondence in the report, where Mr Kirwan, director of the State Claims Agency, said that unless the remedial work was undertaken, the State Claims Agency would be unable to defend future claims. Why was that not acted on? Have we exposed the State to considerable liability?

This is before, as I am sure the Minister is aware, the asbestos directive from the EU has to be transposed into law by 21 December this year. That provides for a ten times decrease in maximum occupational exposure limits. We did not act from 2016 until now to the scale required. The SCA said in 2016 that we were exposed in respect of these Garda stations; I have a list of those stations and what is required in all of them. If we are exposed to that level and this directive has to be transposed by 21 December this year, where does that leave us as regards any gardaí who have been sick in the intervening years, who have had respiratory issues or possibly had issues in relation to cancer, where Garda members have been pregnant, where there have been issues regarding contractors and maybe even issues in respect of members of the public? Where are we on this? Was the Minister aware of this? What remedial actions are happening? What is the plan? Was the Minister told about this issue by the Garda Commissioner? It looks like he tells the Minister very little.

**Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O’Callaghan):** I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. I publicly apologise for the fact there was confusion last Wednesday. Deputy Kelly put down this issue for last Wednesday but I was not here through some confusion in the office.

To answer the Deputy's question directly, I am not aware of the December 2016 report he referred to, which was commissioned by the OPW and the State Claims Agency, in respect of asbestos in Garda stations. However, I am fully aware that very many stations in this country need to be refurbished and upgraded. Last Monday, I was in Castlepollard Garda station with Deputy Troy to look at the station there. It is clearly a station that is archaic. It needs to be modernised. I am sure that is also the case in respect of other stations throughout the country.

Deputy Kelly raised the issue, which is his primary concern and is obviously also of concern to me, of the safety of people working within An Garda Síochána stations, whether they are attested members of An Garda Síochána or Garda staff. Everyone who is working is entitled to ensure that they are working in a safe work environment. I would be extremely concerned if it were the case that they were not working in a safe environment. I will go back and look at the report in respect of what the Deputy raised. Obviously, the concern is an individual within An Garda Síochána getting ill as a result of the presence of asbestos. Fortunately, that has not been brought to my attention as of yet and, hopefully, that is not the case. It is certainly the case when it comes to older buildings throughout the country, I regret to say, that very many of them have asbestos. It was a material that was perceived as being acceptable many decades ago. This is not just an issue that is of concern to An Garda Síochána. It has a broader concern.

I note what the Deputy said in respect of how we will be able to defend any claims. As of yet, I am not aware, and if the Deputy is he might bring it to my attention, of any claims that have been instituted by retired or current members of An Garda Síochána claiming that they sustained injuries as a result of the presence of asbestos in Garda stations. If that is the case, it would obviously be a serious matter from the point of view of both An Garda Síochána and the State. The Deputy mentioned that the State Claims Agency indicated in a subsequent report from 2017 that if it was the case it would be difficult to defend any such claims. I cannot comment in respect of that, but it is certainly the case that if claims were put in and there was liability on the part of the State, I would then ask that the State, in line with the Attorney General's guidelines, would adopt a very principled approach to that. For any member of An Garda Síochána who sustained an injury, which was caused as a result of the known presence of asbestos in the building that exposed that Garda to danger, there would then have to be a liability on the part of the State for that.

The Deputy also mentioned the asbestos directive. I am not trying to diminish my responsibility but I am conscious there are a lot of issues on my desk in respect of An Garda Síochána. The Deputy raised an issue from 2016. I will look at the report, but ensuring that the directive is transposed into Irish law is an obligation we have under European law. We would have to ensure that it is complied with. I will inquire what the level of safety in An Garda Síochána is, but I have not got direct complaints in respect of concerns that members of An Garda Síochána have from working in the stations. I have met the GRA on many occasions. In fact, I met a representative of the GRA last Monday. It is the case that this issue has not been brought to my attention, but I will look at the report. I thank the Deputy for bringing it to my attention.

**Deputy Alan Kelly:** It is very difficult for there to be claims when there is no awareness. How could there be claims if people were not aware that these buildings had high levels of asbestos? How could there be claims? How did they even know? I repeat that the head of the State Claims Agency said that unless remedial work was undertaken, the State Claims Agency would be unable to defend future claims. That leads me to believe there has already been a claim. This report was done by the State Claims Agency, An Garda Síochána and the OPW. Very little has happened and the State has been exposed to claims. Gardaí, contractors and,

possibly, members of the public have been exposed, who are not aware and may have been ill. How could they make a claim if they were not aware and did not know they were exposed? Does this not create a huge risk which the Minister needs to put close to the top of his pile as regards issues the Commissioner has not told him about? I read recently that the Minister said he can only ask questions. Perhaps he needs to have a truth and reconciliation meeting with the Commissioner. Perhaps he needs to sit down and say, “Hey, Commissioner, do you know what, you are out the gap on 1 September. Is there anything else in the long list of issues you have not told me about?” Perhaps he should say, “As Minister, I should not have to ask the question.” He should tell the Commissioner, “There is a thing called section 41 where you have to tell me things. Maybe you should have told me about this. Maybe this is an exposure of the State. Maybe I should have known. Why has nothing been done in relation to it?” There are many other issues. I guarantee many still have not been brought to the Minister’s attention. I encourage the Minister to have that truth and reconciliation meeting very soon. Otherwise, I will be coming to the House on many more issues he is not bloody well aware of.

**Deputy Jim O’Callaghan:** A person is only entitled to take a claim for personal injuries if they have sustained an injury. First, there has to be an injury before somebody can bring a claim and then allege the injury was caused as a result of, in this instance let us say, the presence of asbestos. If people have sustained an injury, it will be diagnosed when they go to the doctor and complain about a specific illness. That diagnosis will be of assistance to an individual if they are told they are suffering from asbestos exposure. Most people will look around to see where they have been and what could have exposed them to asbestos.

On a truth and reconciliation meeting with the Commissioner, I have quarterly meetings with him. I meet him regularly. I meet senior management in An Garda Síochána. Prior to my appointment, I was always impressed with the rank and file members of An Garda Síochána and the excellent job they do. Since being appointed as Minister, I have met a lot of senior personnel in An Garda Síochána and I am extremely impressed with them as well in the work they do. The Deputy is perfectly entitled to highlight the issues of concern to him but as Minister for justice and the person who has political responsibility for An Garda Síochána, I have to look at the broader level of work done by the Garda on a daily basis, whether that is the rank and file members of the force out on the streets in the towns, villages and cities of this country or the great work they do in bringing people to justice before the courts. I cannot adopt a myopic approach trying to identify issues which might get some media attention. I have to have a broader assessment of what is in the best interests of An Garda Síochána.

**Deputy Alan Kelly:** That is very condescending.

**Deputy Jim O’Callaghan:** That is why when I engage with the Commissioner, I probe him. The Deputy has brought things to my attention, which I welcome. When he does that, I say I will raise them with the Commissioner and I do. The same will apply to other Members of this House. I have huge respect for this House. If a Member raises an issue of concern with me relating to the Garda, I will bring it to the attention of the Commissioner and seek an answer.

## Local Authorities

**Deputy Rory Hearne:** I wish to discuss housing maintenance, in particular the impact of mould and damp on tenants of social housing in my constituency and throughout the country. It is an area I have worked in for almost two decades in an academic capacity doing research on



the impact of mould and damp on residents and tenants and working with communities. Mould and damp are endemic across social housing in this city and the country. There is a systemic failure to provide people, particularly families, children and vulnerable people, with housing of a decent standard. A basic human right to housing includes at its core the right to adequate housing, which means housing does not have defects that impact health. The World Health Organization outlines clearly that mould and damp have major impacts on health, through asthma for example, and on other areas, even mental health.

There appears to be no urgency, transparency or accountability. Worst of all, no empathy is shown in how tenants are responded to as regards voids and housing maintenance. We need to go back to what worked, namely, in-house maintenance teams in local authorities. They were the backbone of housing upkeep. They could turn homes around quickly but they were decimated during the Celtic tiger period and again during austerity. I spoke to a man called Craig who contacted my office. He has lived in Ballymun all his life. He started working when he was 15. After experiencing homelessness, he finally secured a local authority home, which was a chance to rebuild and recover. That home has become a nightmare for Craig and his mother. Mould is destroying his clothes, bed linen and belongings. It covers the walls and ceilings. He is only 23 but now he cannot work because of the health impacts of living in these conditions, which include congestion, facial pain, headaches and disrupted sleep. His doctor had to write to Dublin City Council, pleading for action. Is this what social housing looks like in a wealthy republic? If Craig gives up and leaves that home, how long will it sit empty before it is restored and made habitable? Will it be weeks, months, a year?

This is just one of many cases. Another case that came to the attention of my office is that of an older resident of Ballymun in her seventies who is experiencing a distressing housing situation. Her home is also filled with mould and destroyed with damp. She is 71 and has her own health issues. This impacts her physical and mental health. She contacted the council and was told it would be eight or nine weeks before someone would be able to come out and even look at the property. How can older residents be subjected to this unacceptable wait time?

I also raise the issue of Cromcastle Court. It is now so dilapidated that residents wonder if it is already vacant and why has it taken ten years for regeneration. Similar estates across the city include Dolphin House, Pearse House and others. In my constituency in Finglas there are major issues with mould and damp. How long will tenants be left living in substandard accommodation that impacts their physical and mental health? We need more action and support for local authorities.

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy John Cummins):** I thank Deputy Hearne for raising this matter. I assure him the Minister and I and our Department take it very seriously. It is important to note there are just over 150,000 local authority-owned social properties in this State, which have an estimated market value of more than €25 billion. The proper management and maintenance of this valuable State asset is a very important matter. Of equal importance is the requirement that local authority tenants occupying those properties and paying their weekly rent live in homes that provide good comfort levels for their occupants.

In accordance with section 58 of the Housing Act 1966, local authorities are legally responsible for the management and maintenance of their housing stock, including pre-letting repairs to vacant properties, implementation of a planned maintenance programme and carrying out of responsive repairs. Local authorities also have a legal obligation to ensure that all

of their tenanted properties are compliant with the provisions of the rental standard regulations 2019. Notwithstanding the legal obligation on local authorities to manage and maintain their own stock, the Department of housing provides annual funding support to local authorities for management and maintenance under a number of grant programmes such as the planned maintenance, or voids, programme, the energy efficiency retrofit programme and the disabled person grants programme, with the selection of homes and nature and priority of works for inclusion in the programmes a matter for the local authority. From 2013 until the end of 2024, Exchequer funding of more than €59 million was provided to support local authority work in this area. Furthermore, funding is available under the regeneration programme. This funding will support ongoing projects, with a focus on building new homes as well as the refurbishment and rebuilding of some of the oldest flat complexes in Dublin city and local authority estates in various parts of the country. For 2025, €50 million has been made available under this programme.

As is the case across all of our housing stock, local authorities continue to receive and address repair requests in a standard manner. Furthermore, the Department of housing will continue to support local authorities in their work in this area. In particular, I note all 31 of the local authorities are now live on the new asset management ICT system, which provides the ability to carry out and gather the data on stock condition surveys which will inform future work programmes. To that end, €10.1 million has been ring-fenced to support these surveys and subsequent works arising.

In addition, I want to see best practice adopted with regard to the turning around and re-letting of council properties. This is a matter which the Deputy rightly raises and I have addressed on the floor of the House previously. It certainly should not be the case that it takes some local authorities up to a year to re-let a property, while others can turn a property around in between 12 and 14 weeks. That is an issue I interrogate when I visit local authorities. Contrary to the comments the Deputy made on the in-house teams, which are important for the ongoing maintenance work, the National Oversight and Audit Commission, NOAC, indicator reports show that local authorities that have put frameworks in place to enable the quick turnaround of properties are able to turn properties around much quicker.

The Department is open to suggestions. We need to see properties turned around and re-let and they need to be of good quality and to a good standard for tenants.

**Deputy Rory Hearne:** I thank the Minister of State for his response and engagement on this matter. To iterate the scale of this crisis of mould, damp and poor conditions, it was seven years ago that the European Committee of Social Rights found the Irish State to be in violation of human rights and failing to take sufficient and timely measures to ensure the right to housing of an adequate standard for families living in local authorities housing. Seven years ago, the committee found against Ireland on the basis of the presence of sewage, contaminated water, dampness and persistent mould and it raised serious concerns about habitability. It noted in particular the high number of residents in certain estates in Dublin complaining of sewage invasions and issues of dampness and mould.

This is not acceptable. We have to look at what the structural problem is here. Why are local authorities unable to respond in the way they should be able to? We need to go back to in-house maintenance. Local authorities need the funding and resources to systematically and quickly respond to these issues. Children are growing up in social housing in this country whose lives are being damaged by mould and damp. It impacts their education, mental health and life chances. It is a breach of their human rights. We are breaching the rights of children



who are growing up in social housing because of the State's failure to act. This is the State's responsibility; that is one of the most frustrating aspects of this issue. These people are tenants of this State. The State, which is the landlord, should be leading on responses and treating tenants of social housing with dignity and respect. That has to change from the top down and local authorities have to change as well.

**Deputy John Cummins:** I reiterate that it is important that local authority tenants who are paying weekly rents are provided with good quality and good comfort levels in their homes. No one will hear me disagreeing with that. It is set down in the rental standard regulations of 2019. Local authorities are obliged to provide that for their tenants. I have also set out what the Government is doing in providing funding to local authorities to assist them. Under the planned maintenance and voids programme, €31 million is available this year. Under the energy efficiency retrofit programme, €90 million is available. Under the disabled persons grants, a further €25 million is available. Within the regeneration programme, I mentioned €50 million being provided. This funding is expected to provide for upgrade works to more than 6,200 local authority homes this year.

The Department is working with the local authority sector, through the Local Government Management Agency, LGMA, to drive a planned maintenance approach so that we can target local authority homes. There will be stock condition surveys carried out on all 150,000 social homes as part of that programme. The Department will continue to provide local authorities with funding support, including through the schemes I mentioned. It is important to note that local authorities have to move to a position whereby all the rents they are collecting from tenants are ploughed back into the maintenance and upkeep of properties because they receive a significant rent roll.

The Government is working with local authorities to ensure we have proper, adequate and comfortable homes for tenants.

### **Business Supports**

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** I am glad to get the opportunity to discuss with the Minister of State the promised appeals process for business grants where businesses were misclassified, including the power up grant. When will this appeals process begin? In the past few days, we have been in contact with our local authority and it has not been informed of any appeals process or it is not sure if it will happen. In addition to those who qualify - retail, hospitality and beauty businesses - other businesses believed they were wrongly excluded from the increased cost of business, ICOB, and power up grants. Garages, body shops and plant hire and repair companies, all of which paid rates, felt they were not included or they did not know about it. That is the other thing. Other businesses in the first category were not aware of the scheme. Can they be considered?

The ICOB grant was introduced in March 2024 and people could apply until 29 May. Allegedly, businesses were to receive a once-off grant payment as a contribution towards the rising costs they faced, including the rising costs of rates. Around that time, perhaps during the previous year, Tailte Éireann revalued and reclassified people's properties and significantly increased the rates. In some cases, they were increased by two or three times the amount the business used to pay. While the Government did great work by introducing this business payment as a once-off payment, we are worried about how people will contend with the rates bills

they will receive.

Those that did not qualify for the ICOB grant did not qualify for the power up grant the following October. As I said to the Minister of State, some businesses were misclassified. It is very important that we try to give these people assurances that they will get paid as soon as possible. That is why I am raising this issue. I believe the Minister of State took a question on the payment on 1 May and stated it was to be brought in very shortly afterwards. I ask the Minister of State to make things clear this morning, because so many people are under financial pressure and do not know what is happening. Many people are under financial pressure that they are not used to or never been under before because of the cost of everything, including materials and supplies, and Brexit is not helping. I ask the Minister of State to provide certainty and to tell me what is happening.

**Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (Deputy Alan Dillon):** I thank Deputy Healy-Rae for raising this important issue. Last year, the Government introduced two business support schemes that were designed by my Department and administered by the local authorities. The increased cost of business, ICOB, scheme was launched in March of 2024 and was delivered in two phases. The first phase was a broad scheme that distributed over €154 million to 75,000 SMEs in all sectors of the economy in recognition of the higher costs of doing business. The second phase was targeted specifically at businesses operating in those sectors that were most impacted by increasing costs and was focused on the retail, hospitality and beauty sectors. Almost 39,000 SMEs in those sectors received their second ICOB payment. A total of €90 million was paid out in the second phase of ICOB in 2024. As part of budget 2025 last October and in recognition of the continued high energy costs the Department introduced the power up grant. Under this scheme over 39,000 SMEs in the retail and hospitality sectors received a flat grant of €4,000 in the final months of the year. In total, over €158 million has been paid out through the power up grant. Taken together, the grant schemes paid out over €400 million to small and family-owned businesses right across the country in a very short period.

Following the launch of the power up grant, the Department and local authorities became aware of issues where many businesses were misclassified and were subsequently not eligible for the second ICOB payment and the grant. To address this, the Government recently approved an appeals process that will give those businesses in the retail, hospitality and beauty sectors that were not eligible for ICOB and the power up grant because of the misclassification issue the opportunity to register for these grants. I emphasise that this is not a reopening of the grant scheme. This is designed solely to allow those who were originally misclassified the opportunity to register for the grants. Subject to the agreement of the local authorities, we are working extensively with many of the local enterprise offices, LEOs, and intend to open the appeals as soon as possible. Local authorities will contact eligible businesses. They are currently working through those who were misclassified and did not receive a second payment under ICOB. We will inform those businesses of the necessary steps to reapply for the second phase of ICOB and the power up grant in the coming period.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** I thank the Minister of State, but I am a bit confused now. First, I thank the Government for bringing in these two schemes. I also my local authority and all of the local authorities around the country for the great work they did in delivering those grants to the people involved who had applied. The Minister of State has just said that the local authorities are working through the misclassified applications at the moment but my local authority has said that it has not heard anything about the appeals process and was not made

aware of it. I am a bit confused in that regard.

The Minister of State also stated that it is not a reopening, but many people did not know about first scheme and did not apply for it as a result. Obviously, they were then not entitled to apply for the second one or did not meet the criteria. I am concerned about that. Is there any way that those people can be accommodated? Some people feel aggrieved that they were not considered in the first place because they were in neither of the three categories that were outlined at the start. Many people are facing fierce financial pressure at the moment. I know the Government is also under tremendous pressure but these people are the backbone of rural communities. Sadly, some of them have departed the scene. Last year, many small companies could not carry on. I wonder whether the grant would have helped them. I am sure it would. Will the Minister of State consider reopening the scheme to accommodate those who have been left out?

**Deputy Alan Dillon:** I again thank the Deputy for raising this important issue. As outlined, my Department is actively working with local authorities and the LGMA to finalise the details of the appeals process. This process will allow businesses that were misclassified to have their cases reviewed and, where appropriate, be given access to the supports. This is a priority for the Department. We want to ensure that we do everything possible to commence the appeals process without delay. We need to get it right, and we are finalising matters with the local authorities. We will contact eligible businesses in that regard.

Under the first phase of ICOB, over 75,000 SMEs registered and were given a flat payment. Under the second phase, 39,000 were eligible. We need to determine how many of those who were deemed ineligible were actually eligible. That work is currently being undertaken. This Government recognises the vital role that SMEs play within local economies, towns and villages. I am sure that Deputy Healy-Rae has been a big advocate for the SMEs in Kerry. We want to ensure that we can alleviate some of the significant pressures they are under. That is the importance of ensuring that SMEs get a cash injection. We placed a particular focus on the retail, hospitality and beauty sectors because they were the most impacted. A paper commissioned by the Department detailed rising operational costs and identified that the greatest cumulative burden fell on those sectors in terms of cost changes and regulatory burdens. The Department will continue to work with local authorities to ensure that there is a speedy process put in place to deliver for those businesses who need it most.

### **Heritage Sites**

**Deputy Louis O'Hara:** Dunguaire Castle is an iconic cultural and heritage landmark in Kinvara on the Wild Atlantic Way but it remains closed off to the public. That is a huge loss for Kinvara and south Galway as a whole in terms of tourism, heritage and employment. This loss is being felt as we enter the summer months. Dunguaire is a 16th century castle with great history, but it has been closed for two years. Huge numbers of tourists pass it in buses every day and while many will stop off, they cannot enter the castle. In the past, there would have been tours, banquets, performances and so on. The castle was a real asset and of significant benefit to the community. This is a real missed opportunity in terms of the castle itself but also for the village as a whole. The castle is right on the edge of the village and is within walking distance from there. Its closure is most definitely impacting on footfall in Kinvara.

Galway County Council has been in talks with the Shannon Group on acquiring the site

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but it needs Government funding to progress this purchase. It has estimated that it could cost in the region of millions of euro to bring the castle up to a safe standard. Significant remedial works are required to do that. The council's request for the necessary funding has not been granted. The council has been engaging with the Ministers responsible for local government and tourism, as have I. They both said they do not have discretionary funding streams available to facilitate the purchase and necessary works. I have also raised this with the Minister of State responsible for the OPW, but he said he cannot direct the OPW to intervene and purchase the site because it is not designated as a national monument. These excuses are very frustrating for the local community, especially as it seems the castle will remain closed indefinitely, with no Department seemingly willing to take responsibility and allocate the necessary funding. Somebody has to take responsibility. The reality is that if there is political will, the castle can be brought back into use.

Where is the Government commitment to the Wild Atlantic Way and towns and villages like Kinvara along the route, for which tourism is critical? Kinvara must not continue to be neglected, and Dunguaire must not be left closed indefinitely. While the funding required is significant, it should be seen as an investment rather than an expense, considering the spin-off benefits for the local community and the increases in tourist and employment numbers.

Can the Minister of State outline whether the Government decision not to provide funding to Galway County Council to acquire Dunguaire Castle to bring it up to a safe standard and ultimately reopen it to the public will be reconsidered?

**Deputy John Cummins:** I thank the Deputy for raising this matter, which I am taking on behalf of the Minister for Transport, Deputy Darragh O'Brien.

As members may be aware, Shannon Airport Group informed the Department in summer 2020 that it was necessary to consider a comprehensive and radical adjustment of its structure to secure the long-term future of the Shannon Heritage business and employees. Several challenges had arisen, including the lack of expertise in maintaining the sites in the group, the capital investment required to maintain the heritage sites and the impact of the onset of Covid-19. Subsequently, Shannon Airport Group engaged extensively with the relevant local authorities on the transfer of sites and the business. King John's Castle was successfully transferred to Limerick City and County Council in April 2022 and the Shannon Heritage business and four sites in County Clare were transferred to Clare County Council in May 2023.

Dunguaire Castle is the only remaining site under the ownership of Shannon Airport Group. The Minister understands that Galway County Council has engaged with the group on the possible transfer. The Minister, Deputy Browne, has informed the Minister, Deputy O'Brien, that the national monument service of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage received a funding request from Galway County Council in November 2024 in relation to the castle. He understands that in response to this request, the National Monuments Service wrote to the CEO of Galway County Council in December 2024 advising that a voted funding stream to facilitate the purchase of heritage sites by local authorities is not available. However, he is aware that the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage funds a range of relevant grant streams intended to support local authorities and other owners in respect of the repair and conservation of archaeological and built heritage sites.

Where the structures concerned are protected or are within a designated architectural conservation area, the built heritage investment scheme and the historic structures fund can provide

support for the repair and conservation work. The built heritage investment scheme provides grants of between €2,500 and €50,000, while the historic structures fund offers funding of between €50,000 and €200,000 for works on a larger scale. Where the structure is an archaeological monument, the community monuments fund can provide grants of up to €100,000 for conservation works, where eligible. In 2025, the community monuments fund awarded 122 projects €7.5 million in funding.

All of these grants help owners and the custodians of archaeological monuments and built heritage assets alike to safeguard them into the future. In recent years, these conservation schemes have allocated in excess of €50 million for works on archaeological monuments, historic buildings and the public realm, which is a testament to the dedicated and hard work of all involved, including local authorities, community groups, private owners, the professional heritage sector and officials within the Department, to ensure the ongoing protection, conservation and maintenance of our heritage assets.

In addition to the aforementioned conservation schemes, local authorities seeking funding should, depending on the exact nature and circumstances of the structures and buildings in question, engage with the urban regeneration and development fund, the rural regeneration and development fund, the LEADER programme or Údarás na Gaeltachta funding schemes.

**Deputy Louis O'Hara:** The issue is not just the purchase of the castle but also bringing it up to a safe standard. As outlined, Galway County Council estimates that could cost millions of euro. The grant schemes the Minister of State has outlined, such as one offering €100,000, will not be sufficient for Galway County Council to acquire the castle and bring it back into use.

The Minister of State mentioned some of the Clare assets of the Shannon Group that were purchased by Clare County Council. Government funding of €6 million was provided at the time to facilitate the purchase of those assets. If the Government is prepared to do this for Clare County Council, why not Galway County Council? The Government needs to step up to the plate and ensure Dunguaire Castle is brought back into use. We are receiving excuses as to why this cannot happen, but something similar has happened before. That is the reality. The funding provided at the time was an acknowledgement of the importance of heritage sites like the one in question and the need to support the Wild Atlantic Way and villages like Kinvara.

Our local authority in Galway is cash-strapped. It is one of the worst-funded local authorities in the State as a result of consistent Government underfunding over many years. Our council is not in a position to take this on without Government support. It is very frustrating for us in Galway that we seem to be constantly neglected by the Government, particularly in this instance. Funding was provided to another local authority but not that in County Galway.

The castle is an iconic cultural and heritage landmark and a very popular tourist attraction along the Wild Atlantic Way. It must not be left closed for any longer. Will the Government recognise the importance of the site to the local community in terms of heritage, employment and tourism and provide the necessary funding to Galway County Council?

**Deputy John Cummins:** I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. There is no question but that investment in our archaeological and built heritage delivers great benefits to the public through enhancing the character of an area. I acknowledge the representations the Deputy has made on this specific case.

As indicated, Shannon Airport Group operated Sharon Heritage on a commercial basis in



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line with its commercial mandate, meaning the sites were likely to open only on a seasonal basis. The Deputy referred to the transfer of four sites to Clare County Council, which did receive support through funding, but the Deputy must acknowledge that the transfer of four sites was exceptionally complex and involved the transfer of staff. St. John's Castle was transferred to Limerick City and County Council without any financial support from the Government. That is why I have outlined several schemes available to assist local authorities in maintaining and upgrading our built heritage assets. Those schemes are set out as I set out in my original remarks and I will be more than happy to work with Galway County Council regarding them, but there is a difference between providing funding to one site as opposed to four whose transfer was complex and involved the transfer of staff. I acknowledge the Deputy's representations on this matter.

### **Dental Services**

**Deputy Colm Burke:** The issue I wish to raise, which I am aware was raised in the House recently, relates to the number of places for dental students in Ireland. In UCC in 2023, 61 students qualified as dentists. Of these, 25 were European, including Irish, and 36 were from outside Europe. In Trinity the same year, 41 students qualified. Of these, 25 were Irish or European and 21 were non-Europeans. We have a huge shortage of dentists who are prepared to provide a service for public patients, yet they are providing treatment if you attend as a private patient. The number providing public care has dropped from 1,450 to 810. The latter is the most recent figure available and relates to 2023. The number has, in fact, fallen below 810 at this stage. The number receiving treatment who are public patients dropped from 393,000 in 2012 to 283,000 in 2023. That is a decrease of 110,000.

There is also a substantial problem with regard to people who have intellectual disabilities in that access to care is not there for them. I had one case recently where the family involved had to pay out for private care that cost more than €10,000. Care is available but there is a substantial waiting time of anything up to 12 months, even for the most urgent case. This issue needs to be dealt with, first in the context of engagement with the Irish Dental Association and trying to get more dentists to take on public patients or people with medical cards. The second issue is training. We have got to dramatically increase the number of students who qualify each year who are more likely to stay in Ireland.

I fully accept that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland intends to start a new training programme, which will involve at least 20 Irish students. I do not think that is sufficient for the demand that exists. For instance, within a mile radius of my constituency office in Cork, two dental practices have closed because the owners could not get anyone to take them over. They wanted to retire. We will have a huge number of dentists retiring out over the next five years. We have got to deal with this challenge now. The other figure given to me by the Irish Dental Association is that 75% of dental practices that wanted to recruit someone in 2023 failed to fill the vacancies that were there. We have got to deal with this as a matter of urgency.

It is not a case that universities have to take on extra staff. It is a case of reducing the number of non-European students taken in and increasing the number of Irish students taken in. This will really help. Even if we do that in the morning, we are still five years off having those qualified dentists available. This now needs to be given priority by the Department. It has to be done in the next three or four weeks before the universities make final decisions about admissions of



students for 2025. That is why I am raising it a second time in a very short period.

**Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Marian Harkin):** I sincerely thank Deputy Burke for raising this important issue. This is his second time to raise it in a number of weeks. It relates to the availability of dental training places in Ireland.

The Government is committed to ensuring that our healthcare system is supported by a steady and sustainable pipeline of highly skilled graduates. In fact, my Department has just progressed an immediate expansion of 461 places in key health and social care professions. I know dentistry is not included, but it does show the commitment of Government to ensuring that we expand the health and social care workforce.

To come back to the issue at hand, my Department, in collaboration with the Department of Health, the HEA and higher education institutions, plays a central role in delivering the education and training infrastructure needed to meet the evolving demands of the healthcare workforce, including critical areas such as oral healthcare and dentistry. Ensuring adequate capacity to train future dentists is part of our broader commitment to workforce planning that will support the health and well-being of our population.

Until this year, 60 places, as the Deputy said, were available each year to Irish and EU students on dentistry courses. My Department recognises that this represents a limited training pipeline at a time when the demand for oral healthcare, both clinical and preventative, is increasing nationally. The number of places offered is a matter for the higher education institutions in line with their autonomy. I acknowledge, however, that due to a high level of practical work, there can be material constraints on the number of students that can be accepted into dentistry courses.

While my Department does not set quotas for student places, we work closely with the Department of Health and the HEA to explore how capacity can be sustainably expanded in key health disciplines, including dentistry. In 2023, the HEA carried out a targeted capacity expansion exercise across priority healthcare areas. One key outcome was the establishment of new dentistry programmes, including a new bachelor of dental surgery at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, commencing in 2025, as the Deputy mentioned. This new programme will provide at least 20 new dentistry places per annum for Irish-EEA students, significantly enhancing national training capacity. This expansion represents a landmark 33% increase in student intake and clearly demonstrates my Department's and this Government's firm commitment to strengthening the oral healthcare workforce and supplying the graduates needed for a modern, accessible health service.

My Department and the HEA are currently liaising with RCSI as they develop capacity for further expansion of 15 additional places from 2027, subject to approvals. I reaffirm the Department's commitment to working with all of the relevant stakeholders to ensure that any future expansion of dental education is grounded in evidence, responds to national needs and is delivered in a sustainable manner.

It is also my understanding that the Department of Health is currently conducting a scoping exercise to support a skills assessment workforce census across oral healthcare services. This will be the foundation of future policy development.

**Deputy Colm Burke:** I fully accept that the Minister of State and her Department are work-

ing very hard on this issue, but there is a crisis here. We have got to deal with it before the college places are awarded in UCC and Trinity. That is the reason why I am asking the Department to engage with them.

The other issue that needs to be dealt with - and this is a case where both the Department of Health and the Department of higher education need to work - is that there needs to be a clear plan put in place to deal with the number of dentists retiring over the next five years. Even if we increase the number of student places, we will still not deal with that issue. There are figures available. I am surprised that the Department of Health did not look at far earlier. I am concerned by what the Minister of State said about its engagement in a process. Engaging in a process may take two years. This is a priority. The figures are clear. Some 110,000 fewer people are being seen under the public scheme for dental care. In addition, there are 30,000 fewer students in our primary schools being reviewed by dentists. That figure is from 2017.

The other issue that has come to my attention is training for dental hygienists. For instance, I understand that in Trinity last year, there were 12 people taken in on the dental hygienists' programme. There were more than 200 applicants. Again, dental practices are not able to recruit people because there are not enough people available. People are going abroad to train in that area. Likewise, students who cannot get into the Irish system for dental training are going to places like Poland for training.

*10 o'clock*

It is an absolute disgrace that Irish leaving certificate students who are competent and want to go into this area have to go abroad while 44% of all dental students in Irish colleges are from outside the European Union. That has to be addressed.

**Deputy Marian Harkin:** I assure the Deputy, on behalf of the Minister, Deputy Lawless, that we are committed to responding proactively to future workforce requirements, including dentists and all other professionals required within the oral healthcare sector. We are working in strong partnership with the Department of Health, the HEA and the higher education providers to ensure our education and training system supports the delivery of a modern, sustainable and people-centred health service.

The Deputy mentioned UCC. The Department of Health has received a strong proposal from University College Cork, requesting €4.7 million in capital funding to establish a dental outreach centre that would enable the training of an additional ten undergraduate dental students annually, particularly benefiting Irish and EU students. This initiative will offer students earlier clinical exposure in real-world primary care settings, which enhances their skills and readiness upon graduation. Discussions are currently ongoing between the Department of Health and my Department to try to progress this proposal with a view to maximising Irish and EU places to obtain value for money for this proposal. Officials from my Department, the Department of Health and the HEA are meeting UCC next week to discuss the proposal. I expect to have more information and can give a further update to the Deputy after that date.

The Minister, Deputy Lawless, is visiting UCC next week for a separate engagement, and he looks forward to discussing this proposal and other important future developments with the UCC president.

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan):** I am sorry. We have to move on.

**Deputy Colm Burke:** May I just mention-----

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan):** We have to move on, sorry.

### **Public Transport Experience: Motion [Private Members]**

**Deputy Roderic O’Gorman:** I move:

That Dáil Éireann:

acknowledges as hugely positive:

— the increase in public transport usage in recent years and, in particular, the fact that over 1 million public transport journeys are now taken each day;

— the reductions in all public transport fares that were introduced in April 2022;

— the additional reductions in public transport fares for young adults between 19 and 25 via the Young Adult and Student Card, which was introduced in 2022 and extended in 2024; and

— the roll out of additional Local Link services since 2022, which has seen a five fold increase in the number of people using these services, with 100,000 journeys taking place on Local Link services every week;

notes that:

— further reductions in fares, balanced with investment in capacity, will bring even more people onto public transport;

— a focus on continuous improvement in passengers’ experience is now critical to further growth in public transport usage, in particular efforts to improve timetabling and eliminate ghost buses, ease of access for all, easier contactless ticketing, and real, accessible customer service when something goes wrong;

— transport remains one of the most urgent sectors of Ireland’s carbon emissions to reduce;

— the All-Island Strategic Rail Review outlines economic, social and climate benefits for both Ireland and Northern Ireland;

— the Connecting Ireland rural bus programme has transformed public transport use in rural Ireland, connecting communities for the first time and delivering regular, frequent services; and

— people with disabilities or with a mobility impairment continue to face unacceptable obstacles to enjoying equality of access to public transport;

further notes:

— the Programme for Government 2025 - Securing Ireland’s Future is completely lacking in measurable commitments in terms of the amount of additional funding envis-

aged, and timelines by which the public transport commitments in it will be achieved; and

- that public transport needs to be affordable, accessible, convenient, connected and safe, and that this will require sustained multi-annual investment from central Government to achieve; and

calls on the Government to commit to:

- a further reduction of 20 per cent in public transport costs for all, across the lifetime of this Government;

- establish a new Public Transport Passenger Experience Office, which will work to diagnose and deliver solutions on issues in the current provision of public transport and advocate for the rights and experience of passengers, this office will provide timely information to passengers, particularly where a service is delayed or cancelled, and which will enhance the accessibility of services for passengers with a disability;

- pass the legislation, and provide the necessary funding, to ensure that the Transport Security Force is established and operational by Quarter 4 of 2026;

- complete the rollout of the contactless fare payment system in 2026;

- a €10 billion increase in capital for public transport in the National Development Plan review;

- ensure the full implementation of the Connecting Ireland rural bus programme, expanding on current levels of services and working towards an “every village, every hour” bus service;

- achieve 150,000 journeys per week on Local Link services by Quarter 4 2026; and

- outline in the Revised National Development Plan those recommendations of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review that the Government plans to deliver by 2030.

I thank the Minister of State for attending.

The Green Party believes that a focus on continually improving the experience commuters and passengers have on our buses, trains and light rail is absolutely critical to further growth in public transport usage. Too often, the stories of being late for work because two services did not connect, standing at a bus stop and seeing numerous services appear on the real-time app and then disappear, listening to someone loudly doomscrolling TikTok in the seat beside you, or feeling menaced on a late evening train carriage when another passenger decides to act up, when shared by word of mouth and put up on social media, undermine confidence in our public transport services. They are a disincentive to people making the change in the way they travel. These stories are effective in doing so because all of us who take public transport have experienced the same situations; we can relate to them when they are reflected back to us.

The programme for Government contains a lengthy section on transport and a significant number of worthy commitments on public transport. However, it is completely lacking commitments in terms of the amount of additional funding that will be committed or timelines by

which the public transport commitments will be met. There is not a deadline in sight in the programme for Government.

The absence of anything measurable has real consequences. Where there are no clear timelines being worked to, it lessens the pressure on agencies, Departments and Ministers. I know the Minister of State will agree from his own experience that, without constant pressure from the top, no major reform in this country will ever succeed.

With this Green Party motion, we seek to fill that gap. We are including eight important commitments, with key measurements around them. At the heart of each of these commitments is the belief that we owe commuters a duty to improve their experience on our public transport systems. I welcome that the Government is not opposing this motion and that the Dáil will agree these eight commitments at the end of this debate.

These eight commitments are not an exhaustive list addressing every challenge faced by public transport, but if they were achieved in the lifetime of this Government, they would make a meaningful difference to commuters all over Ireland, urban and rural, North and South. Ultimately, our goal must be to build a first-class public transport system that gives every person on this island a service that works every time. The benefits that flow from that, in terms of emissions reduction, reduced air pollution, more sustainable communities and healthier people, are all well known.

Commitment No. 1 is to a further reduction of 20% in public transport costs for all across the lifetime of this Government. At minimum, the new Government needs to guarantee that the cuts to public transport fares that were introduced in the previous Government will be maintained. We will be watching that closely in budget 2026. However, the Government needs to go further. We know that public transport users are price sensitive. Let us continue to make the use of public transport as affordable as possible for commuters by continuing to cut fares.

Commitment No. 2 is to demonstrate that the Government is serious about tackling ghost buses, inadequate information about cancelled services and the hoops that users with disabilities have to go through in order to be able to access a train by establishing a new public transport passenger experience office. This would be a division within the National Transport Authority to diagnose and deliver solutions on issues in the current provision of public transport. It would also advocate for the rights of passengers.

Commitment No. 3 is to pass the legislation and provide the necessary funding to ensure that the transport security force is established and operational by quarter 4 of 2026. This means starting to provide funding for it in this year's budget, that the legislation would need to be introduced in September or October of this year and that drafters would be put under pressure, but there is widespread agreement that we need to improve the perception of safety on our public transport services, so let us deliver that now.

Commitment No. 4 is to complete the roll-out of the contactless fare payment system in 2026. We all recognise that the lack of a contactless system, whereby one can pay with one's card or phone, leaves Ireland way out of line with most European countries. The Minister of State and I have discussed in the House the significant contract that has been signed with a private company, but I am worried about the lack of timelines. The situation as currently envisaged does not provide a clear line of sight on the delivery of this ambitious and expensive project, and that is why I argue it is essential that we put an ambitious, but doable, timeline into



these commitments.

Commitments Nos. 5 and 6 are linked, and they relate to the Local Link services around the country. Due to the investment provided by the Green Party in the previous Government, these have seen huge growth in recent years. The number of passenger journeys have grown fivefold on Local Link services, from 20,000 journeys in 2022 to 100,000 in 2024. We believe that, with continued investment and prioritisation, we can continue that upward trend and grow it to 150,000 journeys by the end of 2026. We want the Government to set this ambition for the completion of the Connecting Ireland rural bus programme and work towards the concept of an every village, every hour bus service. That opens up new options for people living in rural Ireland and gives them real choice in how they plan their journeys.

Commitment No.7 is probably the easiest. We have already completed the all-island strategic rail review. What elements of this does the Government plan to deliver by 2030, which is the end of its term in office? The strategic rail review lasts up to 2050, but I know from my engagement with Irish Rail that it has big plans. It is ready to deliver on significant projects if it can be assured that the budget is there for them. This is specific to the Minister of State's remit, so I would love a clear list of what he intends to achieve in his term of office.

The final commitment - No. 8 - relates to that key issue of budget. If we are serious about improving the commuter experience, we have to invest in it. What is currently allocated to the Department of Transport under the existing national development plan will not be enough to deliver all the big transport projects as well as the other transport projects within the programme for Government. That is why the Green Party advocates for an additional €10 billion in the review of the NDP to public transport projects - €7 billion from the Apple receipts and €3 billion from the surpluses. This sort of investment will make sure we can deliver key large-scale public transport projects.

I will give the Minister of State, Deputy Canney, a little illustration of the commuter experience. I was getting the 7.34 a.m. train in from Castleknock this morning. The train did not arrive. There were horses on the track between Hansfield and Clonsilla. It happens. I found that out on the Irish Rail Twitter feed. We had an announcement on the station's intercom but nobody could hear it because of the noise of a train engine idling over on the other side. No one knew really what was going on. I had to make the call as to whether or not to go the No. 39 or the No. 37 bus. Each of the apps was telling me a different time for the different buses. I took the risk went for the No. 37 but as I was walking to get it, the No. 37 went sailing past and I missed it. When I arrived at the bus stop the real-time machine there was not working. Another No. 37 arrived and Dublin Bus got me in half an hour later. Again, it is not the end of the world but these are just a small few additional stresses that were added to every commuter who was taking that particular route this morning. These are stresses that could be resolved with a greater focus on the experience that public transport users have. When I talk to commuters and to passengers, they talk glowingly about their service, about their bus, and about their train, when those services work. They recognise it when they see additional services being laid on by the public transport companies. Too often they have another feeling, however, which is a feeling of being abandoned. They feel abandoned by the bus that did not turn up. That wrecks a person's morning, being abandoned by that real-time display that bears no reality to the buses arriving and departing and by lifts that are not working or where there are no staff to provide a ramp when a passenger has mobility issues. We have got to make this a thing of the past. We have got to build confidence in our public transport system. It must work all the time and for every single passenger. These eight commitments are about putting measures in place. They



are ambitious but I put it to the Minister of State that they are absolutely doable in the lifetime of this Government. If the Government does manage to undertake and complete these commitments, it will show that it is serious about public transport.

**Deputy Charles Ward:** I thank my colleague, Deputy O’Gorman, and his staff for putting forward this motion on the public transport experience. I fully support the motion and its call for public transport that is affordable, accessible, convenient, connected and safe. In particular the motion seeks to ensure the full implementation of the Connecting Ireland rural bus programme. Developing transport in rural Ireland is very important as many transport services in rural parts of the country are poorly developed and unreliable. This is an issue that comes up time and again for my constituents in Donegal where people are unable to rely on public transport to get to where they need to go when they need to go there.

We also have issues in Donegal where we have no real network, which means we have no alternative to buses. Most of the people, therefore, are forced to rely on cars. This has negative impacts on the environment and contributes to the chronic traffic issues we currently have in parts of Donegal.

I have said it before that Letterkenny is a disaster. The Polestar roundabout is often gridlocked. Emergency services are constantly struggling to reach Letterkenny Hospital. What used to be a five minute journey now takes 45 minutes and is putting lives at risk. This weekend traffic will be even heavier with the Donegal International Rally. It is expected that more than 70,000 people will attend. I take this opportunity to wish the participants in the Donegal International Rally the best of luck. I urge all those attending on the roads to look out for each other and be safe.

There is always a higher risk of accidents when more cars are on the roads, so relying on cars as the only mode of transport, as we do in Donegal, is very dangerous. It also creates a higher risk of drink driving as people in rural areas often do not have access to alternative modes of transport home. This severely affects the night-time economy in Donegal. Across Donegal pubs, clubs and hotels are closing down because people are unable to travel to and from them in a safe manner. Rural pubs are often used as community gathering spaces and their decline has an effect on people’s ability to socialise and connect with each other. We need to extend the night-time services to generate more business for the local night-time economies, for pubs, clubs and hotels. We need to develop frequent, reliable and accessible transport that will ensure people in rural Ireland would not have to rely so heavily on cars.

The Bus Éireann service between Donegal town, Dublin and Letterkenny is a service I use. These routes are often not reliable, with the bus sometimes not turning up because it has broken down. These routes can often be overcrowded, particularly in the summer months when people use that service as a mode of transport to get to the airport. Typically, older people can be left stranded at the side the road because they have gone into the bus station to book the tickets. As they have not done it online, they cannot access the bus and they are left stranded at the side of the road. We need to focus on providing more transport infrastructure in Donegal such as bus shelters. We have very few shelters. There are only 20 or 30 throughout the county. People are standing at signs that say, “Bus”, the rain is coming down on them and they have no shelter. It is like something from the 1970s.

We need to upgrade our infrastructure to facilitate those who use public transport the most: young people, older people and people with disabilities. From talking to members of the Irish

Wheelchair Association recently, and to my constituents, it is clear that people with disabilities find public transport inaccessible and unreliable in Donegal. Our transport services do not cater for those with disability despite the fact these people rely so heavily on public transport. It is a disgrace that in this day and age these people are being left behind. Many wheelchair users in Donegal are, shamefully, isolated and left in their own homes due to a lack of accessible transport. We need a public transport system that works for everyone and leaves no one behind. This is what the Government should focus on.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** I want to thank all the participants in the Global March to Gaza, particularly the Irish ones, for the support we received from ordinary people in this country. I express my wish that everyone currently being detained by the Egyptian authorities is released, able to go home, and to continue to apply pressure to prevent the sort of scenes we saw yesterday where more than 50 people were killed by Israeli tanks while queuing to access humanitarian aid. The blockade and forced starvation needs to end.

I thank Deputy O’Gorman for bringing forward at this motion, which we support. We believe that we need free and frequent public transport. That should be the goal, and not something that is just accessible in urban areas but also outside of urban areas and for as many people as possible. Good quality and fast public transport should become a realistic option. This is probably first and foremost an environmental issue. Transport is our second biggest sector for carbon emissions. It is also a cost-of-living issue with people spending thousands of euro a year on transport. Car transport is the most expensive transport but still public transport is expensive and price is a factor for people.

It is also a quality of life issue. I would say there are very many people for whom the worst part of their day is sitting in traffic during long commutes. Until a few months ago, I was back in my car for most of my commuting because of the crèche run. Thankfully, I got a cargo bike since, so I am now out of it. Definitely the worst part of my day was driving home in traffic with the child in the back and not happy there. You do not know how long you are going to be. It could be an hour or it could be an hour and a half. I am just going to Tallaght but because of the development patterns we have created here, there are people who are commuting much longer journeys. It is awful. This is an example.

Often environmental policies are wrongly portrayed as something that make people’s lives harder and more difficult, whereas this is about making people’s lives better, cheaper and easier. It is doable. It is a question of political will to implement free public transport. People are surprised at how low a cost it is to turn what we currently have into a free service. It is about €650 million a year. Obviously that needs to be matched with significant capital investment, in expanding the number of buses we have, and in expanding rail infrastructure, which is crucial. It can be done. It is about the political commitment to meet our climate targets and improving people’s lives. Instead, the Government seems determined to pursue a policy of privatisation. The difficulties people experience on a daily basis with ghost buses and with apps that are giving wrong information are directly related to a privatisation agenda. Instead of an integrated system, we have the NTA, Transport for Ireland, Dublin Bus and Go-Ahead Ireland all talking to one another but only to a certain degree. We need a fully integrated, publicly owned system that recruits mechanics and drivers, there being a shortage of both, by offering decent terms and conditions.

We held a public meeting a few months ago in Tallaght at which we talked to a lot of people campaigning on these issues, including the impact of ghost buses. It is not just about the day

somebody is waiting four hours or whatever to get home or that someone does not get to work or college on time one day. These problems have a corrosive effect on people's confidence in public transport. If commuters do not know whether the bus will be there at the time it should arrive and they have to get to work or college or collect their child from the crèche, then public transport stops being an option for them.

It is not that Dublin Bus does not have problems, which it does, but it is striking how it is much worse with Go-Ahead Ireland. People can look at the Go-Ahead Group's record in Britain, which is very poor, yet more and more routes are being packaged off and given to the company as part of a privatisation agenda, which makes no sense for anybody but the corporations.

A big part of the Government's agenda is the pushing of electric cars as part of the environmental solution. Obviously, electric cars are better than cars with internal combustion engines. However, the answer is not for society to shift from one model of individual car ownership to a different type of individual car ownership. There are big hunks of metal sitting all across the country, not being used most of the time, in terms of electric cars, lithium, rare earth and so on. They have their own environmental consequences. There is no question that there are those for whom individual car usage will be necessary, but we must give people a real, alternative option. Most people would take such an option if it were genuinely available.

If we give people an alternative, they will take it. However, we also need to stop the promotion and advertising of fossil-fuelled vehicles and fossil fuels. The picture such advertisements promote of driving on open roads with no traffic, going wherever one wants, is propaganda to make people buy into the lie. We must ban fossil fuel advertising like we banned advertising of cigarettes. It is a public health issue as well as a climate issue.

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Seán Canney):** On behalf of the Minister for Transport, Deputy O'Brien, who will deliver the closing remarks, and the Minister of State, Deputy Buttimer, I thank Deputy O'Gorman of the Independent and Parties Technical Group for the opportunity to speak in the Dáil on the public transport experience and our plans to deliver on the programme for Government commitments. I am confident we can all agree it is essential that the Government continue to invest in the public transport network and that we be supportive of the Government's commitment to deliver an accessible, affordable and reliable public transport network throughout the country. We are not opposing the motion that has been tabled. However, while the overall objective of the motion is broadly in line with the principles of the Government, there are some points within it that require clarification. Those points will be highlighted throughout the ministerial contributions.

On the fares initiative, as Deputies are aware and as outlined in the Programme for Government: Securing Ireland's Future, the Government is committed to keeping fares low and affordable. To support that objective, my Department has secured some €658 million in funding for public service obligation, PSO, and Local Link services this year. The package includes funding for the continuation of the various public transport fare reduction initiatives and the extension of free child fares on PSO services to five-to-eight-year-olds. Most recently, the NTA commenced implementation of a new fares strategy, which is making fares fairer and moving towards a distance-based system, with significant reductions for many travellers as a result. These measures are further enhancing affordability.

While keeping fares low is a priority in line with the programme for Government, factors such as frequency and reliability are equally important in attracting and retaining users. There-

fore, funding for public transport services is focused on existing fare initiatives and service improvements such as BusConnects in the five cities, expanding town services in the larger towns and rolling out Connecting Ireland in rural Ireland.

Transport security is another issue. On the call to deliver on the implementation of a transport security force in 2026, there is a strong commitment in the programme for Government. The transport security force will operate under the NTA and have similar powers to the airport police and customs officers. This is a priority for the Government. My Department is working with stakeholders to examine options for the establishment of such a force. It is important to note that primary legislation is likely to be required for its establishment and this can have a significant lead-in time. In the meantime, we will continue to work with operators to support interim measures such as the recent extension of the Dublin Bus security pilot scheme.

The motion calls for the establishment of a new public transport passenger experience office. The recently established consolidated contact centre within the NTA will provide significant opportunities to gather comprehensive data from all public transport operators and to generate detailed reports and analytics, thereby providing insights to enhance customer experience. The 2024 Transport for Ireland customer satisfaction survey shows that 82% of users are satisfied with public transport, reflecting the effectiveness of the current initiatives. We are supporting the roll-out of increased service levels on existing routes and the introduction of new routes. The Government has allocated increased levels of funding for accessible public transport for disabled people in recent years and, as a result, significant progress has been made towards improving accessibility on public transport. For example, the urban bus fleets are accessible, as are most of our rural bus fleets.

The motion calls for the completion of a next-generation ticketing system in 2026. The NTA's project in this regard will provide for a transformative upgrade to the ticketing system for public transport passengers in Ireland. The project will facilitate a variety of payment methods on public transport services, involving a new-generation account-based ticketing scheme incorporating both mobile- and card-based payments for passengers. In 2024, the NTA awarded an overall framework contract to Indra Sistemas, a Spanish information technology company that has designed, installed and operated similar systems internationally. Implementing such a major and complex system across multiple transport operators requires significant co-ordination. A comprehensive governance model has been implemented to oversee the project, given its importance and scale. It will take a number of years to deliver the project fully.

Public transport is not just about moving people from A to B. It is a vital service that connects individuals to work, education, healthcare and their communities. That is why I am firmly committed to ensuring our public transport system offers services that are accessible, reliable, affordable and safe for everyone, including disabled people and older people. We are supporting accessibility through expanding the availability of accessible public transport throughout the country. The real challenge is with older infrastructure and facilities that may not be accessible, such as Victorian-era train stations. My Department funds the public transport accessibility retrofit programme to make these legacy facilities accessible. The 2025 retrofit scheme allocation of €25 million is an increase of 67% on the 2024 allocation.

One of the key public transport priorities for this Government is the continued roll-out of the Connecting Ireland rural mobility plan. Since its launch in 2022, 150 new and enhanced bus services have been introduced, providing 240 more towns and villages with connections to the public transport system. The plan strives to deliver a minimum level of service of at least

three return trips each weekday to a nearby town to more than 70% of those living outside of our cities. My Department has secured €15 million in funding under budget 2025 to support the continued roll-out of new and enhanced bus services under programmes such as BusConnects, new town services and Connecting Ireland.

The Government is also committed to increasing Local Link services in rural areas to better connect villages, towns and cities. Patronage on the expanding network of Local Link bus services has seen exceptional growth in recent years. It is expected that additional new and enhanced services will continue to attract passengers.

Regarding the all-island strategic rail review implementation, the programme for Government is clear on the need to continue investment in our national rail network, noting that we will work collaboratively to act on the recommendations from the review to improve connectivity across the island of Ireland. Published last July, the review, which was led by my Department and the Department of Infrastructure in Northern Ireland, sets out a strategic vision for the development of a rail system across the island of Ireland over the coming decades.

My Department is currently working with the European Investment Bank and rail stakeholders north and south of the Border, including the National Transport Authority and Iarnród Éireann, to consider how best to sequence and implement the recommendations of the rail review with a view to optimising their development and implementation. This work involves the preparation of a project prioritisation strategy, which considers implementation of the review, including both short-term interventions, such as passing loops or other works that can be progressed without the need for planning permission, as well as longer term projects. The strategy is at an advanced stage of preparation and is planned for publication later this year. This work has also been used to inform my Department's engagement on the review of the national development plan, which is under way. Once the NDP review is complete, it will help provide clarity on the funding available to progress projects over the medium term. This includes those projects set out in the rail review.

The motion calls on the Government to commit to a €10 billion increase in capital funding for public transport as part of the national development plan. The programme for Government commits to reviewing and enhancing the national development plan to deliver existing strategically important transport infrastructure commitments and to consider the need of new or accelerated potential programmes and projects. Speaking on behalf of the Minister for Transport, this motion is generally in line with the principles of this Government and is broadly acceptable in a number of its aspects, particularly its call to introduce the transport security force and improve passenger experience, including the accessibility, connectivity and affordability of services, through investment and delivery. However, as I have outlined, some elements of the motion do not properly reflect the progress to date in certain aspects, the work currently under way or the Government's future plans for public transport.

The Government fully recognises the important role public transport plays in our lives and is acutely aware of concerns that have been raised in relation to public transport in this motion. By expanding the public transport network and increasing service levels through the continuation of programmes, such as Connecting Ireland and BusConnects, and increased levels of funding for accessible public transport, we aim to achieve more balanced development, greater connectivity and safer and more reliable services. The Minister for Transport, Deputy O'Brien, the Minister of State, Deputy Buttimer, and I firmly believe that, through our ambitious plans and ongoing investment in public transport, we will provide a much-improved public transport



system for the people of Ireland.

I thank Members for their contributions so far and I look forward to the remainder of them. It is my strong belief that if we give a good experience to passengers on public transport, they will remain with public transport.

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mairéad Farrell):** Bogaimid ar aghaidh go dtí an Teachta Connolly agus, ina dhiaidh sin, an Teachta Stanley.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** I thank Deputy O’Gorman and the Green Party for bringing forward this motion and putting the spotlight on public transport. I am also grateful that the Government is not opposing it. I welcome the Minister of State’s speech. I know he is heart and soul behind rail. I may get a chance to come back to that.

The Minister of State acknowledged that “Public transport is not just about moving people from A to B. It is a vital service that connects individuals to work, education, healthcare and their communities.” He is right but that has been not recognised by any government. Governments viewed transport as getting from A to B, with a whole lobby group behind car transport, building more roads and getting more cars. We are falling into the same trap in respect of electric vehicles. I would love to see a full examination of electric vehicles, from start to finish, in terms of where their components come from but that is for another day.

I note and welcome the eight commitments outlined in the motion. I see the Government will have a strategy later this year. When will it be published? Will it include the western rail corridor as one of its targets? I hope it does. Unfortunately, statements on that have been moved from the agenda of the Dáil today. I hope they will be back next week and we can go into that more.

The press release from the Climate Change Advisory Council is a call to action. Five years since we declared a climate and a biodiversity emergency in May 2019, we have the climate council telling us it is “increasingly unlikely that the Transport sectoral emissions ceiling will be achieved”. I see we have students in the Gallery today. The council goes on to tell us that “With journeys to education making up one in five of all journeys, the Council urges an expansion of the School Transport Scheme”. It states that only 18% or 172,000 out of 945,000 primary and secondary students avail of the school transport scheme. If the Minister of State was to make any practical difference at all, it would be to expand school transport. It is a no-brainer to provide that it not be limited when we have cars of every size on the roads bringing children to school. Parents have no choice due to the failure to expand the school transport scheme. I and my colleagues have been asking for this forever. The Climate Change Advisory Council sets out what we need to do and the urgency of doing it. We are utterly ignoring the council. We are going to miss our emission targets.

There has been a golden opportunity in Galway city for many years. It is a thriving and beautiful city. Tá mé an-bhródúil aisti. Is cathair dhátheangach í ar thairseach na Gaeltachta is mó sa tír agus táimid sáite i dtranglam tráchtta. Tá a fhios ag an Aire Stáit é sin. Tá trácht chuile lá. Galway should be a pilot city, a green lean city. We should build on the industry that is there, its natural beauty and the talent of its people. Instead, we are letting them sit in traffic every day for hours on end. We hear it on the radio. We have no park-and-ride facility. None has been rolled out. It is 20 years since I had the privilege of being mayor. The council agreed with me then to put the objective of a park-and-ride facility in the Galway city development plan. It



became law on 1 February 2005, over 20 years ago, but has never been rolled out. Pathetically, we are now looking at a 200-space site. I say “pathetic” given what is needed but it is welcome.

Many years ago, 24,000 people signed a petition begging the Government to look at a feasibility study for light rail in Galway. We got the feasibility study, which said light rail was possible. I know the Minister of State is interested in that. Light rail, alongside park and ride, is one of the components of solving the traffic problems in a way that is compliant with our obligations and with the necessity for transformative action in view of the climate emergency and what we promised after Covid.

Every Government policy I read refers to the necessity of public transport for social cohesion and integration but we are utterly failing to deliver. We are dividing people against each other, people in favour of roads versus others, when this is absolutely unnecessary. We need a comprehensive, inclusive public transport system that is free. We are working towards that and we have reduced emissions. I thank the Green Party for its influence on that. However, it is much cheaper to get a public transport system that is free and has everybody on board. We talk about having public awareness to encourage people. People want to use public transport. They are dying to get out of the cars but they have absolutely no choice.

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mairéad Farrell):** Go raibh maith agat. I say “Hi” to the sixth-class pupils from Kiltale National School who are here with Deputy Aisling Dempsey.

**Deputy Brian Stanley:** I welcome the eight proposals in the motion put forward by Deputy O’Gorman. They are very welcome and timely. The very important ones are to further reduce fares and to further accelerate the Connecting Ireland rural bus programme. The all-island rail strategy was mentioned. It is important, as we move towards the reunification of the national territory, that this is stepped up as a practical measure to connect North and South, particularly Donegal, Derry, Sligo, Fermanagh and the other counties of the north west.

We have a lot of catching up to do given that the transport sector accounts for 43% of all energy used. The Climate Change Advisory Council set out again today that we must reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% by 2030. We should be even more ambitious than that. There is huge ground to be made up there.

On the school transport sector, the Climate Change Advisory Council report, published today, notes that of 773,000 primary and post-primary pupils, only 172,000, or 18%, have access to school transport. We can see the difference when schools are on holidays. In mornings and afternoons, the volume of traffic on the roads of all towns, villages and cities, such as Dublin, reduces dramatically. We must change that. One in five car journeys is for the purpose of getting children to school. We can see what needs to be done. We need to drastically improve and expand the school transport system but we cannot do so because we do not have the drivers. Bus operators throughout the country can tell the Minister of State that. We need to deal with the Bus Éireann ban on drivers over 70 years of age for its services and contracted services. The Taoiseach and Tánaiste agreed with me on the issue on the floor of the Dáil. The Minister for Transport, Deputy Darragh O’Brien, agreed me with, as far as I know. I think the Minister of State also agrees that we need to sort that out. We have eight weeks to do so. I have been raising this matter since the first day of Dáil sittings after the new Government was formed. It needs to be sorted out. The review is complete. How many times does it have to be shuffled around between civil servants, their advisers and everybody else? We need to sort it. Drivers

should be allowed to work and drive school buses until they are 75 provided they pass a strict medical and eyesight test every year. They are driving private coaches with 52, 72 and 78 passengers. Why can they not drive a minibus of kids to the local school in Shanahoe, Abbeyleix, Ballyroan or any other village or town around the country? We need to sort that and dramatically increase the number of drivers available.

We need to keep cash payments. While I support the move to cashless and contactless payments, we should also retain the option of cash. That is important. Some of us prefer to use cash when at all possible. That is particularly the case for people who do not have bank cards or use phones for payments.

The passenger experience has been mentioned already. There is no doubt that the public transport system has improved and I acknowledge it. Train services have improved. There is now a large number of trains in Portlaoise. There are trains on the hour and sometimes two per hour, which is a dramatic improvement. However, there is only one toilet in the station and sometimes it is not operational. There is one small weather shelter on the outbound platform. There could sometimes be 200 or 300 people standing there. If it rains, 90% of those on the platform are standing in the rain. That needs to change. There are simple things like that to address. We need simple shelters for people to stand under when they are waiting for a train.

I welcome the local bus service in Portlaoise, which has been rolled out in recent months. It has proved a great success. It is fantastic. Some days I can come to Leinster House by walking 100 yd from my front door, getting on a bus to the railway station, getting the train to Dublin, walking out of the station and onto another bus, which drops me down the road. I acknowledge that the bus service in Portlaoise has been fantastic, but we need more rolled out. I ask the Minister of State to sort out the over-70s nonsense. He needs to sort it in the coming weeks and we are depending on him.

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mairéad Farrell):** Tá daltaí ó Ghaelscoil Éadan Doire sa Ghailearaí freisin, as well as those from Kitealy National School. Plenty of young eyes are watching us.

**Deputy Pa Daly:** I thank the proposers of the motion and acknowledge the fact that the Government is supporting it. We in Sinn Féin also support the proposals in this motion. It is clear that successive Governments have repeatedly failed to build a modern public transport system that is fit for the 21st century. We only have to look at Dublin's MetroLink, which has been stuck in the pipeline for decades, to see why Ireland regularly ranks as having one of the worst public transport systems in the EU. As a result, public confidence in public transport is not as high as it should be, to say the least. We want to have a fairer system in towns, villages and cities across the State. We want a system that is sustainable, affordable, accessible and safe.

Public transport is about far more than just trains and buses. It is an economic engine that connects people to their jobs, education and services. A number of small issues with public transport are important. When people are travelling on public transport, it is important that they are comfortable. It is not acceptable anymore that people who are undertaking four-hour or four-and-a-half-hour rail journeys from Tralee, Galway and the west generally, and almost everywhere else apart from the Cork-Dublin-Belfast rail line, cannot access even a bottle of water on the train. If you are travelling for that length of time and if the train is not delayed, and in fairness it is usually an efficient enough service, you should be able to get a cup of tea. Many people, I know from experience, including older people and those who do not like having

to change trains and who have difficulty accessing public transport, like to take the direct route. It is those trains, in particular, that have the fewest services or no services at all.

Bus stops were mentioned. The system for implementing new bus stops is far too cumbersome. There are overly long negotiations between the councils and the National Transport Authority, NTA, before funding is provided for a bus stop. That must improve.

I will come back to the point about older people and people with disabilities. The situation for them must improve. Some 18% of people have a disability but only 6% of people with a disability access public transport. That is unacceptable. I know what the Minister of State said.

A well-connected, functioning and affordable public transport system is essential for regional balance. The effort to create balanced regional economic growth on the island has been neglected for decades by successive Governments. We heard earlier about the northern and western region and that there is still no rail in Donegal. That region ranks in the bottom 10% of the EU's 234 regions in terms of transport infrastructure. The Government cannot stand over that anymore. It leads not only to a lack of confidence but also to a deep unfairness and inequality. It was good to see the recommendations of the all-island strategic rail review because it is a good way for Ireland to course correct.

I noted what the Minister of State said in his opening statement about fare reductions and that keeping fares low is a priority. It is vital. The Minister of State did not say that the reductions would be changed or altered. He did not give any indication in that regard. Those fare reductions must not be reversed because if we are to continue to make the progress that has been made in recent years, it is important that fares are kept as low as possible. We heard what the Minister of State said. It is important for the Government to get on with it. Implementation should be the priority. People are sick of announcements when there is zero progress. The clear targets for projects, such as the western rail corridor and MetroLink, which must be put in place.

Transport emissions have already been mentioned. They comprise one fifth of Ireland's total emissions and half of them come from passenger cars. The targets for delivery of bus services in rural towns, which are important, must be implemented as soon as possible.

**Deputy Louis O'Hara:** As the Minister of State is aware, Athenry has been without bus services to Galway city for nine months since the previous operator ended its service in September 2024. This is an unacceptable situation for a town of the size of Athenry. It is an enormous loss that has caused real difficulties for workers, students, people accessing hospital appointments and so on. It has caused particular difficulties for those who work early in Galway city because the first train does not arrive into Galway until 8.10 a.m. The lack of a bus has contributed to the serious overcrowding on rail services, which issue I have previously raised with the Minister of State. It has also inconvenienced people as the previous service stopped at the universities and industrial estates, while the train goes directly to Eyre Square.

Shortly after the previous service ended, the NTA stated it would provide for a public service obligation, PSO, bus service. Since then, it has been working with Bus Éireann to provide the service. However, we have now been without a bus service for nine months. How long does it take to get a bus service up and running? I ask the Minister of State to involve himself in the process and hold NTA and Bus Éireann accountable. There is considerable frustration locally and the situation cannot be allowed to drag on any longer.

I recently hosted the Brothers of Charity Galway advocacy council to provide a briefing for

TDs and Senators in Leinster House. One issue highlighted by the council is the current booking system for the free travel pass. Many of the pass holders are required to pay booking fees, including on Irish Rail and commercial bus services. Free travel should mean free travel. I ask the Minister of State to engage with all of the operators to address the issue as a matter of urgency.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** There are many things I could speak about under this Private Members' business but I will stick to trains. Public transport will play a major role in the development of our regions. People must be able to work, live and commute from all over the country and that is why Sinn Féin is determined to deliver major rail projects that have stalled, fallen by the wayside, been left in a Minister's desk drawer or gone hugely over budget. The all-island strategic rail review includes the electrification of the line, new lines to Clongriffin in Dublin and an extension of the DART to Drogheda. While I remain sceptical of a positive impact on commute times when the DART comes to Drogheda, I will wait in hope that it happens.

Government policies have made Drogheda a commuter town and commuters need a new train station on the north side of the town. Almost 20 years ago, a proposed train station was included in the Drogheda northern environs plan. The plan foresaw a huge rise in the population of Drogheda and the need for a train station on the north side. The proposed site of the train station was in housing brochures. Commuters eagerly bought houses that were highly valued because they would be so close to the train station but this changed when Iarnród Éireann said it had no plans to proceed. The north side of Drogheda is getting an extra 20,000 people along the port access-northern cross route over the next five years. The centre of town is choked with traffic around the current train station on the south side. A new IDA business park is being developed on the north side. Drogheda United is developing a new stadium along the port access-northern cross route. All of this could be served by a north-side train station. The land at Aston Village that was originally earmarked is still owned by Iarnród Éireann and this is where the train station should go. For Drogheda to reach its full potential, the long-awaited north-side train station is crucial and no obstacle is insurmountable if the Government really wants to deliver it. I ask that the Minister of State take that on board this morning.

**Deputy Mark Ward:** We need reliable public transport but that is not always the case for residents of Dublin Mid-West. By the time a bus or train arrives at a stop, it is often at capacity and simply passes by. Worst of all are the so-called ghost buses, buses that are on the schedule but simply disappear and do not arrive, leaving commuters stranded on the way to work, college or other important appointments. There is a huge amount of development ongoing in Adamstown, Kishoge and Seven Mills. However, there are not enough trains available for the number of people commuting. Residents of Adamstown have reported a substantial increase in the number of people commuting in the mornings and evenings. It is difficult to get onto these trains, which are already full coming from Kildare. Residents implore Irish Rail to put on additional trains, particularly around peak times.

We all know how difficult it is to get drivers for public transport. There is a cohort of experienced bus drivers who have to retire at the age of 70. As our population ages, surely we must look at giving these drivers the option of continuing to drive after reaching the age of 70. I have written to the Minister of State and the previous Minister to ask if there are any plans to allow people contracted by Bus Éireann to continue to drive beyond that age. The answers I have received so far have been disappointing. Under the programme for Government, there is a commitment to carrying out an independent assessment of this matter. My understanding is the assessment has been completed. What was the outcome of the assessment? Is there any

movement to allow these vastly experienced drivers to continue driving?

**Deputy Conor D. McGuinness:** Public transport is essential for rural communities. It connects young people to education and training, older people to services and workers to jobs. It keeps our rural towns and villages alive and links people to public services, which unfortunately have become ever more concentrated in urban areas at the expense of rural accessibility.

Local Link provides an excellent service in County Waterford and across the State. I acknowledge the management, staff, bus companies and drivers who go above and beyond. However, the service must be properly resourced and empowered to make decisions and respond to local needs. I am not convinced the current structure allows that. It is too slow and too centralised. That said, we have seen progress. My colleague, Councillor Donnchadh Mulcahy, and I have worked hard to secure a long overdue Local Link service for Ballyduff Upper. Councillor Kate O'Mahoney has delivered a new connection from Ballinameela to Dungarvan and Councillor Pat Fitzgerald and his community in Ballymacaw ensured the Tramore to Waterford service now includes their area. There is more to do. There is huge frustration in Portlawn and Kilmacthomas that a service to Dungarvan still has not been approved. Councillor Catherine Burke and I will keep fighting for that. Critically, local input has to be central. Route 361 Waterford Local Link was altered over a year ago after no consultation with the local community. That top-down decision removed stops serving Ardmore, An Sean Phobal agus An Rinn and loyal passengers have been left behind. This has to be addressed. I ask the Minister of State and the Minister to intervene.

I will raise a concern about bus stop infrastructure funding. Funding has been announced and I welcomed that announcement. However, local authorities tell me they have not been given the staff or capacity to develop projects to draw that funding down. The funding is left unspent for lack of resources to administer it. If the resources are not there to deliver new and upgraded stops, then it is not real investment. When will the Minister act in this?

**Deputy Louise O'Reilly:** I thank the Deputies for tabling this motion and giving us the chance to have this discussion. The Minister of State said the implementation of the new fares strategy is making fares fairer. It is for some people, definitely, but for the people I represent in Dublin Fingal West, since Darragh O'Brien became transport Minister, the cost of commuting from Balbriggan and Skerries has increased by over €400 per annum. The cost for children using public transport has increased by 300%. I welcome that the NTA will look at bringing in a capped card but I can tell the Minister of State and ask him to pass on to the senior Minister that people living in Skerries and Balbriggan will not stand for being taken out of the Dublin commuter zone. They are Dubs. The Government took them out of the Dublin commuter zone and should not have done that. That was a mistake and they want it reversed. They also do not want to have to pay €440 extra for the pleasure of squashing on to overcrowded trains.

On the subject of overcrowding, in order to alleviate the pressure on the rail network, such as on the coast where I live, it is important we have reliable bus services. I attended a meeting in Lusk recently with people from Rush, Lusk, Skerries and Balbriggan. Their concern is BusConnects will not enhance the bus service; it will actually mean more people have to go on trains. They will have to pay more and the trains will get more overcrowded. There needs to be strong consultation on BusConnects. We all want it to work and we all want a more efficient bus transfer but the elimination of the 33 route will create people trying to commute and will place unnecessary and undue pressure on the trains, which cannot take it. I would like the Minister of State to pass that message on to the Minister. Things have got worse for my constituents



since he became Minister. We hope there is nothing personal in it.

**Deputy Ann Graves:** Unlike the Government, Sinn Féin has a plan to deliver an affordable, reliable and safe public transport system. This is key to building sustainable, connected communities. I moved to Swords 35 years ago. When I moved there, the population was 17,000; now it is almost 48,000. Unfortunately, the transport system has not kept up with the demands of the growing population. The then Fianna Fáil Government promised to deliver metro north. Thirty-five years on, it may have been rebranded as MetroLink but it has still failed to deliver. Consecutive Governments have flip-flopped on the metro and now the Government cannot agree on when construction is likely to start. You could not make this up.

While the Government dithers, people are being denied decent public transport. Traffic jams remain a reality for people commuting every day. The NTA and Fingal County Council are starting major works on the R132 to introduce cycle and bus lanes, reducing each side of the road by one lane, starting in October. I have spoken to local bus companies. This will cause major traffic problems and should only be done in parallel with metro works. It may be more deliverable and cost-effective to look at other options, like a rail link between Clongriffin and the airport and on to Swords, as an interim measure while we continue to wait.

The Government's lack of public transport plans affects ordinary people going about their daily lives. The bus services in Swords are inconsistent.

*11 o'clock*

Disappearing buses cause hardship, and the ludicrous practices that drivers are instructed to follow just do not work. The 33 bus from Donabate regularly does not turn up. When it does, it is an overcrowded single-decker vehicle. This needs to change, and we have a plan.

**Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire:** I thank the proposer of the motion. It is an important debate. Sinn Féin is ambitious for public transport, particularly in Cork. It is an area that has been the subject of a lot of attention recently. It has been a priority for us because we recognise that for Cork to be the fastest-growing city in the State, we cannot simply rely on more and more people getting into their cars. We need a 21st century transport system. There are number of elements to that. The first, in the context of the proposal, is the Luas. That is something we welcome. We have been calling for it proactively in recent years. Regarding what has been announced for the single route, we believe lessons need to be learned from the approach that was taken in Dublin. If there is going to be a Luas in Cork - and we all want there to be one - the timescale imagined is far too slow. It looks like it could be more than a decade before it begins to carry passengers. The matter needs to be expedited. We also need to ensure that Cork Airport is connected. We need to ensure that there are at least two routes connecting with each other and that we are not left trying to join things up afterwards. It makes absolute sense that it will connect the whole city because there are areas of heavy traffic in Douglas, Carrigaline and on the north side of the city. My colleague Deputy Gould has been vocal on this. That aspect also needs to be expedited.

That is for the medium to long term, and I hope it is expedited. In the short term, we need to get our basic bus system working. People right across the State, not just in Cork, get frustrated and feel that so many things do not work. Buses are almost the perfect symptom. Before I came down, I searched for the words "bus" and "Cork" in my emails. I just picked out two examples, because there are dozens if not hundreds. People indicated that they finish work at 5 p.m. and



that what should be a 15-minute drive takes them an hour and ten minutes to complete every day. I was also informed that buses went missing three times in a row over the course of three consecutive days. This is happening constantly. Our buses need to be resourced with staff in order to resolve that.

**Deputy Ciarán Ahern:** I thank Deputy O’Gorman for bringing this motion before us. The Labour Party will gladly support it. I do not think there is a word in it that I would fault. The Green Party, to be fair, kick-started much-needed investment in our public transport during its time in government, following decades of neglect and underinvestment. It achieved fare reductions on public transport and enhanced Local Link services, investing record amounts and achieving a record 328 million public transport journeys last year. That was a 10% increase on the previous year and a 36% increase on 2022. The Luas passed 50 million journeys for the first time. We obviously need to see more of this. While acknowledging the constraints faced by a small party in government, I still believe more could have been done during the term of the previous Government. In addition, improvements to our public transport system are coming at too slow a pace. We see this in the context of the time it is taking to complete the roll-out of BusConnects, a relatively simple project. We have been talking about MetroLink for the better part of 25 years, and a sod still has not been turned in respect of it.

This is not necessarily the fault of the Green Party. We know better than anyone that when you are in government with Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael, you have to fight tooth and nail for every scrap you can get. Again, the measures the Green Party was able to get over the line during the term of the previous Government were largely positive. Building up capacity and making public transport an affordable and reliable option for people works. Anyone will tell you that our public transport system is far from perfect, but the evidence is there that investment works. We need to see continued investment. We still have not reached a place where public transport is the preferred option for the majority of people, which is where we ultimately need to be. Public transport answers, or at least provides a significant part of the answer to, so many of the questions we face with transport more broadly in this country. These are questions about the climate crisis and reducing our emissions and about road safety and reducing the number of fatalities on our roads, particularly in rural areas. With issues like driving test backlogs and the waiting times we are seeing, such a demand exists. For so many people across Ireland, private car use is their only option because of a lack of public transport, not just in terms of availability but also reliability, efficiency, frequency, cost and sometimes even personal safety.

The previous Government committed to a ratio of 2:1 investment in public and active travel versus new road infrastructure, which was welcome. However, this needs to be built upon in order that we can decarbonise our transport sector and meet our vital carbon targets. That is not to mention the benefits in terms of connectivity, accessibility, health and so on, that more investment in public and active travel bring. Labour called for that ratio to be increased to 5:1 because that is the sort of ambition we need if we ever hope to have a world-class public transport system and to meet our climate targets in the transport area. It is in that context that I was extremely disappointed with the programme for Government. At a time when we need to see a modal shift to the greatest extent possible away from private car use and towards greener, more sustainable modes of transport like buses, rail and cycling, what was the major policy change in the transport sector? It was to pour more concrete. It is clear that the climate-regressive, parish-pump instincts of this Government’s composition won the day. There is no vision for public transport in its plans. There is no lodestar to work towards, and the programme for Government is beyond bare when it comes to detail. Instead, it is bypasses for the boys and lay-bys for

the lackeys. Any pretence that Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael or any Independents are sincere in their commitment towards climate action and encouraging the modal shift towards public transport is over. They will not make the difficult decisions, namely bold but absolutely necessary decisions like reallocating our existing road space for public transport. I cannot help but feel that they saw what happened to the Greens in the election and thought, “No thanks”. Regrettably, we are even seeing the Tánaiste oppose public transport measures in his constituency, which is depressing.

This motion provides a good picture of the direction we need to move in, both in terms of investment and regarding how we bring people along with us and encourage them to leave their cars at home as much as possible. Anything we can do to make public transport more affordable and more widely used will get my support and that of my party. In this regard, I would like to see our rail pricing system looked at. A one-way flexi ticket from Galway to Dublin costs approximately €16, whereas the same ticket from Dublin to Cork costs €33, which is double the cost despite there being only approximately 40 km difference in the distance travelled. I have been in touch with the NTA about this. It acknowledged that the fare structures are not always equitable, consistent or easy for passengers to understand, as other Deputies have alluded to. I ask the Minister work closely with the NTA to change this.

The motion also refers to the proposed transport security force - a dedicated transport police. I welcome this. The incident in Mountjoy Square last April in which a man threatened a bus driver with a gun brought violence on public transport to public attention. Many political promises were made in the aftermath of that incident. Unfortunately, there are dangerous and sometimes violent incidents on buses in parts of my constituency of Dublin South-West all too regularly, but they get absolutely no attention. Thankfully, our community is working together to try to solve these issues. We hold monthly transport forum meetings with bus drivers, gardaí, the council, local community and youth groups and public representatives to try to ensure that every passenger and driver can experience a safe environment and that the bus services are not cut off in any of our communities due to violence or dangerous incidents. I pay tribute to SIPTU for pushing the issue and commend its broader Respect Transport Workers campaign, a really positive initiative. I also acknowledge and thank the thousands of transport workers across the country for the work they do every day. We could certainly do with transport police. I reiterate the call in the motion to have the force up and running by at least the end of next year.

Given that the crux of the motion is the public transport experience for passengers, I also want to give my support to a matter raised recently by my party leader, Deputy Bacik. I refer to the rules relating to pets on public transport. We are out of step with many of our European neighbours. My understanding is that, on buses anyway, it is often at the discretion of the driver as to whether someone is allowed on a with a pet. In the interests of inclusivity and encouraging more people to use public transport, we should make it policy that pets be permitted on public transport, with the necessary caveats that they are on a leash and so forth.

The motion calls for better public transport experience, but, of course, you cannot have an experience if there is no bus or train there for you. Earlier this year, there were serious issues with the reliability of certain bus services in Dublin South-West, particularly the S6 and S8 routes, causing incredible frustration in our area. Thankfully, these issues appear to have been largely resolved but it points to a broader trend with the quality of services being provided on routes that have been privatised. There has been a notable decline in that quality since many of the routes in my area were taken over by Go-Ahead, be it the increasing frequency of ghost buses, cancellations or issues around punctuality. TFI is considering privatising even more

routes, and I put my party's opposition to this on record. It makes more sense to have a single public entity, namely Dublin Bus, operate all services in Dublin rather than a mishmash of public and for-profit providers. If it is a funding issue with Dublin Bus, then just give it the funding.

I reiterate my call for a new feasibility study on a metro for Dublin South-West. Getting the sod turned on MetroLink will hopefully be a priority for this Government, but there is a gaping hole when it comes to Dublin South-West because 350,000 people live there and there is zero rail infrastructure. I will be working closely with the Metro South-West Group on this issue during the current Dáil term. I commend the group on its work on this to date.

**Deputy Robert O'Donoghue:** I thank Deputy O'Gorman for bringing forward this motion, which is supported by the Labour Party. I will take the opportunity to talk about my constituency of Dublin Fingal West where public transport is at best disconnected. I acknowledge that the DART+ Coastal North project will, hopefully, come at the end of 2026. In the meantime, our issue is with the bus service. There are variations in the 33 bus, which was mentioned by one of my colleagues. The 33 bus is to be done away with under BusConnects. My constituents were at best sceptical about BusConnects. They have launched a new campaign to retain the direct link from the north county to town for the 33X. Because we are going to lose the 33 under BusConnects, the capacity of the 33A will in theory be ramped up. However, there are issues with ghost buses on the 33A route. People in the north county are afraid that this will increase with staff shortages. The 32X is a success story, but we could do with two more in the morning and the evening in order to meet peak capacity.

Regarding rail fares, I welcome the fact that after a recent campaign, we are looking at redoing student fares in the run-up to the new school year. However, Skerries and Balbriggan are the only two towns in Dublin that are not in zone 1. The Minister used to represent my area, so he will be aware how much this rankles with people in light of the cost involved and the emotiveness of the decision. I have received countless submissions on this. Good public transport requires us to have a system that is accessible, community-centred and affordable and that not only facilitates physical movement but also serves as a cornerstone for building inclusive and vibrant communities.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** I thank Deputy O'Gorman for bringing forward this motion. It is certainly a motion that my party and I are very much looking forward to supporting. One of the starkest differences between Ireland and other European countries is our poor public transport system. Under successive Governments, one abandoned or delayed public transport plan has followed another. The Minister will agree that transport policy has generationally focused on moving cars in Ireland instead of moving people. My experience as a public representative over the past number of years tells me that what policy should be doing is moving people away from cars towards what should be reliable, efficient and affordable public transport. Certainly, in commuter belts like Kildare, what we are doing is driving people away from public transport and back to their cars. This is something we need to reflect on.

I will highlight some policy pieces that represent core failings of previous Governments. I hope the Minister will take my comments on board and bring them back to his Department. The first concerns BusConnects. In Kildare, BusConnects has emphatically disconnected communities. It has had the completely opposite effect to that intended. I am speaking about communities in Leixlip and Celbridge, which had quite functional Dublin Bus services that brought them to and from shops and work. They are now completely disenfranchised from the communities they need to access. There are no public transport links to hospitals, including children's hospi-

tals. Regardless of whether it is the C3, which terminates in Maynooth via Leixlip, or the C4, which terminates in Celbridge, what we have here are routes that are completely dysfunctional. I implore the Minister and the Minister for State to ask the officials who drew up these routes for the C3 and C4 to use them. They should use these routes and then tell me they are functional, because there is a difference between what were meant to be joined-up routes and services and people left waiting a serious amount of time for buses to arrive. It is just not working. A total of €660 million had been spent up to May on a project that has disconnected communities. We have some serious questions to answer.

I would appreciate hearing the Minister's thoughts on people with disabilities having to give 24 hours notice before they use public transport. In 2025, that is no longer acceptable. This is a rights-based issue, and I would like to see something coming from Government with regard to it. Kildare North is a very young and vibrant constituency where young people are trying to socialise, work and access Dublin city using a service like the 120 that finishes at 11 p.m. or 11.30 p.m. on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. This route is also completely fractured. The Minister might look at whether we could extend the service on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays to allow young people to socialise in town without having to worry about getting a bus home or without driving people back into their cars.

As part of BusConnects, nearly €9 million has been spent on contactless fares. On the basis of replies to parliamentary questions, this project will not come to fruition until 2028. Where is that money going? Given the backlog in driving tests for young people, would the Minister as part of the next budget consider putting €100 on the Leap card for anyone on a waiting list for a driving test for more than ten or 12 weeks? This would give people an incentive to use whatever public transport is available be it rail or Local Link.

**Deputy Gary Gannon:** I thank Deputy O'Gorman for bringing forward this motion. It is timely and important. While I join my colleagues in welcoming the rise in public transport use, I cannot ignore the serious and growing issue of capacity and overcrowding, particularly on the Luas red line, which serves many of my constituents in Dublin Central. It is not just a matter of inconvenience; it is a matter of safety and, at times, dignity for passengers, particularly those with additional needs such as wheelchair users, parents with buggies or older people. A constituent of mine recently shared her experience. At what she thought would be an off-peak time at 4.15 p.m., she took the Luas into town with her 18-month son. The first tram was so packed that they had to let it pass. They squeezed on to the second only to find the buggy and wheelchair spaces completely full. She had nowhere to hold on to, was forced to stand by the doors and was jostled throughout the journey.

I understand that these incidents can occur as a once-off on any form of public transport. However, this is a regular experience for commuters on the Luas red line. It happens every morning. This is the reality for far too many. People are being pushed off the system because it is not safe and accessible and does not work the way it should. I know traffic restrictions come into play around the city centre to encourage a modal shift and I welcome them but we cannot do so while leaving people with no viable alternative. If we want to be serious about public transport, we have to provide access to it for every user. We urgently need increased capacity, better design for accessibility and a passenger-first approach to service delivery on the Luas red line. Anything less than that means leaving people behind, which is not the standard that should be set for our transport system. The overcrowding on the Luas red line is not just a cause of discomfort; it is becoming an issue of public safety and accessibility failure.



**Deputy Rory Hearne:** An issue that is particularly important for my constituency of Dublin North West but affects the entire city is the MetroLink. Ireland is one of the richest countries in the EU, but Dublin is the only large western capital city that does not have a metro. The metro was first promised in 2005, some 20 years ago. It was ditched in 2010 by Fine Gael, so we are still waiting for the metro. The expected deadline for delivery is 2035. Dr. Sean Sweeney, who is the project director, says it might not even be delivered by then. This is one of the core public transport projects that the State and this city need, yet we are not sure if it will even be delivered by 2035. We have to see guaranteed timelines for delivery of the metro. We are now looking at the rail system potentially costing 20% more than its projected budget of €9.5 billion. How much longer will it go on? How many more delays will add more costs? We need to get the metro delivered. It needs to be a priority, and we need to see guarantees in respect of it.

Another area where we see development is the Luas to Finglas, which is very welcome, but I and Róisín Shortall before me put forward a proposal that there would be an extension in that Luas project to Ballymun which would link Finglas, Ballymun and across the city with the airport when the metro is delivered. I ask the Minister again to look at this as a possibility for developing transport in the city to connect our areas properly.

As my colleagues have mentioned, the issue of capacity within public transport in Dublin city is reaching absolute crisis point. The transport system, in terms of buses, trains, the DART and the Luas, is at absolute capacity. Some of the changes we have seen have been beneficial, but others, as previous speakers mentioned, have disconnected some communities. People feel that public transport is not actually serving the public.

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the privatisation of public transport. We see the ongoing expansion of private bus services when we know from the experience in other countries and our own experience that privatisation does not work. We need a properly funded public transport system, with decent conditions for those who work in it. The trade unions that support those workers have made the point that privatisation is bad for both the workers and the public. We need proper investment in our public transport system, which is also a key component in expanding areas in terms of housing, including housing developments outside of our city cores.

**Deputy Peadar Tóibín:** If I might just have the Minister's attention for this, I believe he who wants to do his best in his role on this issue.

**Deputy Darragh O'Brien:** I thank the Deputy.

**Deputy Peadar Tóibín:** I genuinely do. Now, I will say that there are hundreds of thousands of people in this country living in a commuter hell. These are people with little or no access to public transport who are forced to use cars every day and who spend maybe two or three hours getting to work back and forth. Meath is a prime example. Meath is the biggest commuter county in the country. The majority of people in Meath leave the county to go to work every day. That happens in no other county in the country. Some 80,000 people in Meath are forced to use their cars daily. Navan is the biggest town in the country without a rail line.

For the majority of the people in question, there is a real cost to this. There is the financial cost, namely the car, the second car, the tolls, the fuel, the insurance, etc. It adds up to thousands of euro a year. There is, however, also a human cost that nobody is quantifying, and this is where parents do not get to see their kids from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.. A good deal of the anxiety



happening among children relates to the fact that they have no access to their parents for the majority of the day because their parents are forced to commute such long distances over such long periods. Nobody is analysing that cost. Dublin is the most congested city in the EU. The time and labour costs involved in sitting in traffic are higher than in any other European country. The biggest weakness this Government has is in the delivery of significant infrastructure. Some €300 million spent on metro north and not a shovel put in the ground is a serious problem. If the Minister wants to make a difference, this is what he will have to tackle in terms of the delivery. The fact that the Spaniards were able to build about 35 miles of metro in Madrid for €2.8 billion and we have spent €300 million without putting a shovel in the ground is a real problem.

Look at the bureaucratic and regulatory nightmare we are in. The Navan to Dublin rail line was built in 1852 with picks and shovels in three years. The Department will spend more time on a route selection for this line. It will spend more time than the actual complete build just for the route selection. The railway order will take at least one or two years. The planning application will take at least three years. Therefore, before it builds one foot of rail line in County Meath, it will spend three times the amount of time in the preparation that it took to build it with picks and shovels in the 1850s. If we really want to get a hold of the lack of public service and infrastructure in this country, there will have to be a tackling of the regulatory and the bureaucratic nightmare involved in building absolutely anything here, from the national children's hospital to metro north. If there is one footprint the Minister can leave behind him, it is tackling that.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** Connecting Ireland is disconnecting quite a number of places, but I do not want to start with a major criticism. There have been great successes in my constituency, Cork South-West, in relation to Ardgroom, Bantry to Sheep's Head, Crookhaven, Goleen, Lowertown, Schull to Skibbereen, and Baltimore to Skibbereen, where a second bus has been put on the route is so popular. These are the routes that nobody was either interested in or pushing previously. Unfortunately, however, there are serious areas of disconnection. There is no connection to light rail from Ardgroom to Cork Airport, a distance of 130 km - imagine that - or from Mizen Head to Cork, a distance of 124 km. There is no connection whatsoever to either of those areas, and that needs to be looked. In areas like Ballynacarriga, Drinagh, Bantry to Goleen and Ballydehob, there are pockets where there is no transport service as such. I would like to think also that we would look at our school buses being used as a transport service. Kids can come in on the Luas in the morning with adults. Why can they not sit on the same bus with adults? That is an area we need to look at. I thank Bus Éireann, West Cork Connect and Local Link for delivery of what they are doing but, unfortunately, a hell of a lot more could be done. Over-70s should be allowed to drive school buses too. That will be a huge issue going forward and it needs to be looked at.

**Deputy Ken O'Flynn:** I rise today with a little bit of good news relating to my constituency in Cork. It is a red-letter day because we have just had information passed on to us about the development of the delivery of Tivoli, Dunkettle, Blarney and Blackpool stations. I welcome that. That will have a huge impact on my constituency across the north side. We have missed a beat when it comes to the Luas line in Cork. I see the project and the design that are there. There should be probably two designs. We are not connecting to Cork Airport, which is wrong. We are not servicing the north side at all. I appreciate that there are problems with topography on the north side, but the north side also runs from east to west, covering from Mayfield all the way over to Knocknaheeny, servicing the Apple computer business and all that.

I want the Minister to take my hometown of Mallow into account. While we have a con-

necting link with the rail into Cork, we do not have an orbital bus. We have been waiting now for seven to ten years for a Mallow distributor road. If we had an orbital bus in the town of Mallow, it would help get much of the local traffic off the roads. Additionally, we do not have orbital buses in the city centre of Cork, which would allow commuters and the shoppers use it. I implore the Minister. BusConnects is doing a good job. It is trying to do a good job. I see the challenges when it is having its drivers in place, but we have to get orbital buses as well to service local population.

**Deputy Richard O'Donoghue:** In Limerick, Local Link is operating at capacity. To improve the system, people are looking for more services. Local Link would not be in our area were it not for private operators. We would not have it otherwise. I appreciate the investment the Department is putting into Local Link, but there is no joined up thinking. It is doing one route. It should be doing a figure 8 on all links such that when one route is done it links up with one spot where the other route connects to it in order that an operator can go from one to another and travel around different parts of the county. There have been 300 signatures from people looking for a Local Link service for Martinstown, which is J.P. McManus country. People in Bulgaden are looking for a Local Link. There are more than 300 signatures on this but we have not got the investment. We need the Department to invest more in Local Link to make sure it can happen.

There are bus routes coming from the likes of Bruff, Kilmallock and Bruree. While there are services for people there, there are not enough. People in those areas will use that transport if it is provided. It is the private operators, which we need, that are providing it. We also need to look at licensing to increase the age for drivers. It is just about investment. There are drivers in the private sector, whereas the Government sector does not seem to have them because they cut people off at the age of 70. We have plenty of capable drivers who can drive buses after the age of 70.

**Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty:** It is good that the Minister is in the Chamber. I have raised transport issues a couple of times when he was not here. I presume some were passed on to him, but I will reiterate a couple.

A while back, I raised the need to have an intercity stop at either Adamstown or Kishoge train station. I know that would cause a five-minute delay but there is a lot of demand in this rapidly growing area to get a train directly from Adamstown. A lot of people will not get a train that involves making a 40-minute trip to get to Heuston. It makes sense. I ask for that to be considered in consultation with the NTA.

I did a major survey, called "Bus Correct", last year. More than 2,500 people responded. I eventually got a meeting with the acting chief executive of the NTA on foot of that. The overall satisfaction rate of 37% from survey participants has to be qualified by the fact that people with a gripe are more likely to give a negative response but, at the same time, it reflects dissatisfaction with buses not turning up and the lack of faith in the service. If we are trying to get people to use the new expanded spine system, we have to have certainty. The survey also highlighted an issue in areas where there were older people with bus passes and wheelchair users. At present, there is only one wheelchair space on a bus. We have to look at that. Changing a bus is not suitable for these cohorts.

We still have to have an early service in the more traditional areas that allows people to get into the city centre. I note the Newcastle direct service was changed by the NTA after there

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were plans to abolish it, and the Rathcoole service will now be half hourly rather hourly, so the NTA can move. The old 25 route from Adamstown, which was a direct route into the city, needs to be looked at. It is not good enough that the train service in my area has been getting second-hand carriages from the northern route for two years. We need proper carriages.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** I wish the Minister well in his new role. It is time for it. I hope he will come to County Tipperary - I know he will - to see the different gaps we have.

I welcome the new TFI Local Link. This is a town bus in Clonmel that has been an outstanding success and well used. The Waterford bus is now linking into Kilmanahan and Clonmel. We need it to come to Newcastle and on to Knocklofty, where there should also be a few stops.

The Minister should come and see the rail service, which I use, from Cahir to Limerick Junction. It is a good service although it only runs twice a day. The fare is only €2.70, which is nothing, but the service must be upgraded to at least four or five times a day and have better connectivity to Thurles. It must also be marketed. Nobody knows it is even there. People ask me where I get the train and say that they cannot get a train from Cahir. They do not know it is there, so Iarnród Éireann needs to promote it.

I used the DART to come in this morning. Dublin is lucky to have that service. It is a great service that is almost always on time. It is a very efficient, well-run and nice service. We have gaps in rural areas that we should not have. One of my first jobs as a councillor was setting up the rural transport service, Ring a Link, which was one of the most joyous things I ever did. We now have more services. I salute the manager of Ring a Link, Jackie Meally, and its staff, drivers and everybody else. We need more connectivity for rural Ireland. We also need huge investment in the train line from Waterford to Clonmel and on to Cahir and Limerick Junction. That is the way to do it if we are to get cars off the road. We are forcing people into their cars because they have no other option. We do not have enough TFI services. We have many that are great and more are coming - tús maith leath na hoibre - but there is a long way to go.

I look forward to engaging with the Minister. Maybe he will visit south Tipperary to see for himself the black spots that are there, especially the rail service. We have the stations and other infrastructure but the line needs to be upgraded and we need more frequent services. Above all, the services we have must be marketed. There is no point in a service running if nobody knows about it. It is bizarre that people do not know. They do not believe they can get a train in Cahir. The toilets at the stations in Clonmel and Cahir should be open. It is not fair to have people waiting without those facilities.

**Deputy Barry Heneghan:** I welcome the Government decision not to oppose the motion. Continued investment in public transport is essential if we are to deliver on our climate obligations. We need to acknowledge, as others did recently, that there are now 1 million daily users as well as the expansion of the local network link. We need to make it easier for people to use public transport. Everyone here has travelled to European cities and been amazed by the fact that they can just tap with their phones. The Leap card system is good, but surely it can be adapted to allow people to use their phones. The NTA has said that it will take one or two years, but it should not take that long to adapt a small chip to give people travelling a tap-on experience.

I will reference accessibility. We need to reflect the scale of the barriers people with disabilities still face when using public transport. I acknowledge that we are seeing progress but

there are problems with bus stop design in many areas, particularly along the Clontarf Road in north Dublin. At several bus stops on the recently upgraded cycling network, I have witnessed near collisions and there have been serious injuries. I raised this matter with Dublin City Council, the NTA and the Government. We cannot pit one transport user's experience against another. Public safety and accessibility must be the cornerstone of our transport infrastructure. We see where it is being done well, but there are a lot of places where the same design was not implemented.

I will raise another matter. People with disabilities are unable to use Clontarf or Clongriffin DART stations because the lift is continuously out of order. I reference another European city that has an app that shows people real-time data. I know we are doing that but it is not as quick. It needs to show exactly when the lift is out of order so that people are informed and told where they can go.

Go n-éirí leat i do phost nua, a Aire. He will do a great job and I look forward to working with him.

**Deputy Carol Nolan:** I also wish the Minister the very best in his new role. I look forward to working with him.

I am happy to speak to this motion. I commend the Independent and Parties Technical Group on tabling it. I particularly reference the all-island strategic rail review and the manner in which it outlines economic and social benefits. This is incredibly important.

In respect of my constituency of Offaly, I will raise ongoing issues regarding Clara train station. As my constituent, Barry Flynn, has noted through his extensive research on this issue, Clara was once the location of two railway stations and two railway junctions, one of which branched off the main line to Mullingar and the other off the main line to Banagher. It has been built beside what is called a passing loop. This means that both trains serving the station at the same time can allow passengers to embark or disembark. Unfortunately and bizarrely, this does not happen at Clara. Only the train using the main track can allow passengers to board or alight. The train using the passing loop stops, but because it does not have a platform, passengers cannot enter or exit. This happens on a number of occasions daily. This means that many people from the Clara railway station catchment area, which includes Clara, Moate, Rahan, Ballycumber, Kilbeggan, Tober and Ferbane, who would like to use a specific service cannot do so. The cost of constructing the second platform would be a capital cost and a tiny percentage. Will the Minister consider constructing the second platform at Clara train station?

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** I am glad to get the opportunity to speak. We have more public transport at the present time. There is a service from Kenmare through to Kilgarvan to Killarney that is great, but maybe a medium-sized bus would suffice rather than the large bus it has. Maybe we could get more bus stops. We need more bus stops because it is not much good to have a bus passing by when people are waiting by the side of road who cannot be picked up because they are too far away from the bus stops we have. The local authority needs to combine with and assist the Department of Transport to provide these bus stops. Places like Clonkeen are having difficulty getting access to public transport.

I wish to raise another issue. In Killarney, the train station is on one side of the railway platform. The bus station is on the other side of the rail track. We looked for a connecting bridge so that people would not have to go out on the street and down by the Great Southern Killarney

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with bags and everything, but we were told there was no funding for that. I ask the Minister to look at this again.

**Deputy Frankie Feighan:** The Minister is always welcome to the constituency that is Sligo-Leitrim and south Donegal. Indeed, he is always welcome to the west and north west. When he does come, he can come by road, rail, bike or foot. In the Minister's case, I understand he sometimes comes by boat up the Shannon.

I wish to raise the N17 Sligo to Galway and Mayo road. It is an issue everyone wants resolved, and I am delighted it now has been. In the previous Government, there was an issue. The former Minister, Eamon Ryan, came to Sligo and said funding for that road would not be continued. Between the three leaders, we came up with a compromise that allowed the road to progress. I am delighted the N17 is in the programme for Government. It is important.

There are other road projects. For example, we need progress on the N15 to Sligo and Donegal. I understand the Minister is aware of that. There is also the N16. A lot of good work has been done as far as the Leitrim border but there is an issue regarding the road over to Glencar lake. It needs to be resurfaced. There is no money for that at the moment, so we need to look for funding. Coming across the border from Manorhamilton in Leitrim into Sligo, the road is in a bad state of repair. It needs surface dressing.

I also wish to raise the Carrick-on-Shannon bypass. We must ensure it progresses. During the summer or on a Friday or Saturday, one could be waiting up to 40 or 45 minutes. The good news is that the N5 - the Ballaghaderreen to Scramoge road - is progressing. Nearly €400 million has been spent on it. It will be open in the next six months. For traffic coming from Sligo to Dublin or *vice versa*, we need a plan so that it comes down through Boyle, for example, and hits the N5 around Elphin. That would take a bit of pressure off Carrick-on-Shannon. It needs a bypass to survive, thrive and grow. It is happening but I want to make sure the bypass and N17 get approval. I thank the Minister for listening to his Government TDs and delivering on these projects.

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I thank Deputy O'Gorman for tabling this useful motion. I fully understand it is difficult for many Deputies to resist the temptation and not go into the micro and macro. From the contributions, people have recognised that significant progress has been made in public transport and want to work together to accelerate that progress further. It has been a good debate. I was at a Bus Éireann board meeting for the first hour of this debate, so the Minister of State, Deputy Canney, was here for that part. I am happy to make concluding remarks.

I am confident we can all agree it is essential that the Government continue investing in the public transport network. We will not oppose the motion. It has been a useful debate and people are supportive of the Government's commitment to deliver an accessible, affordable and reliable public transport network throughout the country. In the motion and contributions from Deputies, we heard about a range of challenges, but also the progress that had been made and the range of opportunities in public transport. There were record public transport numbers last year, which we want to accelerate. I believe we are all in agreement about wanting to provide a strong public transport network that serves the needs of all members of society in rural and urban areas.

As the House is aware, the Government is strongly committed to providing all of our citi-



zens with reliable, realistic and sustainable mobility options, as outlined in the programme for Government. Public transport is key in the delivery of this goal and in enabling us to make continued progress with regard to our climate obligations.

On fares, the Government is committed to delivering an accessible, reliable and affordable public transport system for all citizens, including children. In the programme for Government, our commitments include the roll-out of contactless payments and keeping fares affordable. We saw the announcement of fairer fares, their implementation and an examination of the further expansion of free public transport for children. We have extended the 20% fare reduction and a 90-minute fare on public service obligation services until the end of 2025 so that everyone will benefit. We have also extended the 50% reduction available for young adults on PSO and commercial bus services until the end of this year. We are supporting new and enhanced bus and rail services as well. Further measures introduced this year include the extension of free travel for children from the ages of five years to eight years. Most recently, there was the roll-out of the NTA distance-based fare and fairer fares. The equitable fares strategy will result in significant reductions for many. We will continue to do that. It helps people to change their behaviours and habits, particularly younger people, if they get used to using public transport at an early age. It leads to them continuing to do that into the future.

We need to fund public transport services. We are focused on existing fare initiatives and service improvements such as BusConnects. I am pleased to say that tenders are in for three of the BusConnects corridors. At least one will start this year. Twelve are now through planning, approximately seven are being challenged and back with the board, and there are various other challenges, but we can start them as well. We are rolling out Connecting Ireland in rural Ireland to enhance factors such as frequency, accessibility and reliability. DART+, DART+ South West, DART+ West and DART+ Coastal North have come through planning. As Deputy O’Gorman will know, my predecessor in the previous Government, Eamon Ryan, oversaw the first significant batch of new rolling stock for our rail lines. It is being tested and commissioned right now.

I am committed to transport security. I have already advanced proposals within the Department as to what that force will look like and how it will operated. I will meet the Minister, Deputy O’Callaghan, as we also need input from the Department of justice. We will need primary legislation, so I will look for co-operation and assistance from the Opposition in that regard.

Many surveys have been published as regards customer experience. Broadly, people feel safe but there are pinch points and black spots. Those who do not use public transport, interestingly, have a worse perception of safety. It is stopping people from using public transport. People who do not use it have specific fears. We need more gardaí and visibility, which we are seeing. The transport security force can augment that. That has been well documented in passenger experiences.

Reliability was mentioned. I have raised in the House previously how people need to be able to be confident in the real-time data. It will improve over the next two years but there are, unfortunately, still situations, particularly on our bus network, with buses not showing up or disappearing from the app. As recently as yesterday, I had a complaint from my daughter about that very thing when two buses were cancelled. I have good engagement with the NTA. We have been able to find out issues around resources.

Next-generation ticketing was mentioned. The contract has been in place with Indra Siste-

mas since last year. It is complex; a new IT system is being built. The Leap card works well but we want that contactless system across all of the public transport network. The comprehensive governance model has been implemented to oversee the project. It is an important project and will come to fruition. I believe I mentioned to Deputy O’Gorman when he asked about it during our previous Question Time that the middle or end of 2027 was the timeframe. It will entice a lot more people onto public transport. It will be a better system than the system in Britain and will be account based as well.

Accessibility on public transport for disabled people is one of the matters I was discussing with Bus Éireann. We have done a lot of good work in this space. It is a priority for me, too. We have seen Iarnród Éireann move, with the 15 hub stations where people with disabilities and mobility issues do not have to wait an outrageous 24 hours anymore. Now, if someone requires assistance, he or she will get it within an hour at most. The new rail cars that are being tested right now are all fully accessible using a ramp-to-platform basis. If one is in a wheelchair or is mobility impaired, it will make it much better. Our public transport system should be available to everyone regardless of physical ability or the physical impediments he or she might have.

The Taoiseach has established a unit within his Department that will focus on disability, reflecting our commitment in the programme for Government to a step change in the supports and services required by people with disabilities. It is fundamental that people can access public transport services, and we want to ensure that happens and improves. I will be engaging with that unit on the emphasis of addressing wider issues, such as ensuring that all public transport operators provide safe access to all passengers.

Great strides have been made with rural transport in recent years. We want to accelerate that. I have met Local Link as well. There can perhaps be better route designs, which has been mentioned during this debate, in linking up routes to other routes, but the numbers speak for themselves in terms of rural transport and how people are responding to it. It is an area that we will continue to accelerate.

There will be resource implications. When I say “resource”, I mean drivers. From my meeting with Bus Éireann this morning, the five-year plan it will bring forward this year will probably require 1,000 extra staff in net terms. School bus services have been mentioned. That is somewhat out of my remit, but where drivers are concerned, we need to solve the issue of over-70s school bus drivers. The expansion of school bus places to pupils has been transformative, and there is more demand. There will probably always be more demand with a growing population. We want to get to a stage where we can make a step change and start to catch up with that demand.

On the all-Ireland rail review implementation, the Minister of State, Deputy Canney, noted in his opening statement that work was ongoing with the EIB and rail stakeholders, both North and South, to consider how best to sequence the review’s recommendations. That is a commitment in the programme for Government.

The national development plan, NDP, review will be important. Deputy O’Gorman has been through iterations of that in different budget discussions. Public transport is key. Indeed, transport is key to our citizens’ quality of life, growth within our country, accessibility and connectivity. I am in the middle of the NDP review with the Minister, Deputy Chambers, on behalf of the Department of Transport. I am working hard in that regard to ensure we can get as many of the additional resources we require to continue to invest.

I fully recognise and emphasise the important role that public transport plays in all of our lives. I am acutely aware of a lot of the concerns that have been raised. There are a lot of very specific issues, which I will endeavour to have the Department respond to. I encourage Deputies across the House, regardless if they are in government or opposition, to reach out and make contact where there are specific instances and examples we can work on together.

I thank Deputy O’Gorman for tabling this useful Motion. It has been a constructive debate heretofore.

**Deputy Roderic O’Gorman:** I thank colleagues across the House for their contributions on this debate. I thank the Minister, Deputy O’Brien, and the Minister of State, Deputy Canney, for attending.

Last year, we saw public transport usage grow to 1 million passengers per day, which was an important milestone to pass. This shows the success of the measures that were taken in the previous Government, led by a Green Party Minister, to encourage people to take the bus, the train and light rail. I am pleased that the Government is not opposing this motion, but what I am taking from the Minister’s agreement to it is that the Government sees these eight commitments as being achievable in the lifetime of this Government. On behalf of the Green Party, I will be holding the Government to account on achieving these commitments.

However, something I was disappointed by in the speeches by the Minister and Minister of State was that, while they were very nice speeches, there was a lack of specifics and measurables in terms of when key commitments will be achieved. The Minister spoke with some passion about the transport security force. In my motion, I set out a timeline to have the legislation passed and the force up and running by the end of 2026. That is 18 months away. I think that is doable.

**Deputy Darragh O’Brien:** Possibly.

**Deputy Roderic O’Gorman:** It will need legislation. I am on the transport committee and am happy to work on that legislation, but we need clear commitments on when we will actually get these things done.

Similarly on the issue of next-generation ticketing, I suggest the end of 2026 to have that implemented by. The Minister of State’s speech spoke of taking a number of years. The Minister has now given us a date of the end of 2027, which I welcome. That is important. We have already committed €149 million to Indra Sistemas. That is a lot of public money. I do not think the idea of it happening “in the next couple of years” is good enough. I welcome the fact that we have an end of 2027 deadline in terms of the achievement of next-generation ticketing.

One thing I was struck by in the contributions from Deputies across the House was how many raised the improvements in rural transport through Local Link and town services. For far too many people living in rural Ireland, public transport simply is not an option. That is why, in the previous Government, the Green Party prioritised the Connecting Ireland rural bus programme. We know that Local Link bus services are a key lifeline in many communities, particularly for those who simply do not own a car. The roll-out of additional Local Link services since 2022 has created a fivefold increase in the number of journeys taken. There were 20,000 Local Link journeys taken in 2022, but 100,000 in 2024. That is a huge improvement. Connecting Ireland has transformed public transport in rural Ireland. It is connecting many communities, some for the first time, and giving regular and frequent services. This is not just

about moving people. It is about breaking down barriers, ending isolation and ensuring elderly people have those options available to them.

At the centre of the proposals in my motion is the need to improve the commuter experience. Too often, passengers in Ireland face ghost buses, inaccurate information about arrivals and departures on transport apps, broken real-time monitors and inflexibility in how they pay their fares. The Minister will have heard Deputy after Deputy speak about how ghost buses in particular are undermining public confidence in the transport system. The Minister did a nice little TikTok himself about it a couple of weeks ago.

We have called on the Government to set up a public transport passenger experience office. That will ensure accurate information is provided to passengers, particularly if a service is delayed or cancelled. It will ensure a revamping of the entire real-time system because it is not working. The different apps tell people different things. It will improve services for people with mobility challenges and people with disabilities. I note what the Minister said about the consolidated contact centre. I see that as progress but while its role is gathering data from the public transport companies themselves and analysing that, what we need is something for the passenger when he or she has a problem. We do not have that at the moment. What is there at the moment is not accurate and is not important.

I note the improvement in stations where there is only a one-hour notice period for people with disabilities and the improvement to the 15 stations, but we all recognise that there is a job of work to do. The Minister recognised that in his own contribution.

Affordability is key. We know that public transport users are price sensitive. It is important that the overall cuts in public transport fares that were introduced by the previous Government be maintained, as they are important cost-of-living measures. I heard what the Minister said about that. What I am disappointed about relates to my call for a cut of at least another 20% over the lifetime of this Government. The Minister was fairly uncertain on that particular point. Funding for public transport services is focused on existing fare initiatives. That is not ambitious enough. The Government should be looking across four budgets to be taking another chunk off the cost of public transport for commuters because when we do that, they will respond and move onto our services, particularly as capacity grows over the next number of years. Let us reward commuters and make it as attractive as possible for them to make that move.

I welcome Deputy Canney's outlining of the project prioritisation strategy for the all-Ireland strategic rail review.

*12 o'clock*

I know we had to cancel statements on it today, but I hope we will have an opportunity to discuss the all-Ireland strategic rail review. It has major potential for linking parts of the country that have been isolated and neglected for far too long. It has a major North-South element. In order to deliver some key projects in that review, the NDP review, as the Minister said, is absolutely central.

The Green Party calls for an extra €10 billion to be allocated to the Minister's Department over the course of the next five years to 2030. Major projects, including the DART upgrade, metropolitan rail in Cork and Limerick, the western rail corridor, gluas in Galway or the metro-link in Dublin, will not be developed with the current allocation for the Department, given the other transport priorities he has outlined. Deputy Feighan spoke clearly about that. I hope the

Minister is fighting as hard as possible for an increased capital allocation.

The Green Party of course opted to table a motion on public transport as it has a direct consequence on our carbon emissions. We know that transport is one of the areas where we are not getting on top of reducing emissions. We also accept that ordinary commuters are not thinking about that on their way to work every day. On a dark winter morning in Blanchardstown when it is raining and the bus flies by a bus stop because it is already full or a family is taking to a trip from Athlone where everyone has to stand on the train because what was marketed as a five-carriage train only has four carriages, there is a daily pain that people experience in terms of being late because real-time information on the app was not correct. All of this weighs on people's patience and time. People are simply thinking they want a public transport system that actually works for them.

Due to the irritation people experience, they often perhaps do not recognise the improvements that are taking place, to which many Deputies have referred. While the significant increase in capital investment is needed, the penny has to drop in the Department and the NTA that passenger experience is of critical importance to public confidence in and satisfaction with the delivery of the infrastructure and to get them moving. That starts with the Minister. I hope he is able to follow through on the commitments we have discussed today.

Question put and agreed to.

### **Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions**

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I welcome all those in the Gallery.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** The scandal of abuse and neglect of elderly residents at two of the country's nursing homes has deepened with the publication of a HIQA report last night. It revealed that one of those homes, Beneavin Manor in Glasnevin, had almost 200 allegations of abuse of residents in the past three years. HIQA has notified the Garda of its concerns regarding the two nursing homes concerned and has requested that Emeis Ireland, the company that owns the two facilities, stop admissions to all 25 of the homes it controls. How can we have 108 allegations of abuse at just one nursing home, yet it took an RTÉ programme to expose the scandal?

What we witnessed on our TV screens was horrific. Vulnerable elderly people were man-handled, neglected, disrespected, pushed down hallways and forced roughly into chairs by the very people who were supposed to care for them. Their families are absolutely devastated and are calling on the Government to act now. The HIQA report reveals that these were not one-off failures in care caught on camera. The culture of abuse and neglect at Beneavin Manor was obviously endemic, hardwired into the operation of the home and went on for a very long time.

It is clear that Emeis did not fear HIQA. Quite frankly, it did not give a toss about regulations or inspections. It is little wonder because the hands of HIQA are tied behind its back. It does not have the legal power to impose fines. The corporate entities that own these nursing homes are out of their reach. HIQA badly needs new powers to deal with both of these fundamentals. The toxic culture in these nursing homes and the regulatory and governance failure that allows this wholesale abuse of elderly residents are a direct result of Government policy. For decades, campaigners have called for robust adult safeguarding legislation to protect resi-



dents in nursing homes, but their calls have been ignored by the Government.

Some 20 years on from the big promises of change made after Leas Cross, we have had a litany of abuse scandals, including the Brandon and Grace cases and Áras Attracta. We have had case after case of abuse after abuse, yet the Government sits on its hands. There is no safeguarding legislation, mandatory reporting or legal right of entry for social care teams to investigate complaints. There is no accountability ever.

This abuse and neglect has happened with the corporate takeover of nursing homes and care. Twenty years ago, 30% of homes were in private hands. Today, that stands at 80%. The State walks away from its responsibilities and the profit of wealthy companies is put above the care and dignity of the very people who built this country. Is toradh é an scannal seo maidir le drochíde agus neamhaird a léiríodh do sheandhaoine a bhí ina gcónaí i dtithe altranais ar theip an Rialtais gníomhú. Teastaíonn reachtaíocht láidir a chosnóidh daoine fásta go práinneach.

The Taoiseach may well seek to distance the Government from this scandal, but the fact is that the neglect and abuse and weak regulation and oversight are a direct result of Government policy, a policy to allow big corporates to take over nursing homes. The Government needs to act now. When will the Taoiseach listen to the calls of families and campaigners? When will HIQA have the powers it needs? When will the Taoiseach bring forward robust safeguarding and mandatory reporting legislation and ensure that our elderly citizens are safe and respected?

**The Taoiseach:** One of the most difficult decisions for any family to have to take is to place a loved one in a nursing home. It is a very difficult decision. The least people can expect is that the dignity of their loved one will be respected at all times and that their loved one will be looked after, cared for and not be subjected to the abuse, neglect and unacceptable behaviour revealed in the “Prime Time Investigates” programme. I pay tribute to RTÉ for the important programme that dealt with this issue.

There is a fundamental obligation on the nursing homes concerned, and all involved, to look after people in their care. In no circumstances can the abuse of people be tolerated. People have a right to expect that level of care.

Additional measures to strengthen the powers of the chief inspector of HIQA have been granted from 2017 up to 2021 and onwards. A range of additional measures, capacity, power and so on were outlined in the interim report of HIQA published yesterday.

There are some very disturbing and clear facts in the interim report. For example, 61% of the homes in question did not adhere to fire regulations. That is a red alarm. There is a power to close nursing homes, which is sometimes described as a nuclear option. In my view, when things are at the level as revealed in this report, in terms of more fundamental issues like that, where clearly the health and safety of residents is at stake, that is an option. I know it brings with it a whole range of issues but it is one that in the past used to be invoked and the HSE would be engaged. We are all familiar with HIQA investigations and reports in which it would have recommended closure. People would ask about their loved ones and ask where they should go but there does come a point if it reaches a level. The lack of compliance in a number of key areas is clear in the report. The one that jumps out, in my view, is with regard to the fire regulations. There are other aspects of either partial compliance or non-compliance. This is deeply traumatic for the families involved. In our system approximately 75% of our nursing home centres are in private hands, 20% are publicly owned and approximately 3.5% are section

38 or section 39 organisations. The fair deal scheme was the last major intervention trying to facilitate making it more affordable for people in respect of sending their loved ones and placing their loved ones in nursing homes.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Taoiseach.

**The Taoiseach:** In recent years the push has been towards home care but home care also involves privatised nursing care. People contract in people to help. I will come back to the final point I was going to make.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** The Taoiseach is not a commentator on these matters. He is after giving me a whole spiel there that told me precisely nothing, with all due respect. A total of 198 complaints were made against a nursing home with not a cent of financial penalty. There were no consequences until RTÉ showed up. This tells us the system is not working. It is not sufficient for the Taoiseach to take to his feet and offer tea and sympathy. We all know how difficult it is for anybody to make a decision to place a loved one in a nursing home and how difficult it is for the person themselves to lose that sense of autonomy that comes with all of that. The Taoiseach should know also there are people throughout the State terrified they would ever end up in a nursing home. More families are worried sick about the treatment of their loved ones in these facilities. I have made the point on the corporate takeover of care and the Government has facilitated that. HIQA cannot investigate individual complaints.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Deputy.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** It cannot impose financial penalties. It cannot reach into these corporate structures. What is the Taoiseach going to do about that? Will he please answer my question on safeguarding legislation-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Deputy. Your time is up. The Taoiseach to respond, please.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** -----mandatory reporting and the need for social care teams to have access to these homes to protect these very vulnerable elderly people?

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**The Taoiseach:** The interim report outlines a whole series of measures that were taken to enhance and strengthen the measures and powers of the chief inspector of HIQA, in terms of the legal timeframe for decisions by the chief-----

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** The CEO of HIQA is before a committee today looking for more powers. Answer my questions.

**The Taoiseach:** You are interrupting again, Deputy. I have had enough of that now. I have the floor now.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** Then answer the questions.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Excuse me, Deputy, please resume your seat and afford the Taoiseach the same benefit that you had.

**The Taoiseach:** I will answer it but you have a tactic all the time-----

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**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** No, answer the question.

**The Taoiseach:** -----of interrupting every time I get to my feet and make a point.

**Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn:** And you never interrupt?

**The Taoiseach:** I do not interrupt Deputies.

**Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn:** I can check the record if you want. You do it regularly.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The clock is ticking if you wish to have an answer. Deputy Mac Lochlainn, it is not your question. I ask the Taoiseach to please resume his response.

**Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn:** He is accusing people of doing something he is guilty of regularly.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Taoiseach, please resume your response.

**The Taoiseach:** The fundamental power that HIQA has, particularly in the face of breaches, in my view, and it is one that should not be balked at, is cancellation of the licence. In my view, this is the teeth that HIQA has. Yes, we do need to review the methodology-----

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** It is not sufficient.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Sorry, Deputy.

**The Taoiseach:** -----of HIQA and it has said it itself.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** And the CEO-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Taoiseach.

**The Taoiseach:** No, sorry I-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** No, I understand.

**The Taoiseach:** Hold on a second-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Taoiseach, it is not your fault and it is certainly not the other Members-----

**Deputy Conor D. McGuinness:** If you did not waffle as much in the first four minutes.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Let me say please Taoiseach-----

**The Taoiseach:** How long is this going to continue?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** This is the problem, Taoiseach.

**The Taoiseach:** It is not my problem. I am not in a position now to answer.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** They are not hearing the answer because they are not listening.

**The Taoiseach:** I cannot get my points across because of this constant-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Yes, I agree.

**Deputy Louise O'Reilly:** The Taoiseach had five minutes. If he did have an answer, he could have given it in five minutes.

**The Taoiseach:** I ask the Ceann Comhairle, given what has happened and what has happened in the past number of weeks, I want a review of how this is happening. I am not going to come in here-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** It is not your fault, Taoiseach.

**The Taoiseach:** -----and listen to everybody and give them the courtesy of listening and not be allowed to reply.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** That is the point.

**The Taoiseach:** That is fundamentally wrong.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Excuse me.

**The Taoiseach:** It needs an intervention from the Ceann Comhairle-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** My intervention is that the answer-----

**The Taoiseach:** -----and the Whips as well, and the Chief Whip, to sort this out.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** They have a timeframe-----

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** Then answer the questions that are put to you.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Excuse me, Deputy. There is a timeframe in which the Taoiseach can provide the answer.

**Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:** Resign as Taoiseach. That is the easiest way.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** If they choose not to listen, it is kind of pointless asking the question. The reality is that everybody should be afforded the opportunity, as Deputy McDonald was by her colleagues, to ask a question.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** And I would expect answers-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I would expect-----

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** -----to my questions.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I am speaking, Deputy.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** As am I. I am entitled to answers to my questions.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I am speaking, Deputy, so I would expect that you stop speaking when I speak. What I am asking is that everybody afford each other the same level of respect. In that way the House will operate with decorum. I call Deputy Bacik.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** Last week on Wednesday, and again on Thursday, I and Deputy Sherlock raised on Leaders' Questions the scandal of abuse in nursing homes. We sought assurances from the Taoiseach on Wednesday and from the Tánaiste on Thursday in respect of protections against abuse. This week again we see more serious concerns raised, with HIQA's

interim report released last night revealing to us that HIQA had heard of the 200 allegations of abuse against residents in Beneavin Manor made since 2022 and 40 more were disclosed in respect of residents in Portlaoise.

It is no exaggeration to say that trust in the model of private and for-profit nursing home care has been shattered since Aoife Hegarty and her RTÉ team broadcast the coverage of abuse and neglect of residents in those homes. Faith in the system of inspections has also been greatly damaged in this time. Unfortunately, the presentations of HIQA's CEO and chief inspectors at this morning's health committee has raised more questions than answers about the system of inspection and oversight. Residents of nursing homes deserves security, safety and dignity. That is all any of us want for ourselves and for our loved ones. We want to know that complaints will be taken seriously, that there will be zero tolerance of abuse, and that there will be real consequences for those who carry out abuse or for the management of nursing homes where abuse is carried out and facilitated.

The presentations made before today's meeting of the health committee will not have reassured anyone. Inconsistencies permeate in the interim report and in the opening statement. The process in place for escalating complaints, in particular, remains really unclear. HIQA's sole tool for responding to complaints appears to be restricting admissions, short of making a report to the Garda. What use is restricting admissions for those already resident in a home? Shockingly, it seems that an impugned home arguably has more authority to lift the restriction than even HIQA does. There is an issue about consequences. Serious concerns therefore remain about HIQA's capacity to keep nursing home residents safe.

There is also a pressing issue which arises from this morning's hearing. The report HIQA published last night gave the impression that the organisation was not on notice of all that the RTÉ team had unveiled prior to broadcast, and that the HIQA team did not know about it in advance. However, information shared with my colleague, Deputy Sherlock, shows that HIQA had received detailed protected disclosures prior to broadcast and that it received seven pages of correspondence from Aoife Hegarty herself 12 days before broadcast. This information included allegations relating to a third nursing home not featured in the RTÉ programme. When Deputy Sherlock asked this morning about this, HIQA's chief inspector was nothing short of evasive.

People need to know the extent of abuse in nursing homes. We need assurances that HIQA is capable of investigating and effectively addressing abuse. The horror stories of private nursing home facilities are spreading. We are all hearing them. Will the Taoiseach tell us how many Audeon Guys are suffering in silence throughout the country today? What will the Taoiseach do to ensure there is effective safeguarding in place? Will he introduce legislation before the summer recess? Will he ensure that HIQA has the necessary teeth to deliver sanctions where abuse occurs?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Deputy. I call the Taoiseach.

**The Taoiseach:** I fully agree with what Deputy Bacik is saying in respect of people's entitlement and families when they place their loved ones into nursing homes. It is absolutely shocking and scandalous there would be any abuse of people residing and living nursing homes. There is a range of existing legislation, including the 2007 Act amended on a number of occasions. There are a lot of measures and powers available to HIQA in respect of this. There is a forthcoming national policy on adult safeguarding for the health and social care sector. This



will set out how existing protections can be strengthened. It will be brought to the Government shortly. It will commit to the development of adult safeguarding legislation for the sector. We have included a health (adult safeguarding) Bill in our legislative programme to facilitate this. It is complex stuff. Let us not pretend. When events of this kind happen, people tend to rush and say “This is the answer”. A more comprehensive response is required, including adult safeguarding legislation. I fully agree with the Deputy on that. I have no issue with larger fines being levied but I believe, and this is a difficult balance, the option of closing has to be on the table. Otherwise, people will not fear. I recall that eight or nine years ago, when HIQA was going to various facilities, people would object and say it could not close them. I am just saying this as something I believe. Yes, it is then up to the HSE and others to resolve the consequential crisis that occurs if a decision to close is made. We should not baulk from that decision because of that. That would send a real message, but not just a message, because it is an action and an intervention which is allowed for under the law. If there is a series of non-compliance, as seems to be the case in respect of the interim report from HIQA, that option should be on the table.

If the Deputy has noticed what has happened since the “RTÉ Investigates” programme, safeguarding teams have gone in. The director of nursing of the HSE has sent them in now. Where the protection of people is involved, the HSE has every remit to get involved and protect, which we did during Covid. There was huge support of nursing homes during Covid because it was adjudged they were not in a position to deal with the wider impact of Covid. Huge State supports went into nursing homes via the Health Service Executive. Where alarm bells are raised and there is a clear issue around the protection of people and the prevention of abuse, there needs to be an intervention by the health authorities, once HIQA has raised the alarms, to safeguard people. That is already there and can be done.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** On the safeguarding piece, we are not rushing into this. The Law Reform Commission published a report last year. Just two weeks ago, Safeguarding Ireland published a clear blueprint of pathways and necessary steps for the Government to take. During debates on nursing home care, I think the Minister of State with responsibility for older persons said the safeguarding Bill would be introduced in this House before the summer recess.

**The Taoiseach:** Who said that?

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** I understand the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell, said that during the debate. We need clarity and a timeline, with respect, on the safeguarding legislation and, crucially, on the issue of HIQA powers. People are desperately seeking a clear pathway for making complaints, including a pathway to escalate a complaint. That is sadly lacking. As the Taoiseach rightly said, people are seeking a clear indication that HIQA has effective sanctions available to it, including the sanction of temporary closure, if necessary. I sat yesterday in a café in my constituency with a family whose mother had been severely badly treated in a nursing home. They pointed out to me that the café could be closed temporarily if food standards fell short of statutory rules, but the nursing home cannot be shut down in the same way. That is where we need to go. We need effective sanctions and effective complaint pathways.

**The Taoiseach:** The power to remove or cancel a registration is there.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** I raised short-term closures.

**The Taoiseach:** Eight nursing homes had their registration removed last year. It has happened and can happen. Looking at the protected disclosures and the list of complaints in re-

spect of these nursing homes, one could argue that the case merited that type of intervention. However, I think the interim report contains an argument made by HIQA that the profile of one of the nursing homes was completely changed from the time of the inspection in November to February. That is what HIQA is saying in terms of numbers and so on and the nature of them. Legislation on its own is important, but so are behaviour and obligations. Nursing homes have obligations. Some very good nursing homes fulfil their obligations. There is a more fundamental point, which we should come back to again as an Oireachtas, in terms of what the balance is between public, private and home care. Most home care will be private.

**Deputy Gary Gannon:** I turn to another gross institutional failure of the State, namely, the Irish Prison Service, which is in crisis as we speak. That is not a word that I use lightly. Right now, 5,415 people are in our prisons, with more than 400 of them sleeping on floors. Prison officers and inmates are living and working in dangerously overcrowded and volatile conditions. We have been repeatedly warned that there are immediate safety risks. Inmates are being held in degrading conditions. We have heard stories of people being confined for up to 22 hours a day, often beside unpartitioned toilets and denied access to basic rehabilitation services. That is nothing short of institutional abandonment. This crisis is not simply the result of rising prisoner numbers; it is the direct consequence of the political decisions of a Government that is determined to appear tough, even if it means acting recklessly.

In correspondence published this week, the director general of the Irish Prison Service issued a stark warning to the Government. Caron McCaffrey said the Government decision to crack down on immigration and imprison asylum seekers will “necessitate the early release of more serious and high-risk offenders”. Ms McCaffrey sent her letter in 2024. Since then, the Government has doubled down on this dangerous approach. Recently, 28 people facing deportation were detained for nearly a month in advance of a deportation flight to Nigeria. These people were detained in prison purely for administrative reasons at a cost to the State of more than €200,000. They were also put on a flight costing another €350,000 when it was finally arranged. This is the result of the Government’s Trumpian posturing-----

**Deputy Mary Butler:** Trumpian.

**Deputy Gary Gannon:** -----when it comes to this action. It is imprisoning the vulnerable to send a message, all while more serious offenders operating within the machinery of organised crime are let out the back door early. This is performative cruelty at its most blatant.

Organised crime groups are thriving in communities that are already deeply neglected. Releasing those involved in these networks will send a chillingly clear message that these communities will continue to flounder while the mid-level gangs entrenched within them will flourish. It is performance dressed up as policy and it is putting communities at risk. Organised crime groups are deeply embedded in these communities, recruiting younger and younger members. Is it now the Government policy that gang-affiliated offenders should continue to be released from prison early to make room for those facing low-level immigration charges? Does the Taoiseach believe this sends the “tough on crime” message we often hear coming from Government because it clearly does not? It sends a message that this Government is willing to sacrifice public safety for political optics. I do not believe for a second that prison in its current form is working. We know that more than six out of ten people released from prison will reoffend, but this policy is dangerous. How can the Taoiseach possibly justify a policy where being tough on immigration takes precedence over being smart or safe when it comes to crime?

**The Taoiseach:** The Deputy's juxtaposition of the migration issue with the genuinely serious problem of overcrowding in prisons is stretching credibility.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** Hear, hear.

**The Taoiseach:** It is a false juxtaposition.

**Deputy Gary Gannon:** The Government is putting people in prison for coming into the country.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy, allow the Taoiseach to answer.

**The Taoiseach:** Sorry, I did not interrupt the Deputy. I just want to make the point. The Deputy said there are more than 5,000 prisoners. He is saying that if a number of asylum seekers are imprisoned, for whatever reason, they should not be, irrespective of what the reasons might be. That is what he indicated. His suggestion that it is all about some performance for the optics that we just want to get tough on migration, imprisoning a few and letting criminals go free is a preposterous proposition and assertion, and it is wrong.

Let us take it bit by bit. Every country in the world has rules in respect of migration. We issue work permits for people who want to legally come into the country to work. We issue visas for people who want to stay in the country and so on, be it a holiday visa or whatever type of visa. There is a variety of visas. We have visa agreements with other countries. There is freedom of mobility within the European Union. All of that has been positive for this country, but there has to be rules around migration. The Government is very clear on that. The Minister for justice, Deputy O'Callaghan, has been very clear on that. It is not optics; it is just common sense. We will reject any assertion that Ireland is an open-border territory. It is not. We have never had open borders because there has always been a system.

There is a very serious issue in terms of prison overcrowding. Two weeks ago, the Minister brought proposals to Government to speed up the construction of 960 prison spaces. That will happen. It will take four years, between the planning, getting the construction work done and completing part of it. That is an immediate response. There will also be more medium-term responses in terms of prison capacity.

Third, a range of measures have been taken in recent years in the context of getting tough on crime. I refer here to legislation to criminalise the grooming of children into a life of crime, rolling out a support programme to break the link between gangs and the children they try to recruit, strengthening CAB's ability to target the proceeds of crime and speeding up the process to dispose of assets for the benefit of the State.

The Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau is leading in tackling of all forms of drug trafficking and the supply of illicit drugs in Ireland. More than €627 million in illicit drugs have been seized by the bureau, as well as firearms and so on. The Minister for Justice, Deputy O'Callaghan, and the Minister of State, Deputy Murnane O'Connor, recently launched a drive in respect of a drug-related intimidation and violence engagement project. That will have impact. The Garda workforce is also increasing.

**Deputy Gary Gannon:** It is sometimes difficult not to interrupt the Taoiseach when he is purposely distorting-----

**The Taoiseach:** Sorry?

**Deputy Gary Gannon:** It is sometimes difficult not to interrupt when the Taoiseach is purposely distorting what exactly it is that he is trying to say. Politics is about choices. He knows this. We prisons that are overcrowded to the point where multiple sources, including those in the area of security and civil servants, have confirmed that a number of prisoners, including those suspected to be members of organised crime gangs, have been released. While the Government is doing this, other people detained in our prisons are awaiting deportation flights. Once those flights happen, we have a justice Minister who talks to “Morning Ireland” or whatever newspaper as if he is a general coming home from war. Our prisons are overcrowded.

*(Interruptions).*

**Deputy Gary Gannon:** We have a situation that is detrimental to the human condition. For the purposes of the Government’s performative cruelty, we are now putting people who are awaiting deportation flights into prison. They are in every prison, including Mountjoy and Dóchas. People are being taken out of IPAS centres and brought to prison. All the while, the Government is releasing drug dealers back into communities. That is its choice. That is no distortion. The Government has to own that because that is the choice it is making.

**The Taoiseach:** The Deputy started by saying it is very difficult not to interrupt. I respectfully suggest-----

**Deputy Gary Gannon:** Sorry?

**The Taoiseach:** The Deputy said it was with great difficulty he could not but interrupt. He has never had any difficulty interrupting from my experience in the House.

There is a prison overpopulation issue. That is accepted by the Government. The Minister has brought forward proposals which will result in about 960 additional prison spaces. That can be done as quickly as possible. Opposition is being created where this expansion is happening. I have no doubt that other members of the Deputy’s party may very well be criticising some of the decisions the Minister has taken regarding the location of those prisons. That is the consistency of political opposition. I suppose it is a condition of it.

On migration, what is the Deputy suggesting? Is it that there be no sanctions at all for those who are breaking our laws in respect of migration?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** That was not a question for answer.

**Deputy Gary Gannon:** This is ridiculous.

**The Taoiseach:** There has to be a balance. I suggest that the Deputy’s basic assertion is wrong and flawed.

**Deputy Roderic O’Gorman:** Lady’s Island Lake in County Wexford is the largest saltwater lagoon in Ireland. It provides refuge for a variety of wildfowl. That is why it is protected under both the birds and habitats directives. It surrounds Our Lady’s Island, which is a beautiful and ancient place of pilgrimage. Unfortunately, Lady’s Island Lake is also highly polluted. The environmental protection agency, EPA, has been studying the lake for the past two years. The report it published in January makes for grim reading. It states, “the ecology of this lagoon has been severely damaged by nutrient over-enrichment resulting in harmful algal blooms and fish kills.” It goes on to say:

The continued decline of Lady's Island Lake and other saline lagoons in Ireland will result in the loss of many specialised species, the disappearance of feeding grounds for migratory birds and reduce the recreational and aesthetic value of these waters.

One of the report's authors, Dr. Cilian Roden, told the *Irish Independent* in January last year that the situation is so bad, the lagoon's glow can be seen from space.

The EPA's research was discussed at the joint Oireachtas committee on environment last week. One point emerged crystal clear from the EPA report, namely that no improvement in the lake's ecology will be possible without a large reduction in nutrient run-off from land. It is important we do not frame this as blaming farmers, but the impact of nutrient run-off at this significant site is absolutely clear. So too are the recommendations from the EPA on how we can save Lady's Island Lake. We must enforce existing regulations on agricultural nutrients entering the lake, help farmers change their practices and improve the buffer zones around the water sources flowing into the lake.

The evidence put before the Oireachtas committee included a newspaper article from 1983 describing pollution in the lake. This is not some new environmental catastrophe; this problem has been in the making for more than 40 years and has been allowed to continue. All the various enforcement and accountability arms of the State, including local authority inspections, Teagasc and other mechanisms, failed to protect Lady's Island Lake.

If agricultural run-off is the recognised driver of the pollution of the lake, will the Taoiseach task the Minister for agriculture to take the lead here? Will he agree that it must be a priority to reverse the pollution of the lake? In light of the absence of sufficient action for more than four decades, a solution needs force and the political clout a senior Cabinet Minister brings in order to bring together the relevant stakeholders and ensure that they deliver. Will the Taoiseach task the Minister with ensuring that action is taken to stop an ecological disaster that is unfolding in real time and in full view of us all?

**The Taoiseach:** I agree with the Deputy this must be a priority to reverse the pollution of Lady's Island Lake. A specific action plan should be developed for the lake and so forth. That will have to involve a number of stakeholders. It will not just be agricultural stakeholders, but, obviously, they will be key. The Minister of State responsible for biodiversity should lead on this in conjunction with the Ministers for agriculture and climate. We are engaged in a range of projects across the country. This will have to be done on cross-departmental basis.

The climate and biodiversity dimensions have to be central to this in order to get improvements. There will have to be a whole-of-government approach because there may be a need for financial intervention in order to enable any plan to have impact on the ground. I know it is not the Deputy's intention to apportion blame, but he is clearly saying that farming is creating the nutrient run-off into the lake. Clearly, the solution is going to have to involve neighbouring farmers. I will engage with the Minister of State, Christopher O'Sullivan, the Minister, Martin Heydon, and the Minister, Darragh O'Brien, and ask them to come together to coming up with a plan to deal with this issue. We have seen plans on other issues - whether it was the Corncrake LIFE project or the white-tailed eagles - in respect of which we engaged with stakeholders and which were - I will not say floundering - in difficulty early on. Through engagement with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, NPWS, we got good responses and this resulted in the success and progression of those projects. There are other projects farmers have co-operated with - the Burren being a very good example - where we have also got good outcomes.



It is possible to get a good outcome, but an action plan involving all stakeholders has to be developed with a view to getting the outcome the Deputy correctly identified. It is not satisfactory to have ecological devastation at such an important site for a range of reasons.

**Deputy Roderic O’Gorman:** I thank the Taoiseach for his comments, but this time we have to do something different. We need political leadership and accountability. The damage here has been building for four decades and the existing processes just have not worked. In place of a thriving ecosystem, we are going to end up with a toxic goo lagoon. If we fail to act, we do not have far to look to see what is next for Lady’s Island Lake. Lough Neagh is already described as toxic due to the algal bloom it experiences each summer.

There are solutions, such as, perhaps, advancing a European innovation partnership scheme. Something similar was done nearby in Duncannon. That would create ways of rewarding farmers for changes they undertake to reduce nutrient run-off. As my colleague, Senator Malcolm Noonan, said in the Oireachtas committee, unless the Department of agriculture is centrally involved and unless all the stakeholders play an active and collaborative role, this unique habitat will become a dead zone for nature. I do not think the Taoiseach wants that on his watch.

**The Taoiseach:** I certainly do not. Over the last number of years, I have taken a direct interest in the work of the NPWS and the biodiversity issue. We doubled the staff of the NPWS and we bought additional lands to transform into national parks. We now have a biodiversity officer in every local authority. When he was Minister of State, Senator Malcolm Noonan, did a lot of good work and I worked very well with him on this agenda.

I hear what the Deputy is saying regarding the centrality of the Department of agriculture but if it was left on its own, we might not get what he is looking for, and I do not mean that in an disparaging way as other stakeholders have to be involved as well. The EPA clearly has a role in terms of water quality and so on. The Minister of State in the Department of housing with responsibility for biodiversity has a clear role as well to pull this together. I will personally intervene to see if we can get an action plan put together to start the process of reversing this.

### **Ceisteanna ó na Comhaltaí Eile - Other Members’ Questions**

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Like many Members of this House, I speak not only as a public representative but as a former councillor and as a parent of three young children. I regularly meet parents of children with disabilities. What they tell me is clear; the system is not working for them. The programme for Government commits to progressively increasing the domiciliary care allowance, DCA, and to phasing out the means test for carer’s allowance. As the Taoiseach knows, the DCA is a non-means-tested payment of €360 per month for children under 16 with significant additional care needs. It comes with a medical card and a €2,000 annual carer’s support grant. However, here is the reality. Figures I obtained through parliamentary questions show that between 2020 and 2024, more than 52,000 families applied for the allowance. One in three was refused. Yet, of those who appealed, 60% were successful. In the most extreme cases, 67 families took the State to the High Court and in every resolved case, they won that case. This is not a fair process. It is a system that forces families already under pressure, to fight for what they are entitled to.

The recent ESRI study, published ahead of the economic dialogue, found that disability-related costs absorb from 52% to 59% of disposable income. This rises to more than 93% in

cases of what the ESRI terms, “severe disability.” Research by AsIAM shows that parents of autistic children face costs of between €10,000 to €28,000 per year.

I acknowledge that there has been progress. The Minister, Deputy Helen McEntee, has committed to expanding the educational therapy support service, which is being piloted in 75 schools, into both special and mainstream schools nationwide. This kind of wraparound support is crucial, but it is being undermined by the battles parents still face, not just in service delivery from our child disability network teams, CDNT, but in simply accessing a payment that has existed for decades, a payment where the legal test has not changed, despite a significant rise in the number of children with additional needs.

We do not even collect data on families who give up. These are parents who cannot face the appeals process because they do not have the time, resources or energy to instruct a solicitor or go to court. I suspect that many of them would have been successful too, but we will never know.

Does the Taoiseach agree with me that we need a full review and reform of the DCA? I do not believe that one in three families is applying for something that they simply do not need. I believe that too many are losing out because the system is asking them to fight, rather than supporting them. Does the Taoiseach agree with me that these families deserve better?

**The Taoiseach:** I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. Prior to and during, the general election, I included a number of issues regarding disability in our party’s manifesto. I was very clear in putting in to the programme for Government the need to increase the DCA. The previous Government increased it by €20 per month. It is a very important allowance and it helps the families of those with disabilities with the cost of disability. The medical card, in particular, can be of great assistance. In the programme for Government, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Independents all agreed on the priority that should be attached to disability. I have also made it a red line issue that there should be a national school therapy service, beginning in special schools. It used to exist prior to the CDNT policy change in 2013. At that time, all special schools had their own therapists but the system changed. Very good progress has been made by the Minister, Deputy McEntee, and the Minister of State, Deputy Michael Moynihan, in respect of that area. We will have that in place in the next school year, or at least the first phase of it. That is important. So far, the work that was done by the National Council for Special Education, NCSE, to recruit therapists has worked well. The NCSE will provide an advisory service to education. It was interesting that the recruitment was quite positive because there had been doubts about it.

On the DCA, the numbers have grown, which is positive, as I see it. Some 10,500 applied in 2022 and this figure rose to 13,270 in 2024. This is an 8% year-on-year increase and, therefore, there will be an increase in the number of appeals. There is a point to be made whether early on in that process work could be done to identify cases that might not necessarily have to go to appeal. In other words, can there be a better early screening of applications to reduce the necessity for appeals? That can be looked at.

Twenty additional staff were assigned and attended training during 2024 up to January 2025. New appeals’ regulations came into effect from April of this year. They provide, among other things, for simpler processes and specified response times. We hope that this will help to reduce the processing times. A new IT system has been introduced in the social welfare appeals office. It provides online capabilities to provide a more efficient and streamlined service for people

availing of services. At the end of 2024, a new update provided functionality on *mywelfare.ie* for making appeals. That is improving the customer experience by offering an additional online channel which facilitates 24-7 access to view the current status of appeals.

The chief appeals officer wants consistency but accepts that there needs to be greater turn-around, and in fact there has been an improvement. At the moment, there are about 560 appeals on hand. A month ago, in mid-May there were 1,300 appeals on hand. That is a very substantial reduction. Some 460 of the current 560 relate to appeals for April, May or June of 2025, so that is a very short time.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** I thank the Taoiseach for his reply. Fundamentally though, there is a problem here in that I cannot think of any other allowance in the State where many people who apply for it are refused. It has been one in three applications over the past four years. I do not believe that those families are applying because they think that a little bit of extra money would be of assistance. They are applying because they absolutely need the money to support the needs of their child. They may be spending the money on occupational therapy, on private speech and language therapy or on private psychology therapy. They may be spending it on fitting out areas of their house to accommodate someone with physical disabilities. However, they are not getting the payment. Some families have the wherewithal to keep going in battling through an appeals' process, but it is a strange phenomenon that in a payment we have assigned from the State to give to parents of children with disabilities, that they have to go through an appeals process to get the allowance. Worst of all, I regret to say there is a system where parents have to go to a solicitor - I do not know whether solicitors do such work *pro bono* or get paid for it - to get a solicitor's letter to get this payment. They are battling on all fronts.

**The Taoiseach:** I accept that up to a point, but of course if we compare the most recent census to the previous one, we see that the number of people, including children, identifying with a disability is increasing exponentially. This can be seen from both censuses. The DCA was originally introduced for severe impacts on children, resulting from disabilities. I expect the numbers to continue to increase. There is an appeals system in every payment from the Department of Social Protection. What is important is efficiency and a timely approach. There is a focus on this within the Department. We can see the numbers coming down. They have come down from 1,300 to 560, and of the 560, some 460 relate to appeals for April, May and June of this year - essentially the last three months. The issue is whether we can make decisions more quickly for the applicants.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank the Taoiseach.

**The Taoiseach:** Perhaps we could also then fine-tune the application process to reduce the necessity for appeals.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Just before moving on-----

**The Taoiseach:** Could I just welcome-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** That might be what I am about to do.

**The Taoiseach:** -----a special guest, Aaron O'Shea, who is here with us.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** No, but the Taoiseach can work away there.

**The Taoiseach:** I welcome Aaron. I meant to do it at the beginning. He is aged 14 and from

County Clare. He is here with his parents Fidelma and Martin O'Shea as part of the Make-A-Wish Ireland. He met the Minister of State, Deputy Michael Moynihan, earlier. I wish him a very warm welcome.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Very good.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Only secondary to Aaron, with the liberty of the Deputies, I welcome Gaelscoil Chaladh an Treoigh from Limerick, including a grand-daughter of former Deputy, Éamon Ó Cuív, who is also present, who is in sixth class in the school. We welcome them all. We will move on to Questions on Policy or Legislation.

### **Ceisteanna ar Pholasaí nó ar Reachtaíocht – Questions on Policy or Legislation**

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** Most students rent their accommodation in the private sector. Every autumn they struggle to find accommodation. Those who are lucky enough to do so pay extortionate rents. Others, who are not so lucky, face very long commutes. The consequences on their lives for their studies are very serious. In worst case scenarios, students have had to defer their course or have dropped out of their studies because of this financial pressure. Rather than supporting students, what the Government proposes to do is to make life even more difficult for them - to force rents up even further. We heard mixed messages from the Government last week. It was going to help students and then it was not. Now, we know it will not. How does the Taoiseach defend the Government's policy to students and their families, who face into extortionate rents and all of that pressure?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank the Deputy and call on the Taoiseach to respond.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** His message to them is that their rent is going to go up.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank Deputy McDonald. I call on the Taoiseach.

**The Taoiseach:** No matter how often Deputy McDonald tries to misrepresent the reforms the Government announced last week in respect of the rental sector, it just will not cut it. There are very strong protections in the rent pressure zones, stronger than was the case previously, as a result of the reforms we are going to introduce. In particular, there is a cap of 2% for existing tenants and a cap tied to the CPI for future tenancies.

First, there is a significant expansion of support by the State on the way for universities in regard to bespoke student accommodation. We will continue to support students. We have a variety of mechanisms to support students, and we do.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** The Government forces up their rent. It does not care.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** This question is for both the Taoiseach and the Minister for justice. It relates to the new RTÉ "Doc on One" series, Stolen Sister.

**The Taoiseach:** I am sorry. Could the Deputy please repeat that?

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** There is a new documentary podcast on RTÉ, which tells a very serious story about 23-year-old Elizabeth Plunkett from Ringsend who was murdered in 1976. She was a victim of Ireland's first serial killers, John Shaw and Geoffrey Evans, who acted in concert and also killed a second woman, Mary Duffy. Evans died in prison. Shaw was convicted

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of Mary Duffy's murder but was never convicted of Elizabeth's murder. Elizabeth's sisters, Kathleen and Bernadette, whom I know well, who I know have been in touch with the justice Minister have been seeking answers for years. They are not legally regarded as victims within the Parole Board process. This only came to light in 2023. The justice Minister is aware of this. An inquest was delayed for 50 years. I raised this issue in the Dáil last year. The inquest was finally held in January. I am glad about that. However, their solicitor, who wrote a follow-up letter to the justice Minister, the Garda Commissioner and others on 28 May has not yet received a response.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank the Deputy.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** The family in particular seek a cold case review by the Garda and legislative reform-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank the Deputy and I call the Taoiseach.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** -----to address the anomaly in the Parole Board Act.

**The Taoiseach:** I thank the Deputy for raising this very serious and sensitive issue for the family concerned. I will ask the Minister for justice to deal directly with Deputy Bacik and with the family as well in respect of endeavouring to bring closure to this for all concerned and a resolution of the issues outstanding.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** I thank the Taoiseach.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** The Taoiseach has said that a key issue for him in the budget will be child poverty. I agree with the focus, but his words ring very hollow because we have heard all this before. The previous Government made reducing child poverty a priority. What has happened since? The number of children living in consistent poverty has nearly doubled to more than 100,000 in 2024. That is not a blip. While nearly 5,000 children are now homeless and living in emergency accommodation. That so many children are being failed and left behind at a time when the State coffers are overflowing is utterly shameful. The Government's policy is not just failing vulnerable children and their families in the present. What is it going to do in its term to set out a roadmap to end child poverty?

**The Taoiseach:** In the past two to three years, some fundamental decisions were taken, for example, to provide free access to school meals, which is something that was not there previously on the current scale. Free access to school books has had a significant positive impact on low-income families. The Deputy does not acknowledge that at all.

The recent SILC report is concerning. I prioritised the reduction of child poverty for the next budget. We did take measures in regard to child support payments and gave the biggest increase ever in the last budget. We are looking at a range of measures to reduce child poverty in the forthcoming budget. We will see then.

**Deputy Brian Stanley:** The slaughter in Gaza continues this week. We still see innocent men, women and children mowed down by tank fire and massive aerial bombardments while they queue for food, but also in camps where people are trying to shelter, who have been displaced for the one hundredth time in the past two years. There is a moral and political responsibility on us to do all we can to put pressure on the terrorist State of Israel. Last week, the Government refused to back a measure that would do just that, by refusing to back a proposal to



block the Central Bank from approving the prospectus for the sale of Israeli bonds. The Minister for Finance claimed his hands are tied and that the Government could not intervene with the State bank's approval of bonds. The Taoiseach went further. He stated: "that the Central Bank does not approve, issue, sell or oversee the sale of Israeli bonds." The Governor of the Central Bank, Gabriel Makhlouf, has said different. He has contradicted what the Taoiseach said. He states the Central Bank could decline to approve the sale of Israeli bonds if "national restrictive measures" were put in place.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank the Deputy. I call on the Taoiseach to respond.

**Deputy Brian Stanley:** The decision is with the Dáil.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank the Deputy. The time is up. I call on the Taoiseach to respond.

**Deputy Brian Stanley:** He said we could provide a legal basis to do so. He said that he agreed to look closely at it.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank the Deputy. His time is way over.

**Deputy Brian Stanley:** In his view, the Central Bank does approve the prospectus for the sale of bonds.

**The Taoiseach:** First of all-----

**Deputy Brian Stanley:** We must do the right thing.

**The Taoiseach:** Overall, the Irish people are very angry.

**Deputy Brian Stanley:** Anger is not enough.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** This is not a back and forth exchange.

**Deputy Brian Stanley:** We must take action.

**The Taoiseach:** We have taken action.

**Deputy Brian Stanley:** That is not-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** It is not a back and forth. Would the Taoiseach like to respond? No. That is fine. I call Deputy Paul Lawless.

**Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn:** The Taoiseach should respond.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Taoiseach has not been given the opportunity. Everybody should appreciate the format of these questions is one minute and one minute and they should please stick to it.

**Deputy Brian Stanley:** That is no help to the people of Gaza.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I call Deputy Paul Lawless.

**Deputy Paul Lawless:** I very much welcome the publication of the endometriosis clinical guidelines that were published recently. This is a very positive step forward for the thousands

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of women who suffer with this condition. One in ten women in Ireland is believed to suffer from it. Many of them suffer in silence. The guidelines specifically state that the clinical guidelines should be used in conjunction with the national framework. However, the national framework has yet to be published. It was due to be published last year. From speaking with the representatives, my understanding is that the discussions have yet to commence between the GP organisation and the HSE. We are coming into the summer recess. I seek a commitment from the Taoiseach to progress with the discussions so we can get to a stage where the national framework can be published. From speaking to many GPs across my constituency, there is a significant level of backlog due to many retirements and additional work that has been heaped on them.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank the Deputy. I call on the Taoiseach to respond.

**Deputy Paul Lawless:** What incentives can be provided to GPs to engage with this process?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Deputy must stay within his time. The Taoiseach should please respond.

**The Taoiseach:** Significant work has been undertaken in respect of endometriosis. It has been recognised as part of the work of the women's health task force. It was included in the women's health action plan 2024-2025. The previous Minister, Stephen Donnelly, did exceptional work on this issue. Regional hubs have been established in the Rotunda and Coombe hospitals, the National Maternity Hospital, University Hospital Limerick, and University Hospital Galway.

*I o'clock*

Severe cases can be referred to two supra-regional specialist centres in Dublin and Cork and Tallaght University Hospital in Dublin. They provide multidisciplinary care. The Deputy is talking more about the primary care side in terms of clinical guidelines in conjunction with the national framework.

**Deputy Paul Lawless:** The framework.

**The Taoiseach:** I will discuss this with the Minister for Health. The Deputy has mentioned the GPs, negotiations and discussions. There can be a number of issues on that agenda but there should be a mechanism by which the clinical guidelines can be adopted, but I will leave that to the Minister to discuss with the various interested bodies and come back to the Deputy on it.

**Deputy Aisling Dempsey:** Meath West commuters eagerly anticipated the new commuter fare zones being announced but they were disappointed in April to find out those only related to rail fares. We were disappointed again in recent weeks when the bus fares were announced. My own town of Trim only saw a minimal decrease in the fare but towns like Navan and Athboy saw an increase. The rationale given is that these fares now cover bus and rail. Unfortunately, as the Taoiseach well knows, we have no access to rail lines in towns like Navan and Athboy. I ask that an exception be made in areas that have no rail line and for these fares to be reduced. Meath has a huge amount of commuters leaving it every morning. We have the longest commutes in the country, mostly in cars, so we need that incentive for commuters.

**The Taoiseach:** I thank Deputy Dempsey very much for raising what is a very important point. If we look at our climate change objectives, I can see the logic of what she is advocat-

ing for. It might be difficult in terms of implementation. Navan does not yet have the rail line, although the Government is committed to it and work is under way. I will talk to the Minister involved and raise the point Deputy Dempsey has raised. I understand the motivation because Meath is a very significant county where a lot of people are commuting on a daily basis.

**Deputy Joe Neville:** The issue I raise today is facing a lot of towns across the country, especially in my constituency and town. In the likes of Leixlip and neighbouring towns like Kilcock, we see the centre of our towns facing dereliction and us having to do them up. We have vacant homes and towns that need regeneration. I want to draw a couple of key points that were brought up in the programme for Government. We need to establish a new towns and cities infrastructure investment fund to replace the urban regeneration and development fund, URDF, because it seems we are not able to get anyone new onto the URDF scheme. If it is to be replaced, when will it be replaced? We must also have a fund available for towns to draw down. We have a lot of shovel-ready projects in our towns. When are we going to get the funds to do them and when will we be in a position to revitalise our town centres? That would involve above-the-shop living refurbishment schemes as well.

**The Taoiseach:** I thank the Deputy for raising the issue. There are a range of grants out there now for vacant houses and for dereliction. They are quite substantial, and there are a lot of applicants. I know they may be more on the individual level. There is the town centre renewal programme. I think there is a town centre renewal officer in Kilcock. I know that the Minister will, obviously in the context of the forthcoming Estimates and budgetary considerations, look to see what more we can do, but there are existing schemes that towns and county councils do not seem to have been successful in transforming into real projects. The town renewal scheme and so on are not getting us the return. I will come back to the Deputy on it.

**Deputy Claire Kerrane:** The programme for Government commits, for the very first time, to providing capital investment to build or purchase State-owned childcare facilities to create additional capacities in areas where unmet need exists. I attended the launch of a childcare needs analysis in Boyle, County Roscommon, last Friday. Their analysis concludes that, in the Boyle catchment area, there are 20 childcare places per 1,043 children. A figure of 77% of children aged zero to four years have no access to a childcare place. For me, this is the definition of “unmet need”. I understand some scoping work has been done by the Department to identify need and capacity issues. I ask that the commitment in the programme for Government to provide such investment be made available now where need is shown and proven already rather than taking the time to do the scoping. Where need is already identified, could that investment be released?

**The Taoiseach:** The Government is essentially five months - close to six months - in office. This will require capital allocation and provision. We are working off the budget of last year in terms of the estimates that were provided to every Department, so there are limits to what the Government can do in 2025 if one takes on board that substantial additional capital moneys were allocated to housing - up to €700 million - and substantial additional moneys were allocated to education in respect of new school projects. I will talk to the Minister for children in respect of the specific area Deputy Kerrane has identified.

**Deputy Ryan O'Meara:** Both Cloughjordan and Silvermines in my constituency need playground facilities for young children. Both of these local villages have dedicated, skilled and ambitious voluntary committees that have been working on this for a number of years. Both have secured lands, namely, the Thomas MacDonagh Memorial Garden in Cloughjordan

and the parish field in Silvermines. Both have considerable sums of money fundraised, both have acquired planning permission and both have detailed designs published. The Silvermines committee has already shown the public its plans. Cloughjordan is doing that this weekend from 12 p.m. to 3 p.m. in St. Kieran's Hall. Both communities have very excited children who want their own local playground, but both have major problems accessing funding. The social inclusion stream of LEADER for north Tipperary has been maxed out and no other funding options are coming close to the funding required. Both playground groups have applied for funding through CLÁR and others, but have not been successful to date through no fault of their own. Considering the next Common Agricultural Policy is not due until 2028, I am asking for funding from the Exchequer to go into those empty streams to continue that funding in rural Ireland and get us our playgrounds in Cloughjordan and Silvermines.

**Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Dara Calleary):** I thank Deputy O'Meara for raising this issue. Relating to LEADER in Tipperary, the Tipperary local action group, LAG, has received €10.8 million for the 2021 to 2027 period, which is an increase of 7% on the previous budget. As the Deputy knows, the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht has no role in deciding on specific projects. That is done by the Tipperary LAG, which has the capacity to seek flexibility within the programme.

Relating to the specific projects in Cloughjordan and Silvermines, they expressed an interest in funding to Tipperary County Council. Potentially, there will be funding there. Tipperary County Council has not forwarded that on to our Department for consideration. I am happy to engage with the Deputy on it, but either the LAG needs to make a decision or Tipperary County Council needs to get it to our Department.

**Deputy Michael Murphy:** The decision by Tipperary County Council, announced yesterday, to not contest the judicial review of the Dundrum House section 5 declaration substantiates my genuine concerns around the IPAS contract for this site that was given to a proxy company that was only incorporated in January. The ownership of this site is still being contested in the High Court. I fully accept and recognise the Government's obligations to international protection applicants, but they must be met in a way that is legal, transparent and sustainable. The Department's current position is untenable. It has executed a flawed contract on a legally uncertain site through a proxy company and has ignored valid environmental and planning concerns. I urge the Taoiseach to immediately suspend the contract pending the outcome of the High Court proceedings, launch an independent audit of the due diligence and procurement process, and halt further expansion of the site until full planning and environmental compliance is verified.

**Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan):** I thank Deputy Murphy. As he will be aware, Tipperary County Council declared the site an exempted development last January. As a result and following on from that, a contract was entered into with the Department. I believe it was last Monday that the local authority effectively gave into the judicial review applications and, as a result, the section 5 declaration will be quashed. My understanding is it will be quashed because the screening carried out was deficient. Obviously, the Department would need to consider the consequences of that court decision and, more imminently, Tipperary County Council must figure out what happens now, because it is no longer an exempted development. I will assess it within the Department and we will be discussing it with Tipperary County Council. I will revert to the Deputy on it.

**Deputy Conor D. McGuinness:** The housing crisis is not just an urban crisis. It is also

tearing out the very heart of rural Ireland. Young people are being priced out or locked out. They are being pushed into the larger towns or cities or, more often than not, they are being pushed abroad. GAA clubs and county boards are raising the alarm on this. Some are now appointing demographic officers to deal with rural youth depopulation. This week in my role as Sinn Féin spokesperson on rural affairs, I will be meeting with GAA president, Jarlath Burns, to discuss the very real impact on clubs, parishes and communities across the State. The national planning framework that the Government pushed through the House actively promotes urban concentration at the expense of rural Ireland, deepening pressure on cities and depopulating the rest. The Our Rural Future strategy is silent on housing. It barely mentions it; there is only superficial mention. There is no ambition. There are no plans and no delivery. Virtually no affordable housing has been delivered in rural areas. In many towns and villages, no social home has been built in 30 years.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Deputy. I call the Taoiseach to respond.

**Deputy Conor D. McGuinness:** Local authority CEOs are telling the Government that the affordable serviced sites scheme is not working.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Time is up, Deputy.

**Deputy Conor D. McGuinness:** As Head of Government, when will the Taoiseach acknowledge his housing policy is failing rural communities?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Taoiseach to respond.

**The Taoiseach:** First, more generally, the Minister for rural affairs will be meeting the Gaelic Athletic Association in respect of the new rural future design programme. The GAA is having a huge impact the length and breadth of the country on many fronts.

On the housing front, it is not fair to say that there is no focus on housing in rural Ireland. There is. The derelict grants and the vacant grants have been particularly used in rural Ireland to great effect. I have seen places myself. It was because I was walking through rural Ireland that I said to Darragh O'Brien in the last Government that we needed to develop such a derelict grant scheme, and it is having an impact. One can see it now in towns where houses have been refurbished and families have gone in to live in them.

On the bigger issue, depending on different areas, I do not think there are any applications from rural Waterford in terms of affordable housing schemes, but the more general help to buy scheme-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Time is up, Taoiseach.

**The Taoiseach:** All of those apply to rural Ireland. The first homes scheme applies to rural Ireland.

**Deputy Conor D. McGuinness:** The issue is that local authority managers are saying it is not suitable or appropriate.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy, it is not a back and forth.

**Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty:** We saw recently the implementation of the new legislation on e-scooters. It needs to be in, but I want to lay down a marker for the end of the year.



At the moment, if a scooter weighs a maximum of 25 kg, travels at speeds of less than 20 km/h and has a certain wheel diameter, it is considered a personal transporter and not a vehicle that requires licensing. Anecdotally, however, I have seen situations where these 20 km/h scooters are going at speed on footpaths with impunity, as per our discussion on anti-social behaviour last week. In that context, could we look at, by the end of the year, designating them as vehicles that need licences or insurance or having some form of registration plate at the back of them so they can be identified if someone brushes past someone?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Deputy.

**Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty:** The other issue would be the reviewing of insurance if someone crashes into someone else.

**The Taoiseach:** I thank the Deputy for raising the issue. He is raising very legitimate concerns and I will ask the Minister for Transport to review this. I will also ask him to consult the Minister for justice in respect of any road traffic regulations and laws. I saw a situation yesterday evening. I could not believe my eyes. There were two guys on a scooter and a guy on a bike was hanging on to them to get propulsion on a main road, Baggot Street. I was saying to myself, “What is this about?” One could see the obvious safety concerns or safety implications and the dangers for someone driving behind them and so on.

We are trying to be reasonable in terms of regulation and regulatory frameworks but there are limits. The Deputy is correct. If there is not a regulatory framework, these scooters will be abused and danger will result. There have been fatalities, one very recently, the Minister for justice has informed me, of a young person. We need to be very careful about all of this.

**Deputy Conor Sheehan:** I raise the issue of policing, in particular in Limerick city. Recently, we have unfortunately had an escalation of violence in the Ballinacurra Weston area and a deterioration of the situation in King’s Island following the very successful operations Capóg and Feabhsaigh. The continued refusal of a sanction for overtime, especially in King’s Island, means the situation is getting worse. Last week, unfortunately, we had a situation in the city centre where a prominent employer was assaulted, causing him to take refuge in a hotel. He had to be escorted home. Despite concerns being repeatedly raised by everyone from businesses to community leaders, the lack of a visible policing presence has become a defining feature of the city centre. I am asking for additional funding for policing in Limerick, specifically for King’s Island and the city centre,-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Deputy

**Deputy Conor Sheehan:** -----and the approval of an application for CCTV that has been sent to the Department of justice.

**Deputy Jim O’Callaghan:** I thank the Deputy for his question. Four weeks ago, I was in Limerick city and met the chamber and members of An Garda Síochána. It is true to say that requests were made for further Garda visibility on the ground. I brought that message back to the Garda Commissioner. There was also a request for a community van, which would be of assistance. I am trying to see, through the Department, whether that can be done. I will take on board what the Deputy said, discuss it further with the Garda Commissioner and try to ensure that the visible policing the Deputy wants is put in place.

**Deputy Colm Burke:** The average time from when a medicine is approved by the Europe-

an Medicines Agency to it being available in Ireland is 617 days. Between 2004 and 2025, 402 new medicines were approved by the European Medicines Agency, of which 71% had applications made in Ireland. In other words, for 117 medicines approved by the EMA, no licence or approval has been applied for here. It is the whole delay in the process. I fully accept additional staff are being taken on, but the period the process takes is far too long, especially for new cancer drugs, which are available at European level but not in Ireland. We need to fast-track them. What action will be taken, especially to make cancer drugs available in an early timeframe?

**The Taoiseach:** First of all, I think about €3 billion is now being spent on medicines. I can clarify that. There is an ongoing issue, and there will be, because of the rapidity of discovery and new drugs coming onto the market. Ireland has a very significant pharmaceutical presence. I have engaged with most of the CEOs of the pharmaceutical companies in respect of tariffs, trade and so on and domestically, the European Public Health Alliance, EPHA, has made representations in respect of this, as have patients, particularly as regards rare diseases and orphan drugs. The Deputy, Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan and others have been looking at this for quite a while. The process we have through the pharmaceutical centre, headed by Professor Michael Barry, is diligent and so on. We need to look at it in terms of rare drugs, rare diseases and orphan drugs in particular, and new discoveries as well.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Taoiseach.

**The Taoiseach:** We should work to improve our timelines.

**Deputy Brendan Smith:** Primary school principals across Cavan and Monaghan have raised with me consistently the ongoing challenges they face in meeting day-to-day expenditure requirements. There have been improvements in recent years in capitation payments and I hope that budget 2026 will provide for a further increase. School principals and boards of management outline clearly the need for further financial assistance. Energy costs, including for electricity and oil, and insurance account for a substantial proportion of the overall capitation grant. One principal said to me that insurance was a dreadful burden on the school’s resources. Some schools do not receive a meaningful ancillary grant payment. There are many other calls on the capitation grant, including the purchase of essential teaching resources and ongoing maintenance costs. I am aware of small schools that have substantial professional fees to pay for the preparation of applications for emergency minor works projects, all coming from the capitation grant, without certainty of approval of such applications. Classrooms need to be properly resourced and there cannot be more and more demands on school staff, parents, boards of management, parents associations-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Deputy. The Taoiseach to respond.

**Deputy Brendan Smith:** -----and local businesses to meet day-to-day expenditure and annual costs.

**The Taoiseach:** I thank Deputy Smith for raising this issue. I know this is an issue close to his heart. The Department is committed to offering all available and appropriate supports to all schools. Last year, the then Department of Education provided *per capita* grants to all recognised primary and post-primary schools. There are two grants: the capitation grant and the ancillary grant. Schools have flexibility to manage these grants as a combined fund. The current capitation rate for primary schools is €200 per pupil and the ancillary grant is €173. As part of last year’s budget for 2025, the Department secured more than €30 million for a permanent

increase in capitation funding. This represents a 12% increase on current standard enhanced rates and follows a 9% increase on budget 2024. From September this year, the new capitation rates will be €224 per pupil in primary schools and €386 per pupil in post-primary schools.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Taoiseach.

**The Taoiseach:** This is an important point. In addition, the capitation grant payment in June 2025, which will be a balancing payment for the period of January to December, will include the new increased rates effective from September 2025.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** I have been contacted by Saint John of God Community Services regarding its approved housing body. It states that it has been privately renting a house in Meath since 2022. Four residents lived in the house, supported by staff. The owner of the property is selling the house and the Saint John of God Housing Association was in the process of purchasing the house and intended to use CAS funding to do so. This would give permanent tenure to the four residents. However, due to changes, it cannot use CAS funding. There are another two houses in the Louth County Council area where the same has happened. What has happened is that CAS funding is now within the social housing acquisition fund for county councils and they say they have insufficient money. The Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation has also spoken about the fact it wants new builds rather than buying previously owned properties unless it relates to something specific to vacant or derelict houses. There is a huge issue in regard to disability housing. I do not expect an answer today but it needs to be looked at.

**The Taoiseach:** The Deputy can send that note to the Minister for housing and copy it to me, and I will talk to the Minister for housing in respect of it. The Deputy should try to take it up directly with him. I will alert him to the fact the Deputy has raised it.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** The Government yesterday announced the purchase of Citywest, the main hotel and conference centre, at a cost of €148 million. What are the projected running costs? Will the State still be renting the CityArk complex, which has 400-plus rooms, from Tet-rarch? The cost per person per night is €84. How much is that per year? Doubling the capacity of the site would mean the population of the IPAS centre was equal to the population of Saggart, which the Independent Ireland councillor in that area, Linda de Courcy, tells me has the local residents stunned, as there was no consultation. Why has the Minister made no reference to the Lemongrass restaurant located on the site? The owners have tried to contact the Minister several times but he has not engaged with them. Where are the Government plans to expand the complex, as per the plan laid out in the *Business Post*? On all of these questions, I have pleaded for a debate on this issue for the last three or four weeks but it has not been afforded to me. It has left us with no choice. However, the purchase still went on without consultation in here or out there.

**Deputy Jim O'Callaghan:** Deputy Collins is correct in stating that yesterday I got approval from the Cabinet for the State to purchase Citywest for €148 million. The reason the Government approved that was because it was going to give effect to a saving of money from the point of view of the State. After four years, we will be making our money back in respect of it. We are spending far too much money renting private properties. As the Deputy knows, in the programme for Government, we have committed to buying or constructing State-owned accommodation where people will be able to live as opposed to us having to go out around communities, trying to rent places.

There will be extensive engagement with the local community. I will speak to the local TDs. Obviously, it is an issue where there will have to be a lot of community engagement in respect of it. I think people are prepared to do that and the local community will be satisfied with the response they get from me and the Government.

### **Finance (Local Property Tax and Other Provisions) (Amendment) Bill 2025: Financial Resolution**

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I move:

“That—

(a) section 13 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (No. 52 of 2012), which provides for the valuation date in respect of local property tax, section 17 of that Act, which provides for the amount of local property tax to be charged, and section 20 of that Act, which provides for the power of elected members of local authorities to vary basic rates of local property tax, and

(b) the provisions contained in Chapter 5 of Part 33 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997) which deal with outbound payments defensive measures,

be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.”

Question put and agreed to.

*Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 1.24 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 2.24 p.m.*

*Sitting suspended at 1.24 p.m. and resumed at 2.24 p.m.*

### **Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill 2025: Second Stage**

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Christopher O’Sullivan):** I move: “That the Bill be now read a Second Time.”

I am grateful to all Deputies and to everybody behind the scenes for facilitating the debate today on this urgent legislation in Dáil Éireann. I will be sharing Government time with Minister of State, Deputy Cummins.

The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill 2025 will amend the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004 to 2024 to extend and expand the operation of rent pressures zones, RPZs, to cover the entire country until 28 February 2026. This Bill provides an interim measure to quickly protect all tenants from high rent increases in anticipation of the broader changes announced last week and planned to take effect in March. For all new tenancies created on or after 1 March 2026, stronger tenancy protections will apply for tenants and a national rent control system will apply.

As Members know, on 10 June 2025, the Government approved policy measures to provide for the enhancement of rent controls and tenancy protections from 1 March 2026. Last week,

the Government also approved, as an interim measure, the provision of a two-month extension of RPZs and the deeming of all areas of the country as an RPZ from the day after the passing of this Bill until 28 February 2026. Yesterday, the Government approved the publication of this Bill to implement this measure. We are moving fast because renters need protection.

From the day after the passing of this Bill, with the co-operation of both Houses of the Oireachtas and enactment by President Higgins, the current RPZ rent increase restriction will apply throughout the country. No rent increase can exceed 2% per annum *pro rata* or, if lower, the rate of inflation as measured by the harmonised index of consumer prices, HICP, unless certain exemptions apply. This is an immediate and concrete protection against high rent inflation.

Rent increases outside of RPZs are now at a level where the application of the rent increase restriction can be justified to apply nationally. We want to provide certainty, clarity and stability for the rental sector. The new policy measures announced last week to apply from next March aim to boost investment in the supply of homes. A new national rental control will come into effect on 1 March 2026, immediately following the expiration of the RPZs. Legislation will be introduced later this year to give effect to the new measures announced for March. The impending changes to rent controls have been informed by the findings of the Housing Agency review of RPZs, and potential policy options, and its preferred recommendation to modify the operation of the existing RPZ rent controls.

We aim to operate a national rent control to ensure that any rent increases across the country will be restricted in line with inflation, with limited exceptions. To protect tenants in times of high inflation, we will retain the cap of permissible rent inflation at 2% per annum *pro rata*, with limited exceptions. We will allow rents for new tenancies created such as first-time tenancy between parties, on or after 1 March 2026 to be set at market value, but in return for far greater security of tenancies for tenants, through six-year tenancies of minimum duration with smaller landlords, that is, landlords with three or fewer tenancies. No-fault evictions will be restricted to smaller landlords and outlawed for larger landlords. The move to a national rent control recognises the reality that tenants throughout the entire country face difficulty in paying their rent. We will continue in March to restrict the rent increases in line with inflation, but linked to CPI and not HICP, and retain that 2% cap.

The Government wants to be clear that at this time, we recognise rents are very high. We also want to be clear that we simply need new investment in rental accommodation, particularly apartments for rent, and that is why we are allowing the rents for new apartments to be linked to CPI, even when inflation exceeds 2%. From 1 March 2026, landlords will be allowed to reset rent for new tenancies, that is, first-time tenancies created between parties, and between future tenancies. However, resetting of rents will not be allowed following a no-fault eviction. Rent resetting will only be allowed where a tenant leaves a tenancy of their own volition or has breached their tenant obligations or the dwelling is no longer suitable to the accommodation needs of the tenant household. Resetting of rents will not be allowed during any tenancy created on or before 28 February 2026, due to the uncertainty this would cause with existing tenancies.

To counter the risk of economic evictions, the Government put the sector on notice last week, on 10 June, that from 1 March 2026, stronger tenant protections will apply for new tenancies, that is, first time tenancies between parties. A larger landlord with four or more tenancies cannot end a tenancy created on or after 1 March 2026 via a no-fault eviction. The tenancy will be for an unlimited duration after its first six months without a valid notice of termination hav-



ing been served. A smaller landlord with three or fewer tenancies will be able to end a tenancy created on or after 1 March 2026 via a no-fault eviction, only at the end of each six-year period that follows or, in very limited circumstances, at any time. It is worth noting that no-fault evictions can occur in line with the strictly limited grounds for termination under the Residential Tenancies Acts. The lawful use of these grounds will continue to apply for smaller landlords only from 1 March 2026. Strict termination procedures apply and the Residential Tenancies Board is available to resolve any dispute that might arise. The provision for a six-year tenancy of minimum duration from next March is a real leap forward for tenant protections in return for allowing landlords to reset rents. These changes will have a significant impact for our rental sector, making much-needed investment more attractive while strengthening the protections and providing greater certainty for renters. I accept there is a very fine balance to be struck here in our efforts. We aim to attract investment, but we know that tenants deserve and need fair treatment. We aim for tenancy protections that best suit tenants and landlords.

This is just one strand of a suite of measures, including planning extensions, planning exemptions and a tranche of further key decisions this week and in the coming weeks from the Government and the Minister, Deputy James Browne. This Bill, and the forthcoming legislation to operate from March 2026, represent key progress. We aim to strike a balance and bring clarity and certainty. Without all of these measures, we cannot ramp up the supply needed. The Government is determined and ambitious to get this right. RPZs are due to expire at the end of this year. If we do nothing, all rents go back to market. The Government is not allowing that to happen. For years, the operation of RPZs has had to be extended, time and again. This has created a sense of uncertainty. We are now moving to a permanent national rent control to provide certainty for tenants, landlords and investors across the country.

As we look to the future of our rental sector, it is clear that the *status quo* is not optimal, either for renters or for those providing much-needed homes. This Bill, and the further legislation to follow, represent a decisive step forward in delivering real, practical and long-term protections. Nowhere is this more relevant than in my constituency of Cork South-West. At the moment only one third of the constituency is covered by the protections that renters can get from rent pressure zones. In the other two thirds, including my home town of Clonakilty, Skibbereen and Bantry, significant towns within the constituency, renters are not covered by these protections. They are exposed to large hikes in rent after certain periods. That is not sustainable and cannot continue. This legislation brings in a greater level of protection and certainty for these renters. I know that for renters across my constituency and the country who will now be covered by these RPZs, this will come as a great sigh of relief. The future legislation to follow will also bring further protections and strengthen protections for tenants, along with legislation that will encourage investment in apartments and the provision of housing. This is very welcome. I implore Deputies across the House to get behind this legislation. It is needed for the protection of renters, for future protection and, eventually, to incentivise investment in delivery of apartments and houses in this country. That is the ultimate solution to reducing rents.

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy John Cummins):** I am pleased to speak today on this very important Bill. The two-month extension to the operation of all existing RPZs, and the deeming of all remaining areas of the country to become RPZs from the day after the passing of this Bill until 28 February 2026, are critical to quickly protect all tenants from high rent increases in anticipation of the broader changes announced last week and planned to take effect next March.

As the Minister of State, Deputy O'Sullivan, outlined, the new policy measures from March

aim to boost investment in the supply of homes while protecting renters. The Government is fully committed to working with all stakeholders to deliver social, affordable and cost-rental homes at scale and to continue accelerating housing supply across all tenures including rental. This is demonstrated by the record level of investment being provided for the delivery of housing in 2025, with overall capital funding now available of almost €6.8 billion. This provision includes the additional capital funding for 2025, which was recently agreed by the Government, namely, €450 million to support the delivery of 3,000 additional social, affordable and cost-rental homes in the period 2025 to 2027 and €265 million to allow for a significant programme of acquisitions in 2025 for priority categories of need. The capital provision for 2025 is supplemented by a further €1.65 billion in current funding to address housing need. Increasing the supply of new homes is key to addressing many of the challenges in the housing market. The Government is committed to delivering more homes, more quickly, for more people to build on the increases we see in the quarter 1 delivery figures so far this year. The new programme for Government aims to ramp up supply further and deliver 300,000 new homes between now and the end of 2030.

The Government continues to review and modernise the planning system and has prioritised the implementation of the Planning and Development Act 2024 to support increased supply across all tenures of housing. This is a key priority of mine as Minister of State with responsibility for planning. This Act represents the most comprehensive review of planning since 2000 and will reform and streamline the planning process, reducing delays in housing and strategic infrastructure projects. The urban development zone, or UDZ, process under Part 22 of the Planning and Development Act 2024 aims to provide for an updated and more flexible approach to the planning and delivery of areas with significant potential for large-scale development and the associated necessary infrastructure. This element has been commenced by the Minister, Deputy Browne, and will be an important part of the variation process which local authorities will undertake shortly.

Given that there are a significant number of planning permissions for housing that are due to expire shortly, the Government is now bringing forward the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2025 to deal with expiring permissions and to encourage activation of housing. This will allow holders of permission for housing development with less than two years left on the permission and have not yet commenced to apply for an extension of up to three years. The Bill will also allow for the provisions of section 180 of the Planning and Development Act 2024 to retrospectively apply to permissions that have already been through the judicial review process or are currently in judicial review and are subsequently permitted. In other words, this will allow for the duration of the judicial review period to not be counted as part of the effective life of the planning permission, avoiding a situation whereby in the past, planning permissions have expired due to delays caused by the judicial review process. This legislation, which we expect to have passed by the summer recess, could protect permissions for upwards of 20,000 housing units from expiry. The Government wants to see shovels in the ground and homes built, and I am sure the Opposition will agree with that. Developers will need to step up and benefit from the extensions that we are bringing forward in this respect.

Returning to the Bill, the upcoming changes to rent controls and tenancy protection feed into a broader suite of measures to bring on housing supply. In return and to balance that, there have to be protections for tenants in that respect. We expect to see progress on this through both Houses of the Oireachtas this week. I certainly hope the officials' briefing to the joint Oireachtas committee, which I understand took place yesterday, was helpful. Given the potential risk

of high rent increases for tenants outside of RPZs who have not had their rent reviewed in the last 24 months, the intention is to seek the early signing of this Bill into law by the President. It is important for all tenants to be protected as soon as possible under the current rent increase restrictions applying in RPZ areas. This Bill provides the necessary protections for all tenants from the day after the passing of this legislation until 28 February 2026. Currently, 17% of tenancies are located outside RPZ areas.

Introducing stronger protections for tenants will not work without a concerted effort in enforcement. The Programme for Government: Securing Ireland's Future, published on 23 January 2025, commits to continuing Government support for renters and landlords. This includes measures to protect renters and landlords from abusive practices by enhancing the enforcement powers of the Residential Tenancies Board. As highlighted in the RTB director's quarterly update for the first quarter of 2025, the RTB's ongoing compliance and enforcement campaign is focusing significant resources on several in-depth investigations into serious, deliberate and repeated breaches of rental law. The ongoing RPZ compliance campaign, launched by the RTB last October following the publication of the inaugural property level analysis, has targeted 16,052 tenancies where rent increased by more than 2%. As a result, €70,911 in overpaid rent has been returned to tenants following 114 compliance interventions. This is positive news for tenants and sends out a clear message that those who deliberately breach RPZ legislation will be challenged. Last month, 36 sanctions were published, resulting in €102,490 in monetary sanctions being issued for serious breaches of rental law, and 105 formal RTB investigations are under way.

I will briefly outline the provisions of this Bill, which contains five sections. Sections 1 and 5 contain standard provisions. Section 1 defines the "Principal Act" to mean the Residential Tenancies Act 2004. Section 5 provides for the Short Title, commencement, collective citation and construction of the Bill.

Section 2 amends section 20, frequency with which rent review may occur, of the Principal Act to provide for the termination of biannual rent reviews outside RPZs, and the entire country will become an RPZ from the day after the passing of the Bill.

Section 3 amends section 24, areas deemed to be rent pressure zones, of the Principal Act. Section 3(a) provides for a two-month extension until 28 February 2026 to the operation of the RPZs in the administrative areas of Cork City Council, Dublin City Council, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, Fingal County Council and South Dublin County Council, which were deemed to be RPZs under section 24B(1) of the Principal Act. Section 3(b) provides for a two-month extension until 28 February 2026 to the operation of the RPZ in the local electoral area of Drogheda Rural, which was deemed to be an RPZ under section 24B(2) of the Principal Act. Section 3(c) provides, through a new section 24B(3), for the deeming of any area not already an RPZ to become an RPZ from the day after the passing of this Bill until 28 February 2026.

Section 4 amends section 8(2) of the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 to provide for a two-month extension until 28 February 2026 to the operation of existing RPZs designated under section 24A(5) of the Principal Act.

The Bill strikes a balance and takes into account the legal advices of the Attorney General. It will safeguard tenants from high rent inflation during the period to next March. This Bill is an interim measure before we bring forward wider changes announced by the Government last

week. I thank all the Deputies for participating in this legislative process in advance of what I referred to occurring. I am sure plenty of points will be made, but I assure the House that all efforts of the Government are about striking the balance between protecting renters and encouraging new investment in the private market. This is an interim measure to allow us to bring all the areas not currently covered by RPZs within the legislation. It is a positive measure that we hope the Opposition will support.

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** What an utter shambles. In my entire time in Dáil Éireann, I have never witnessed a more haphazard, ramshackle, back-of-the-envelope process for putting in place widespread reforms that are going to impact tens of thousands of people. While I understand Ministers and Ministers of State have to come here and defend this farce, privately they must be absolutely reeling. The credibility of the Government's housing policy has once again been exposed as an absolute sham. Only five months into the job, the Minister's own credibility has been badly damaged. This is not just my view. Listen to what the industry, media and commentators are saying. In fact, some of the Minister's own backbenchers were being quoted in the newspapers last weekend. I have to say this is an incredibly sorry tale.

With the greatest of respect to the Minister of State, Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan, speaking in defence of the hard-pressed renters in County Cork, the failure of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael since 2020 to do anything to protect the renters he represents has seen their rents increase by a staggering 60%. We are now looking at new rents in the Minister of State's county being €7,270 more expensive per year now than when the parties formed a coalition. I do not think renters in County Cork, especially outside the RPZs, will be thanking them for their inaction over all these years. As each day has unfolded since the leaks began the weekend before last, we have seen confusion, consternation, contradiction and widespread fear and anxiety among the tens of thousands of renters across this State.

When the Minister launched the policy last Tuesday, it was clear from the words coming out of his mouth and in print in his press release that the ability of landlords to reset rents to the full market level would apply to all tenancies from March 2026. When he was exposed on the floor of the Dáil the Taoiseach was left reeling from the Minister's incompetence and only then did he change the plan. Likewise, there was no mention of students when he launched these proposals on 10 June. There was no mention from his officials during the technical briefing given to the media. Again, it was only when it was highlighted that students would be some of the first and worst hit that the Minister scrambled around to fix the issue. He cannot even agree with his own party colleague, the Minister, Deputy James Lawless, on what level of additional protections may or may not be given to students. This shows that the Minister does not understand the legislation. He signed up to a package without any consideration of its impact on the vast majority of renters, leaving his backbenchers and having to defend what is utterly indefensible.

Let us look at the package as a whole because today's Bill, which I will come to shortly, is only part of a wider package. Let us call it by its name. It is the Fianna Fáil rent hike Bill. This is Micheál Martin, who initiated this process and pulls the strings of his Minister, jacking up the rents for tens of thousands of hard-pressed renters from March 2026 onwards. What is being done is not constructing a careful balance between landlords and tenants or introducing a comprehensive, State-wide rent protection regime. Rather, the rent pressure zone legislation introduced in 2016 is being dismantled over time. These were protections that were incredibly weak in the first place. Nobody will believe any attempt to present this as anything else. Universally, almost all the coverage, from journalists, commentators and industry, has accepted the

simple, central fact of this proposal, which is that it is going to result in rent increases, in many cases at a more accelerated rate than would have otherwise happened. It appears that Fianna Fáil's solution to rising rents is to keep those rents rising. Worse than that, in respect of new rental stock, from the start of next year, the Government is going to peg annual rent reviews to inflation, which will drag overall new rents up even faster. Market rent resets for new tenants in first-time tenancies will accelerate at an even greater rate. This is being done on the promise of increased institutional investment in high-end, high-density, private rental sector investment. That investment will not be delivered in Cork, and certainly not in west Cork. It will not be delivered in the constituencies of the Minister or the Minister of State.

**Deputy John Cummins:** Why not?

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** In the best-case scenario, all this will do is create a modest increase in the levels of institutional investment in high-end, high-cost, private rental cost developments in the Google quarter, Sandyford and other high-income areas. Everyone else will be left behind. The industry reaction to this has ranged from the lukewarm to the hostile because the Government could not even get that bit right. The consequence is that renters everywhere will pay a cost. They will not get the supply dividend the Minister is alleging.

**Deputy James Browne:** How do you know?

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** I have heard the Minister and the Taoiseach say over and over again that they are going to protect all existing renters. Some 80% of current renters are in tenancies of six years or less. Long-term renters are in the minority. That is becoming increasingly evident through the constant levels of eviction notices. The idea that somehow existing renters are protected is simply not true.

While there is no doubt the security of tenure changes will benefit a small numbers of renters, the Government is creating an even more complex set of arrangements that are more difficult to understand and more readily available for rogue landlords to exploit or semi-professional, accidental landlords to misunderstand and make mistakes. That will lead to more disputes at the Residential Tenancies Board, which cannot even handle the current level of cases it has. As a consequence, more problems will arise. To make matters worse, what landlord in possession of a vacant property between now and next March is going to re-let it? This will suck out those properties, which will constrain supply even further and make matters worse in the short term.

With regard to the legislation, we have always argued that rent regulation should apply to all renters of all types in all counties. Extending the RPZs should have been done at the start. The Minister came into the Chamber and said that he is introducing this to protect renters when it was never even his intention to do so. It was always clear-----

**Deputy James Browne:** That is not true. It is in the memo.

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** The Minister should go and talk to the journalists who raised these questions with his officials at the technical briefing. This was going to be in the legislation later this year.

While the RPZs should have always applied to all renters back in 2016, no one should be facing rent increases right now. We need rent increases banned for an emergency period of three years for those renters paying the highest rents in the history of the State. The amendments I will table later, which we will push to a vote, would do exactly that. They would protect



renters who are already paying rip-off rents from any form of rent increase at all. That is what a party which wants to protect renters should be doing, along with putting in place a credible plan to increase investment in the delivery of social, affordable and private for-purchase homes.

The Minister also needs to clarify the impact of this legislation on people currently engaging in short-term letting, in many cases in rural countryside areas. This practice is valuable to the tourism economy. They understood that this matter was going to be dealt with by the process of the register legislation and the accompanying planning regulations from the Minister, Deputy Burke. The day after this Bill comes into effect, however, the short-term letting regulations introduced by the former Minister, Eoghan Murphy, will apply across the board. The Minister owes those people an explanation as to the implications of this and what his instructions to local authorities will be.

To be clear, Sinn Féin is not opposing this Bill. What is in front of us will not protect renters because in a short matter of months, the Minister will bring forward legislation that will rip the heart out of the rent pressure zones. Over a period of time, many of the people the Government is promising protection today will eventually have their rents set to full market rent. All of the affordability gains of the near decade of rent pressure zones will be wiped away. That is what the Government is doing. It is part of a much bigger package, one that is an assault on renters at a time when the Government is also considering reducing design standards. Not only will renters be paying more rent, they will be living in smaller, darker and less adequate apartments in the future. The big consequence of Fianna Fáil's rent-hike Bill is that renters will be the losers once again. This Bill means higher rents with no guarantee of increased supply.

What is clear today, after two weeks of chaos and confusion, is that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael's housing policy has been exposed for the disaster that it is. The Minister's handling of this has been greatly damaged. That is why, in the context of the protest yesterday, the protest in Cork on Saturday and in the weeks ahead, thousands of people will march in opposition to what the Government is doing to renters. It is ripping them off and forcing them to pay higher rents. We will not stand for it.

**Deputy Thomas Gould:** The Minister is determined to make this as confusing as possible. He is forcing out jargon and spin instead of solutions. He talks about RPZs, STRs and every acronym under the sun. Renters do not want that. They are looking for security, support and affordability. It is not rocket science. Unfortunately, the Government, specifically the Minister as the person with responsibility in this area, are turning it into rocket science. The Land League was established 200 years ago to protect and stand up for renters. We now have the likes of the Community Action Tenants' Union, CATU, on the front line standing up for renters because someone needs to stand up for them. That is what Sinn Féin, Raise the Roof and the Opposition are doing because this Government is not standing up for renters.

To give the Minister a feel of what it is like to be a renter today, a lady contacted me who is paying €1,500 rent per month. She has a 22-year-old daughter in her final year of college and a 16-year-old son in transition year who will be going into fifth year in September. She is terrified because she does not know when a rent increase or eviction notice will come. What a way for a mother, who has done everything right, to live her life. She does not qualify to get on the social housing list and is not entitled to HAP because she earns too much money. She works hard and got an education. Despite her doing everything right, the Minister and the Government have excluded her and put her under pressure. She lives in fear as a renter. It is a desperate situation for all renters. This lady is terrified of what will come down the road. Sinn Féin will propose

amendments tonight that will ensure she does not receive a rent increase. The amendments would give her security and allow her to focus on her children, her job and on herself. Can she not be entitled to focus on herself and have some peace of mind? I am not sure whether the Minister and Ministers of State understand this fully. There are enough of them in the Government. Surely some of them understand what renters are going through. If they do not, why do they not reach out to renters to ask them? Whoever is providing the advice is giving the wrong advice for renters. This Government would sooner go to big pension funds, vulture funds and investment companies to get advice when it should be going to ordinary people and renters.

One section of the community is pitted against the other as a result of this. Some people feel that others are entitled to social housing and HAP and are receiving college education while they are working all the hours God sends. The failure in this regard lies at the Government's feet. Its members are the people responsible.

I want to see people given an opportunity to have the best quality of life they can have. The Minister's so-called protections are a joke. The Government is not giving any security to college students, doctors, those getting an education or apprentices. When they get their qualifications, they will get that security by going to Cork, Shannon or Dublin airports and getting on a plane to America, Canada, New Zealand or Australia. There are 100,000 people in Australia who were born in Ireland. The Government has exported and sent these people out of our country as a consequence of all its different failures in housing, cost of living and looking after young people. For a young person, it is a choice between that or staying in the box bedroom of their parents' home until they are 30 or 40 years old. I know a lad who worked in Leinster House for ten years and emigrated to Australia last year because he could not earn enough working in Leinster House to get a mortgage.

*3 o'clock*

His future is in Australia. The night before he left he said, "My only hope of being able to buy a house in Ireland is if there is another crash or recession. Otherwise, I will never be home again". That is what this Government is giving renters.

**Deputy Louise O'Reilly:** It sometimes strikes me that if it was not for incompetence, there would be no competence at all with this Government. There are 15,500 people homeless. Of those, 5,000 are children. That is evidence for anyone with eyes to see that the Government's policy is failing. They do not need us to tell them - Government members should be able to see that for themselves. I am sure they do not go home in the evening when they have finished work and think they are proud of those homeless figures. I am sure that when they reflect, they are ashamed. I hope they are. I hope that sometimes they have time in their day to think about kids who are growing up in emergency accommodation who will find themselves ostracised in school because they cannot have people over for sleepovers and they cannot have a normal life. Despite the Government's best efforts to normalise this housing crisis people still have a memory of what it was like before they destroyed it. People still have some residual memory of what it is like for a young person to be able to aspire to secure accommodation, be it rented or accommodation they can purchase.

Yesterday, there were thousands of people outside this building protesting about homelessness. One of them was my father. Fifty-six years ago, he was a member of the Dublin Housing Action Committee. That was a group of people who came together to fight for the rights of people to decent and secure housing. He has said to me a few times that he did not think he

would have to be back on the streets again, but that is exactly where he has to be. That is where people will be next Saturday in Cork at the National Monument at 2 p.m. because they want the Government to know they are angry. They also, and this is really important, need the Government to understand that as hard as it might try to normalise children growing up in hotels people will not allow that. The Government tries very hard to make people accept that on the last Friday of every month, it rambles out and announces the latest homelessness figures. That was not a feature when I was growing up or when the Leas-Cheann Comhairle was growing up. We know that is not normal at all. The Government can try but it will not succeed because people remember what it was like to have a functioning housing market.

In my constituency of Dublin Fingal West the latest Daft report tells us rents have gone up by 7.2%, in case the Ministers do not know, in a rent pressure zone. The average rent is now €2,371. The Government built affordable houses - you would laugh if it was not so serious - in my constituency that cost over €500,000 each. When replying, the Minister might tell me who exactly is affording that? When he was labelling those houses as being affordable, what kind of income did he have in mind? What kind of people does he think are going to be able to afford that accommodation?

Shortly before the election, I met a family. They had been evicted from their accommodation in Swords and were living with her family in Lusk. It was massively overcrowded. Everyone was squeezed into one bedroom. They have good jobs. These are normal jobs. They are not big-money jobs, and certainly not big enough to get into the circle of people the Government cares about. The people in question work hard. I have spoken to them recently and they tell me they cannot find anywhere to live within their means. They cannot afford a mortgage and, because of the way house prices have gone up, they do not earn enough to buy a house and they earn too much to qualify for housing assistance. They are literally caught in the middle. They ask the simple question of who are the Government policies supposed to help? They are not helping them. We can see they help vulture funds, investors and people with big money to buy loads of property and rent it out but who is it that the Government is supposed to be helping? I really hope he accepts the amendments tabled by my colleagues in order to ensure that at least something is done. However, he knows what the impact of putting RPZs in place where rents are already massively out of control is going to be. I urge him to listen to what the Opposition is saying, engage on the amendments and support the those that will make this legislation stronger and that will at least make a small difference in the lives of the people who are in desperate need.

**Deputy Conor Sheehan:** The way this entire issue has been approached by the Government has been nothing short of shambolic. A series of measures were leaked to the media and subsequently announced. A press conference was going on while we were in the Dáil on Tuesday of last week. What the Minister said at that press conference was different from what was in his press release, which was different again from what the Taoiseach had to say. Then we had the series of measures that were announced again this week in much haste and that were brought forward at the last minute. What was proposed last week very nearly caused a run on the rental market. This has given rise to huge concern among vulnerable renters in my constituency. It is very clear what the priority is here because investors will not be negatively impacted by these changes but renters will. There is one thing about investors that I know from my party's time in government. When my colleague Deputy Kelly was Minister for the environment, he brought in changes in relation to apartment sizes. At the time, he was told – we were all told – that this would be a panacea. However, the thing about these investors is they will always want more. If

it is not apartment sizes, it is rent caps. They will come along in time and look for the Government to remove the very limited restrictions it has imposed on them.

Although RPZs zones are a blunt instrument, they are the only protection vulnerable renters have. It is really regrettable that in the context of the suite of changes being introduced, they will be made even more feeble. Rents in my city of Limerick have gone up by 20% in the past year. It is important to note that since RPZs were introduced, rents have gone up by 63.2%. That is hardly a ringing endorsement of RPZs as a policy measure. It shows how weak they are.

Labour has long called for the entire country to be made into an RPZ. This is something that Jan O'Sullivan first proposed as far back as 2016. The measures that were announced will only serve to increase rents and will negatively impact on particular renters who have short-term fixed tenancies such as students, junior doctors or short-term and migrant workers because when they leave their tenancy, which they do regularly because they have to, their rent will reset back to market rate.

There is a fundamental dishonesty about the way this has been communicated to the public. The Government is claiming it is banning no-fault evictions and it is but only in certain very limited situations. Large and institutional landlords usually offer leases of up to one year. Any ban on no-fault evictions will effectively not apply to them. This new system for smaller landlords will actively disincentivise them from providing long-term secure accommodation. We are talking about a policy measure designed to benefit those who are charging €3,000 a month in rent in order to deliver more build-to-rent supply in Dublin. It certainly will not deliver anything in Limerick and probably very little in Cork.

We have tabled amendments to tweak this Bill to ensure that, in terms of its scope, it will provide the strongest possible supports for renters. I am very disappointed that two of these, amendments Nos. 6 and 7, have been ruled out of order. We believe they fall within the scope of the Bill.

*3 o'clock*

There is a provision in amendment No. 7 that a fine of €100,000 would apply in respect of landlords who break the law. This is designed to provide a real and genuine safety net for landlords. I am disappointed to have had these ruled out of order. I note there is nothing to stop the Government bringing forward its amendments. I ask the Government to seriously consider the measure that proposes a fine for landlords who do not comply.

We have also tabled an amendment to provide for a two-year rent freeze in light of the level by which rents have increased in the past decade and the fact that they will continue to increase under this regime. I ask the Government to work with us to accept the amendment and give hard pressed renters a break. The Government consistently does the same thing as the previous Government and the one before that but expects different results. The fact is that this is only going to negatively impact renters. There is no certainty that it will deliver the level of institutional investment the Government believes it will. The fact that the Bill is being debated a week after it was announced means that some landlords have already increased the rates. If the Government wants more evidence of that, it need only look on websites such as *daft.ie* and *askaboutmoney.ie*.

I have been inundated with emails from students who are concerned about what is proposed and how it will apply to them. Galway and my city, Limerick, have very little in the

way of purpose-built student accommodation. We are heavily dependent on the private rental market in Limerick in order to house students. Students leave their accommodation every May and June and then scramble to find accommodation in late summer. Up to 100 students in Limerick are living in hotels during the week because they cannot get accommodation. The fact that there is nothing in the Bill to safeguard or protect students living outside of purpose-built student accommodation means that rents for those students will rocket and will increase every single year after they leave their accommodation.

I also want to talk about short-term lets. Some of the Minister's colleagues, including the Minister, Deputy Foley, and the Minister of State, Deputy Healy-Rae, have raised concerns about the regulation of short-term lets. Under the Bill, short-term lets will all come under the 2019 Eoghan Murphy legislation requiring owners to apply to their local county councils for planning permission. Given the delays in planning and the shortage of suitably qualified planners, I am eager to find out how the Government intends to deal with this and what additional resources local authorities and their planning departments will get. Local authorities are already understaffed, under-resourced and overworked. I am concerned there could be a level of chaos in regard to this.

Many students are very concerned because landlords are not registered with the RTB. There is a power imbalance between renters and landlords in this country. We have some of the weakest tenant rights in Europe. There is a clear need to beef up the RTB because it can barely cope with the volume of work and disputes it is currently dealing with. What additional measures and staffing resources will be put in place?

The Labour Party will not seek to actively obstruct the passage of the Bill. We will work constructively with all colleagues in the House to ensure that we put in place a suite of measures that safeguards renters above and beyond any other policy objective. That is our overriding priority.

As stated, I tabled a number of amendments, only one of which is in order. I ask the Government to work with us in the Labour Party, accept our amendment on a two-year rent freeze and perhaps consider bringing forward its amendments on a complete ban on no-fault evictions and the introduction of increasingly punitive measures for rogue landlords.

Rents have skyrocketed over the past decade. The measures in the Bill will, in the round, cause rents to increase again. My priority is renters and making sure that their rent does not go up any more. Under what is proposed by the Government, we will return to a situation whereby people will be evicted from their properties because they cannot pay the rent. There has not been an increase in the rate of HAP in over a decade. I ask the Government to consider what we are proposing and work with us within the remit of the Bill to strengthen it.

**Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Robert Troy):** I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Bill. For the avoidance of any doubt and as most people know, I am a landlord, but that should preclude me from having the opportunity to contribute to debates on legislation.

A previous speaker mentioned that he has been inundated with calls from renters in Limerick who are worried about the future. Current renters in the city of Limerick, like those in County Westmeath, who are governed by existing or RPZ legislation will see no impact. They are protected. There is no change. There will be a 2% increase. Only if tenants choose to leave



after six years can a landlord choose to increase rent. If tenants stay for ten years, there will be no difference. In fact, there will be greater protections. The 200,000 people who are currently renting in RPZs will see no difference. If anything, there will be enhanced protections. Let us be honest with people at the very beginning.

The vast majority of landlords are honest people who have bought a small number of properties to act as a form of pension fund. They want long-term leases and good tenants, and nobody is incentivising moving people on. Most tenants want to rent for a period in order that they can put together enough money to buy their own homes. We want a market that works.

The Government is bringing fairness, balance and stability to our housing market. The new framework strikes the right balance for existing tenants, and helps to protect them from sharp and unpredictable rent hikes and provides certainty in order to incentivise new landlords and developers to achieve a fair return and encourage continued investment in supply. The very basic principle of economics is supply and demand. Everybody understands that. If we do not have sufficient supply to meet the growing demand, we will not achieve the ultimate objective, which is to bring rents down to a more affordable level for all of our citizens.

We want to increase supply, and we have to incentivise people to come back into the rental market. This is something the Housing Agency recommended, in terms of modifying existing rent pressure zones. When we have debates in the Dáil, there is a serious contradiction on the part of people on the other side of the House who say that we need more housing and for houses to be built more quickly, but if they are in the wrong location in their constituencies they do not want those houses to be built. I can put my hand on my heart and say that in 21 years as a public representative, I never submitted a planning objection in respect of housing developments in my constituency, whether as a local councillor, a Minister of State or a Member of the Dáil. I do not think everybody on the other side of the House can say that.

We have to look at this in the round. The Minister, Deputy Browne, has made huge inroads since he was appointed, and this is one of the latest pieces in the jigsaw. There will be more. An additional €700 million has been secured for social and affordable housing. There has also been the publication of the national planning framework to empower local authorities to zone more land. I hope the local authorities will not shirk their responsibilities because zoning more land will be central to unlocking further housing supply. Expanding the LDA's remit was passed at Cabinet yesterday. We have a Minister who is committed to increasing supply of social, affordable and private houses. Increasing supply to meet demand will ensure we rebalance the cost of rent for people who are renting and rebalance the cost of purchasing houses. This is something we can all agree on. We want to ensure a stable marketplace for the benefit of all of our citizens.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** With regard to the overall changes proposed by the Minister recently, I compliment him on the balance he has struck. The Opposition will always try to pit landlords against tenants, and have the narrative around tenants versus landlords. We have to focus on both groups and that is the reality. This is about increasing housing supply and we have to deal with the needs of tenants and landlords. The Minister has struck this balance and counteracted the narrative as best he could. This is an extremely complex area. Reforming rental protections and aspects of the rental market is extremely complicated and complex. What has come forward has been very well thought through and very substantive. I compliment the Minister and his team on it.

The overall changes proposed are about trying to activate supply and increase our housing

output numbers. This is ultimately the solution to high rents and high house prices. We have to meet supply and demand. Unfortunately, we are long way off this at present despite the progress that has been made. Significant progress has been made in the housing area. If we go back five years we were developing 20,000 houses in this country. We are now developing more than 30,000. Ten years ago we were developing 12,000 houses. Significant progress is being made and this has to be acknowledged. If we were to listen to some in the Opposition we would think the Government is doing nothing about this.

We are pumping almost €7 billion of public funds into housing, which puts us as the top or second country in Europe in terms of our spend on housing. This is the way it should be. We are in a housing emergency. Of course, this is what we should be doing and possibly even increasing it further. The reality is that there has to be private equity also. I sat at a meeting of the housing committee yesterday and listened to the Housing Agency outline clearly to us how private equity has fallen off in terms of investment in housing. This is a significant concern and it is something we have to address. The changes the Minister has brought forward on the rental market will help in this respect. This is only one of the levers, as has been outlined by other speakers. A series of measures has been proposed by the Minister in recent times, with more to come, which will help with housing supply and activating and stimulating growth.

The Bill is short and it is very welcome. I appreciate the Opposition facilitating the Bill. At the housing committee yesterday it agreed to relax pre-legislative scrutiny. This is very important because it is about protecting renters in some parts of the country, whereby up to 17% of renters nationwide are not protected by the rent pressure zones. It is about bringing in this measure as a matter of urgency so that landlords do not increase rents prior to the bigger changes coming into place on 1 March. I very much welcome this and section 3 of the Bill provides for it. Section 4 of the Bill provides for the continuation of existing rent pressure zones until the end of February 2026 so the protections are in place for renters. This is an important measure. The Bill is very straightforward and it should be adopted as a matter of urgency. I hope we can conclude the business quite quickly. I compliment the Minister on the work he has done in this respect. It is striking the right balance. It is not an easy task but he has struck the right chord.

**Deputy Martin Daly:** I support the Bill. It is an important interim measure until the full extension of the RPZs happen next March. It is very important that protection is afforded to tenants in the interim. The Minister and Minister of State have demonstrated their concern that there would not be a precipice and that tenants would not be left vulnerable to some landlords. It would not be all landlords and we need to be careful of the language we use.

The extension of the rent pressure zones to the entire country is to be welcomed. It was a difficult process trying to thread that needle to balance the rights of tenants and landlords, and to encourage private investment in the housing market, most especially in the area of apartments. It is clear that targets were not met last year because of the precipitous fall-off of investment in building apartments. The *status quo* was simply not good enough. The State can carry a significant burden in terms of the cost of the provision of housing but it cannot carry it all and we do need private investment.

It is also important to note this is only part of a suite of measures coming through. There is the planning framework, the change in the role of the Land Development Agency and the extension of its remit, and the appointment of the chair of the planning commission. I am sure that under the new revised housing plan other measures will be introduced by the Minister. It is important that we show urgency in this matter. A generation of younger people expect it of us

and if we do not deliver we will be judged accordingly.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** I am simply aghast to see how the Government conducts its business with arrogance and incompetence. I recall some months ago there being a discussion on the role of inconsistent policy in driving investment away. In his press release last week, the Minister said this legislation is intended to introduce certainty. It is railroaded legislation in which we have already seen holes. It is poor legislation that will introduce a convoluted four-tiered rent pressure regime. It is unclear legislation, the detail of which has shifted across what has been at least four different contradictory and confusing announcements. This is Minister's attempt to introduce certainty. It is galling that with a straight face he has the arrogance to stand over this poorly-thought-out and ill-conceived piece of legislation in the House. This is the theme throughout Government and nowhere more so than in housing policy. The Government has an ideological opposition to building public homes on public land, especially if they are to be built by the State. We know this.

The public-private partnership scheme was a farce. Effectively the Government rediscovered the concept of council housing but had to make space in it for its investor friends to wet their beaks. It is right the Minister has pulled the plug on it but the manner in which he has done so, putting houses, jobs and taxpayers' money at risk, has been, again, a farce. It is gross incompetence. The Minister should have done this months ago and not left a building contractor with a significant liability. He should have done it months ago and not potentially exposed the State to a significant liability. He should have done it in a way that would not have put jobs at risk but he did not. The manner in which he did it is an illustration of the gross incompetence that is actually maladministration.

The legislation the Minister has brought before the House today is woeful. He forgot about the students in the midst of a student housing crisis. Selling the spiel that he will cut rents is an untruth. Was the Minister of further and higher education not present when this was brought to Cabinet? Has the Government forgotten about the student housing crisis? This is the reason we have a legislative process; it is for Bills to be adequately and appropriately scrutinised. However, the Government has no need for legislative conventions and norms. It wants uncertainty for institutional investors and that is its goal. Does the Minister honestly believe that how he has handled legislation will instil confidence? Sinn Féin is the party of confidence. We believe in having certainty in policy for the market and for homeowners and renters alike. We want to ban rent increases, ban no-fault evictions, support the reduction of the cost of rent, provide funding to bring vacant council houses back into use, adequately fund the tenant in situ scheme and mandate that interest rate reductions are passed onto homeowners. The only certainty that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are capable of bringing to the housing crisis is that they screw it up again and again. They should be deeply ashamed of their proposals today, which will, rather than cut rents, expose renters to increased rents, increased evictions and increased homelessness. Shame on the Minister of State and every one of the Government Members.

**Deputy Rory Hearne:** This legislation, extending rent pressure zones to the rest of the country, is something the Social Democrats have called for before. We will not be opposing it. As part of the wider legislative changes the Government is proposing, however, we are deeply concerned about significant aspects of it. It is quite a cruel move to give renters around the country who will have an RPZ for six or seven months and then rip it away from them. The Government needs to be challenged again. It is not being honest when it says that renters in existing tenancies are protected. What happens when their tenancies come to an end? What happens when their landlords decide to sell the properties in six years' time? They will face market

rents and a rental system and housing market that will be even more unaffordable. What the Government has done and is about to do is giving a very clear signal to landlords to up the rent.

The Government has no understanding of the reality of the private rental sector. If it actually understood what it is to be a renter in this country today, there is no way it would have provided measures that allowed landlords multiple loopholes and ways in which they could evict tenants and raise the rents to market rates between tenancies, be that in six years' time or when the tenancies ended. What will happen from 1 March is that landlords will start putting pressure on renters about needing to increase their rents. What powers do the renters have to challenge that? They can go to the RTB, which then starts a process that might, at some point, impose fine on the landlords. The reality for renters, who are terrified and just want to stay in their homes, is that this legislation that is coming down the tracks will mean they will be more disempowered because what they are facing is a rental market where rents will be brought up to the market rate across the board in the coming years. They will live and are being forced to live in more stress and anxiety. The Government claims its policy will protect renters. The real protection that renters need is from the policies of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, which view renters only as an income stream for investors.

If we look at the coming six years, the current 2% cap would mean that the rent would rise by 12%. What we will now see is the rent potentially rising by 40% to 50% over six years. The Government is justifying the increase in the rents as incentivising investor funds to build a supply of more expensive and unaffordable rental housing while rents will be allowed to rise in line with inflation. There will be no 2% cap. If inflation starts to rise to 3%, 4%, 5%, 10% or 20%, the rents will increase. This is not a recipe for solving the housing emergency; it is a one-way ticket to a permanent housing disaster, with our younger generation forced to be lifetime renters from institutional funds that have no cap on their rents and will be able to continuously increase rent and screw those young people of their lives, of their dreams and of their hopes of being able to buy homes of their own.

What kind of rental sector does the Government think it is creating? What is the best case scenario? Is it that renters suck up the poverty and homelessness and choose between rent and groceries for an undetermined number of years in the abstract hope that their rents will, at some point, get lower? The Government is taking a gamble, but it is gambling with renters' lives, betting on the likelihood that the free market and the investor funds will come through for renters. I do not like the odds and it is not a bet the Government should be making. Let us not call this "market rent" and keep legitimising it. Let us call it what the Government is actually proposing, namely, exploitation rents. It is back to the rack-rents of landlords that existed in this country many years ago. The Government is bowing to investors, lobbyists and landlords and giving them the green light to take whatever they can from renters.

The Government might not take it from me and might disagree with what I am saying, but I am sure it will listen to and have spoken to Mr. Mike Allen, head of advocacy for Focus Ireland. Speaking on RTÉ's "Six One" news, he said the steps being taken by the Government regarding rent were "incredibly complicated". He said "the increase in rent that's going to take place when landlords are allowed to reset to the market rent, that [rent] is going to be very substantial". Even with the protections from eviction, if the rent cannot be paid, the tenant will not be able to stay. The tenant will be evicted because the landlord will be able to do so.

The bigger question is how the State will keep up with the HAP payments to cover the higher rents. If the Government does not increase the HAP payments, how will renters in re-

ceipt of HAP keep pace with higher rents? As Mr. Allen said very accurately, “a solution which says ‘we can deliver more housing, but the cost is that you won’t be able to afford to live in it,’ isn’t a solution”.

Dr. Michael Byrne, writing in today’s *Irish Examiner*, which I am sure the Minister of State has read, raised a number of issues regarding the protections from eviction, including no-fault evictions, the Government is introducing. The Social Democrats have been calling for a ban on no-fault evictions for many years. It is deeply frustrating that so many people could have been prevented from being made homeless if the Government had implemented the no-fault eviction ban when we actually asked for it. Dr. Byrne wrote:

... it appears that landlords will still be able to evict within the six-year period if the property is required for ‘family use’.

This is a regrettable inclusion, as it undermines the objective of the policy by allowing for a form of eviction that the tenant can do nothing about and has no responsibility for.

Similarly, the hardship clauses for landlords could be wide open to exploitation by landlords. We know this because thousands of landlords already ignore the law. The Government is assuming that we have this rental system where landlords follow the law and the rules. They do not, and the Government knows this. Thousands, if not tens of thousands, of landlords are currently not even registered with the Residential Tenancies Board. They evict renters in an illegal manner. They charge rents higher than allowed in rent pressure zones. What is the Government doing? I do not see anything in the Government’s measures that addresses the fundamental problem that we still have a rental system where the rules and laws are not obeyed by landlords and are not enforced sufficiently by the Residential Tenancies Board. Dr. Byrne goes on to make the point that we will have a situation where “the economic incentives of landlords are not aligned with the Government’s stated policy of creating long-term, secure rental homes. Dr. Byrne also wrote:

... a landlord who has tenants in and out every six months will be laughing all the way to the bank.

Similarly, when letting properties, landlords are now incentivised to rent to likely short-term tenants ... rather than likely long-term ones ...

This issue was raised yesterday at the Raise the Roof protest outside Leinster House, where hundreds of people took part, highlighting the devastating impact of the housing crisis.

I was talking to nurses and teachers on that protest who highlighted that, when they must shift placement or job in their training and education, they face a new rent, market rent and tenancy. It is similar for students. In another example of the disrespect shown towards our younger generations, students and key workers, the Minister initially said students would be protected, but now they will not be protected in the open market. How is this a serious policy when Government will not even do what it says it will do? The key workers I mentioned were hearing that we needed GPs, but GPs have very short placements and must move around. The key public servants we need - the nurses, teachers and doctors - now face a situation where they will be forced to pay higher rents as they engage in their placements and in the early years of their work. It is no wonder we cannot get teachers for our schools and they are leaving in their thousands for Australia and other parts of the world.



What will happen to rents? The Government said that rents would fall at some point. I have asked a question but we have not heard the answer. When are rents going to fall? The Government completely misled the public in the election by claiming it had turned the corner on housing. The truth is it manipulated the figures and knew the claim that 40,000 homes would be built was just another failed housing target. Now, it is misleading the public again with the claim that existing renters will not face rent increases. Of course they will when the tenancy ends and they must find a new tenancy. Of course they will when they are evicted from their home, which landlords will still be able to do. Of course they will if they must move around the country for their jobs. They will face higher rents because the Housing Agency, which did the report that underlined the Government's decision, said clearly that average rents would rise. Will the Government be honest with the public and say that this measure will lead to higher rents? It will and there is no getting away from that. The Government should at least have the decency and honesty to accept that it is making renters pay for the investor funds to incentivise - the illogicality of it - their supply of rental housing.

When will the investor funds reduce rents? At what point will institutional investors that want to charge €4,000 per month for a three-bedroom apartment reduce rents? At what point will Greystar, Kennedy Wilson, IRES REIT and the other landlords reduce rents? It is delusional thinking. It is market logic that does not apply because the housing system is not a market like milk, cars or commodities. The housing system operates from the fundamental point that people need a home and will pay whatever they can to try to get one. The market fails over and over in housing. That is why we have regulation and need public housing and why relying on institutional investors to provide a key source of supply of housing is a wrong-headed measure.

There are clear alternatives to this. We have proposed the homes for Ireland State saving scheme, which could leverage some of the €160 billion in private bank accounts. This could funnel billions of euro into not-for-profit housing bodies and local authorities to directly deliver affordable homes to buy and rent. The Taoiseach says it will take years to set up. Of course it will take years if the Government keeps delaying it and does not actually do it. If Government started doing it today, we could get it moving relatively quickly. If we said to people that here was a scheme and, if they put their deposits into it, they would help solve the housing crisis, I guarantee that there would be billions of euro in those accounts within a year. People across this country would say "Yes" and that they wanted their deposits to help solve the housing crisis. It is disingenuous of the Taoiseach and this Government to say week after week that the Opposition comes with no solutions or alternatives. Here is a solution and alternative, yet we see no move at all on it.

Other steps, such as taxing vacant and derelict properties, are half measures by the Government and not serious.

I wish to raise the issue of social housing projects, almost 180 of which are in Ballymun and Whitehall in my constituency. Some 500 social homes were ready to be built, with 280 due to start on site in the coming weeks. These were social homes in areas of the country that needed them most, but at the last minute, the Minister for housing pulled the funding from these projects. Some 500 social homes were pulled overnight. How can a Government justify cutting funding for social housing in the middle of an emergency? It is down to a lack of understanding. My understanding is that the Minister pulled the funding because the Government said those homes were too expensive. Of course they were too expensive. They are public-private partnership homes that include in the price the overall life cost of maintaining the properties. They are more expensive than just building the home, but we do not come along at the very end

when diggers are literally about to start digging sites and homes are starting to be built and say we are pulling it. What will happen is no homes will be built there for a year or longer, and the Government has not even come with an alternative. It is a shameful decision that needs to be reversed.

We should not be surprised when this is the same Government that gutted the tenant in situ scheme. Dublin City Council informed me, when I asked on behalf of constituents who were facing eviction into homelessness, that it would no longer be purchasing properties this year where the tenant was facing eviction because it did not have the funding from the Department of housing. This is truly criminal. I said at the Raise the Roof protest outside the Dáil yesterday that all we heard from the Government was this talk about how it wanted to remove barriers and blockages to housing when the biggest blockage to solving the housing disaster was actually this Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Lowry-backed Independent Government. They are the ones blocking schemes like the social housing projects due to start in Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow and Sligo and the tenant in situ scheme, which was preventing people from being made homeless. They are blocking ideas like the homes for Ireland State saving scheme, which could be putting billions of euro into delivering affordable homes, never mind using the budget surplus to directly fund local authorities, not-for-profit housing bodies and the Land Development Agency to immediately fast-track the projects they could be delivering.

Regarding this Bill, we are in favour of extending rent pressure zones across the country. We facilitated this in the housing committee yesterday and we will not oppose it being moved. On the basis of what is coming forward, though, we are clear that we will be opposing the legislation the Government is planning to bring in the coming months that will essentially make sacrificial lambs of renters in this country, particularly the younger generations. I do not know whether it is in the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael psyche but there is something of pulling up the ladder behind them in this. There is a mentality of protecting those who are there. It is like they would protect the property prices of the homeowners but whoever came after would be sacrificed because Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael wanted a short-term political benefit. How is it acceptable to hand our younger generations over to the institutional funds, which will be able to charge whatever rent they want? Inflation is what the rent will be linked to. We will see the new market rents they will be able to raise rents to, given that these tenancies change every couple of years. When one looks at the percentage change since 2020 and Covid, market rents have increased by 43%. If one had applied the 2% cap, they would only have increased by 10%. That is what renters will be facing. They will face multiple percentages of increases in their rent if they have to change their tenancy and move, or if they are trying to move out of their childhood bedroom where half a million people are stuck trying to find somewhere to rent. It is deeply disappointing that we have not seen the change in direction that is so badly needed. People will be out on the streets of Cork in their hundreds and thousands this weekend. They will be out again for the CATU demonstration on 5 July and there will be more protests, because people have had enough.

**Deputy Catherine Ardagh:** It is very difficult to listen to my friend's sanctimonious rant on this issue. We all know from junior cert economics-----

**Deputy Rory Hearne:** It is very hard to listen to this, with the level of homelessness we have.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Deputy Hearne, you had your turn.

**Deputy Catherine Ardagh:** I am sure the Deputy is familiar with this. I think he is a lecturer in economics. We know from junior cert economics that when supply is increased in the market, prices stabilise, if not come down. This is something we have probably all studied and it is really the basics of economics; it is economics 101.

I am very glad to speak on this Bill. It is about ensuring fairness, certainty and protection for renters across the country. My constituency of Dublin South-Central has been part of a rent pressure zone, RPZ, for quite a while. Renters there have benefitted from some of these crucial protections. Make no mistake; the Bill is hugely important for us, as my friend already said, because it brings the rest of the country in line with the RPZ legislation and gives consistency to renters around the country. From the day it passes, every single part of Ireland will become an RPZ. This means that rent increases will be capped at 2% or the rate of inflation, whichever is the lower. This is not just a minor adjustment but rather a simple, clear and strong protection for people who are trying to plan their lives in what has been an incredibly unpredictable rental market.

This Bill is about much more than just rent caps. It is also the vital first part of a wider set of reforms that will come into effect from March 2026. These reforms will ensure that we will see more supply in the market, because that is what we need. We know that if supply increases, rents come down. That is what people want in the long term. From March 2026, all new tenancies will come with six-year security of tenure, which is a game changer for stability. There will also be a significant end to no-fault evictions, especially in the case of landlords with multiple units. We will introduce more transparency and fairness in rent reviews. This will ensure a level playing field for everyone.

I would like the Minister to ensure that Residential Tenancies Board, RTB, is properly funded. At the moment there are huge delays and it is very difficult to get any sort of decisions both for landlords and renters. For renters in Dublin South-Central, whether they are front-line workers in Kilmainham or a single parent in Rialto, these long-term changes will make it genuinely easier for them to stay in their homes, raise their families and finally have the much-needed stability they need.

We know that 83% of tenancies in Ireland are currently in RPZs. This tells us two critical things. First, that rent controls work when they are targeted and sensible. Second, it is now abundantly clear that it no longer makes sense to have a patchwork of rules depending simply on the post code. In Europe, RPZs have historically worked well. This brings us in line with other European countries.

In Dublin South-Central, we have been living with the aspects of these rules for quite some time. They have genuinely helped renters across the city. Now we need the next stage, which includes six-year leases, proper eviction protections and the consistency across the country, which this Bill brings. I commend my colleague, the Minister, Deputy Browne, and the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell, on bringing this legislation forward. There is so much work to do when it comes to housing in Ireland. It is a crisis and we all need to be working together to come up with solutions. This is a good solution. I think everyone said they were backing the solution, backing the idea of extending the RPZs to the whole country. We need to work together on this crisis because we live on a small island. It is a crisis and if we can put our shoulders to the wheel, as the Minister has, we will see proper results.

**Deputy Shane Moynihan:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Leas-Cheann Comhairle. Is mór

agam an deis seo labhairt ar an mBille seo agus ar na himpleachtaí a bheidh ag baint leis do thionóntaí ar fud na tíre agus an éifeacht a bheidh aige ar mhargadh na gcíosanna. Gan amhras, tá an géarchéim thithíochta ar cheann de na géarchéimeanna is mór atá os comhair na tíre faoi láthair. Tá sé in am dúinn féachaint ar gach uile réiteach is féidir linn a chur i gcrích le cinntiú go rachaidh muid i ngleic léi. Is é an rud is tábhachtaí le cuimhneamh faoi seo ná nach bhfuil aon réiteach amháin uirthi seo. Is iomaí aghaidh atá ag an ngéarchéim thithíochta faoi láthair, lena n-airítear daoine gan dídean, cíosanna arda agus daoine nach bhfuil in ann teach a cheannach agus a leithéid. Caithfear réitigh a dhearadh a rachaidh i ngleic leis na himpleachtaí agus gnéithe na faidhbe seo faoi mar atá siad faoi láthair.

I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle for the opportunity to speak on this legislation and I welcome the fact that across the House there is general consensus on the need to expand the RPZs to the entire country, which is the purpose of this Bill in the first instance. It is also helpful to look at this Bill in the context of the wider reforms that it forms part of. I am sure that in our clinics all of us hear on a daily and weekly basis of people who are struggling with the rental market here, whether that is on the basis of the cost of rent or, more so, in the past few months, of supply. People are telling us they cannot get access to rental accommodation because the supply does not exist in the market. Despite the fact that we have now rolled cost-rental schemes and more social homes are being built, there is still a role for the private sector, both institutional investors and smaller landlords, across the market to ensure they have incentives in the market to maintain their properties. This is not just me saying it; it is the ESRI saying it, that while there has been a moderation in rent increases over time, the incentives for people to maintain properties in the market is not there, especially since 2021, and should be required in the future.

On what the Government needs to do to address this issue, there are two sides to the story. There is obviously the case to protect existing tenants. That is why the extension of the RPZs to the entire country is a welcome move to ensure that those pieces are put in place. I should also mention the protections my colleague, Deputy Ardagh, referred to such as no-fault evictions and so on.

There are also people who do not have access to rental yet, because the supply is not there. The only way to encourage supply, from small landlords and institutional investors, is to create a situation where they can at least break even on the properties they are making available. Where the 2% rate falls below the inflation rate, it is not one where the incentive is created or necessary. This was also found in the Housing Agency's review of this matter published a number of weeks ago. The paper by Dr. Tom Gillespie of Trinity College found that the rental supply has contracted since the expansion of the RPZs in 2021 and that this needs to be addressed in light of any modified rental assistance that is put in place. It is important that this is done now at the start of the lifetime of the Government because we need to get these reforms put in place to create the incentives to increase supply.

We need to reflect on Housing for All. The disappointing figures for the past year are not the only reflection of it. If we take the sum total of the houses that were delivered on target under Housing for All, we exceeded those targets over the lifetime of the plan. It is important to remember that as well.

This rental reform will work. It will protect tenants. It will allow for the reset of rents between tenancies to make sure that the incentive remains for people to provide more accommodation and it will lead to the converse of what was seen immediately after 2021, where there

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was an increase in the number of houses being put up for sale, as opposed houses being made available for rent. When we talk about pulling the ladder up after ourselves, we should be very conscious of the fact that there are many people who cannot get on to the ladder at all, because the supply is not there. It falls to us that we create the incentive for that supply to be put in place.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** Leanfaidh mé ar aghaidh ar aon nós. Níl a fhios agam cé mhéid nóiméad atá agam.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Seacht nóiméad.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** There are three speakers, if they turn up.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Yes, the group has 21 minutes.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** Tuigim. Leanfaidh mé ar aghaidh until they come. Go raibh míle maith agat. Unfortunately, the Deputy who made the allegation of sanctimonious wrath against a colleague in another party has left. I cannot think of anything more inappropriate from a TD who is part of the Government that is standing over a housing crisis. The only sanctimonious wrath that I have ever heard in this Chamber has been from successive Governments. They have used it as a tool and a weapon to obfuscate, avoid and confuse as a way of not analysing the problem. Sanctimonious wrath is an interesting phrase when we look at the fact that almost 16,000 people are homeless. I use these figures. I have been in the Dáil since 2016.

*4 o'clock*

The Minister of State knows that very well. He is familiar with Galway from me harassing him - I take that word back - from constantly asking him about the task force in Galway that should not be there because it is not functioning.

We have no choice but to support the legislation to extend the RPZs to the entire country. The Bill has been introduced in a chaotic and disorderly fashion, with no pre-legislative scrutiny. The committee had to agree with that given the urgency of the Bill. No scheme is ever analysed or studied in the context of what has happened. We keep adding pieces of the jigsaw but we are getting no picture, except to hear that the market will provide.

I wondered what I could say today. I have said it over and over again. The phrase “sanctimonious rot” inspired me to stand up and say: “Good Lord, this is what we are dealing with.” There are almost 16,000 people homeless. We have normalised homelessness and we lack security of tenure. We have turned language on its head, just like we have with international relations with Gaza and Israel.

We are creating a very serious problem in Ireland where, more and more, there is a lack of faith in anything the Government says. I do not wish that on any government because it is very dangerous. Words must mean something. Policies must mean something. We deal with that when we talk about disinformation. Most of the disinformation I am concerned about arises from the Government, whether it is national or international politics.

Specifically on housing, when I left the local authority in Galway in 2016 the city was in the middle of a housing crisis. I became a TD, which gave me a privileged role. In 2018 and 2019, we talked about a task force because of the emergency in Galway. That task force has sat for year after year with no report being given or any analysis of the problem and what led to the



housing crisis in Galway city and county. The task force is on its second chair. I do not wish to personalise it, but both chairs have serious experience. The Department and the councils are represented on it. By December of last year, it finally asked the question. I said this the other night. I hate repeating, but I am going to repeat that the new chair is finally asking the question. The task force was set up in 2019. In December 2024, the date of the latest minutes available to me – I am out of date with my minutes, such is the up-to-dateness of the task force - it told us that the delivery figures are going in the wrong direction. It told us we need to look at how we are going to overhaul housing delivery and get it massively ramped up. The task force has begun to ask what are the obstacles and seven years after it was set up, it has set out what those obstacles are. One of the major obstacles is that we did not build any houses. We stopped building in 2009.

We did not build any infrastructure. I do not know if it was the chair or one of the members of the new infrastructure task force who talked about objectors being a problem in an interview with Claire Byrne. I was singularly unimpressed. I repeat that infrastructure was not built, meaning we have no second treatment plant on the east side of Galway city. We have none in Carraroe. We cannot have balanced development. We had a debacle over Uisce Éireann. We were forced into condemning it. It was a case of divide and conquer, rather than resourcing the local authorities, which had all the knowledge. We have not resourced them to provide housing either.

Tomorrow, the Committee of Public Accounts will talk to the Department of housing. My colleagues and I have attempted to look at the documentation we have got. My God, I do not know how many schemes are now in place for housing. We have a housing crisis. We have children living in homeless accommodation. A delegation from Simon has gone to meet the Minister today about the mental health problems and other health problems arising from homelessness.

We are dealing with the consequences of the decisions of successive governments to treat housing as a product to be bought and sold, to back up the market, to change housing policy with the stroke of a pen in 2014. A pilot project was run on the housing assistance payment. It was said that people were adequately housed once they got a HAP payment. I was called a liar. I said I was very close to being a lawyer, but not quite, at the time. I was called a liar when I said that people were taken off the list once they received HAP. I was subsequently proven to be correct. Problem after problem was created.

My staff, like the staff of other TDs, are finding it very difficult to deal with the level of housing problems that are coming in. There are people who have been up to 16 years on a waiting list in Galway who have been made homeless. People are living in cars and coming in to us begging. We are told the homeless services are chock-a-block. The Simon Community produces a report every quarter. It tells us that there are no properties available under the HAP scheme, even the discretionary scheme. The task force is going nowhere and around in circles.

I am at the point of despair with the problems created by Government policy. One essential part of the solution is public housing on public land. We have not done it in Galway since 2009. The Land Development Agency is going to get more power to use public land to build premium housing down in the docks.

I do not wish to go on for the sake of it. I did not wish to speak at all today because I have spoken so often, sometimes for a minute and at other times for 15 minutes, on a housing crisis

that is a deliberate consequence of Government policy of relying on the market. We have made housing into a product.

I have two sons in Dublin who are renting. I know exactly how it is from my office in Galway. The situation is chaotic. When a government gets to the point where it has normalised homelessness, we are in serious trouble as a republic.

**Deputy Roderic O’Gorman:** I am speaking on behalf of the Green Party on the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill, which has been drafted and delivered at speed. I will come back to the point about speed in a moment.

I will focus my remarks on one particular cohort of renters, namely, student renters. One the question of speed, I spoke at the launch of the Raise the Roof motion on Monday. I said the Government was in complete panic mode when it came to housing. The treatment of this Bill is a perfect example of that panic. The legislation was approved by the Cabinet on 17 June and published the same day. The Bill is now progressing through this House in a single day, with all Stages taken today. There was no pre-legislative scrutiny, regulatory impact assessment or formal consultation with student representatives. We know from experience that rushed legislation seldom results in a fair or balanced outcome, in particular when it comes to housing.

I understand that sometimes we have to move legislation rapidly. I had to do it myself. This is not rapid, however; it is reckless. I have no doubt mistakes will come to light in the debate here or in the Seanad but because there is not sufficient time to go through the Bill in detail and to introduce Committee Stage amendments, I expect we will bring in amendments to the legislation in the autumn term. I have no doubt about that.

We know that student renters are under real pressure. Last year, UCC students’ union did a survey of more than 3,000 students, which was strongly representative. More than 50% of respondents said that housing costs were their most significant source of pressure. Nearly two thirds said the cost of housing was harming their health and well-being. This Bill is not going to address those issues; in fact, it will compound them.

Under this Bill, rent can be reset to market rates whenever a tenancy ends. This might sound innocent enough, but in the student context, where most leases run from September to May, it means students could see a rent increase every academic year, even when they return to the exact same room. This undermines the goal of rent caps and introduces instability for students. It makes long-term affordability impossible to predict.

Despite the scale of the student housing sector, this Bill offers no legal definition of student tenancies. Such a definition matters. Without a formal category, it is unclear how or whether these tenancies can be tailored to the unique needs of students. The Minister for higher and further education, Deputy James Lawless, recently said students should not be inadvertently disadvantaged by the new rental laws. He spoke about designating a certain category for student tenancies. He said that could be part of a solution. He is right. That solution is not in this Bill but it should be. To address these problems, I am asking the Minister, perhaps when he is bringing the legislation to the Seanad because it cannot be done here, to adopt the following approaches: tie rent caps to the property and not just to the lease so students returning to the same room are not charged new market rent each year; and, importantly, give a legal definition to student tenancy allowing academic year leases to be regulated in line with their unique situation. These are not radical asks. They are practical adjustments that would make this legisla-

tion better for a group that is vital to Ireland's future and is already facing real pressures.

Students are not luxury tenants. They are our future nurses, engineers and researchers. They cannot afford to live near their universities. They live with the constant stress of rising costs that we as legislators have heaped on them and failed to address at this point. This element of the Bill is not beyond repair, but it does need revision. It needs to recognise the structural realities of student accommodation. It needs to close those gaps that allow for exploitative pricing under the cover of technical compliance. Let us protect all tenants, not just in principle but in practice as well. Let us not pass legislation that looks fair on paper, only to realise too late that it allows sharp increases in rent where stability is most needed. We have some time between this Bill going from this House to the next House. Let us make those amendments.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** It is interesting in debates in the House and on the media how the Government will not own its own proposals. It tells us that what it is doing is going to increase investment in the rental sector and that will ultimately bring rents down. That is the underlying logic of what the Government is doing. However, it refuses to say the bit in the middle in terms of why this is going to increase investment in the rental sector. This is because the plan is to raise rents. Every time the Government is asked this, it tries to wriggle away from it and say that there are lots of things. The fundamental, most important thing the Government is doing is trying to allow rents to rise even faster. That is Government policy now. It is to increase rents in the supposed hope that through increasing them, rents will come down in the long run. It is the magic of market. The Government expects people to buy this. It expects people to believe that somehow it is acting in the interests of those who it is hiking rents for - young people who are forced to emigrate or are unable to move out of the family home and workers who are being crucified by rents of €2,000, €2,500, €3,000 or more per month - by allowing rents to go even higher, rather than this clearly being an act of a Government of landlords acting in the interests of landlords, in particular the big corporate landlords.

I will focus on the same issue that Deputy O'Gorman focused on, namely, student accommodation. Students are the group that are most egregiously affected by what the Government is proposing. Students in the private rental sector are not going to have any protections whatsoever as regards the level of rents. Every time they return to college, they are going to see a new and significant hike in their rents. The day after the Government announced its new proposals, the Minister for higher education, Deputy Lawless, was in before us at the committee on higher education and I asked him about this. I put it to him that the way this will work is that there will be no rental protection for students in private rented accommodation every time they change tenancy and so on and asked if that was accurate. He stated the following:

We have a new proposal, which was introduced yesterday that will come in to effect next March. There will be a lot of water under the bridge between now and next March. I will sit down with my colleague, the Minister for housing, with whom I have spoken numerous times on student accommodation, and we will delve into the details about how it will effect the student accommodation sector.

I could not believe that the Minister for higher education, who was telling us that a priority was student accommodation, did not seem to know how this was going to affect student, but was reassuring us that it would be grand, there was loads of time between now and March, the Government would sort it out and students would be not negatively affected.

I read with interest the newspaper headlines on Monday. I thought this is good because here

we have a Minister who is listening to the Opposition and is going to protect students. The headline in *The Irish Times* was “Minister wants exemptions to new rent rules to be considered for students sharing houses”. It continues: “Students should not be ‘inadvertently disadvantaged’ by the new regime, says spokesman for James Lawless.” On Tuesday, however, presumably all of the water under the bridge had passed. We read in the front-page headline in the *Irish Independent* that there are “No additional protections for students in private sector under new rental rules, Minister admits”. That is it. I was accurate in my summation of things at the committee. In saying that there was a load of water going to pass under the bridge and do not worry things will be fine by March, the Minister was trying to mislead people, or he did not know what was happening. The truth is that students are being thrown to the wolves by this proposal. It is incredible, when housing is the number one crisis facing the third level education system, that students are going to be taken out of any protection whatsoever.

There are a few things that the Government often likes to say to the Opposition. It says that we have no proposals. We can write books on it, as two Members have. We can put forward detailed proposals on budget proposals and in policy, but no matter what we do the Government will say that we have no proposals. No matter the level of detail that we produce, it will say that we have no proposals. The other thing it will say is that the Opposition is being ideological or that we have an ideological aversion to the private rental market. We are expected to believe that the Government has no ideology whatsoever. For ten years now, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have been trying to incentivise the private sector, be it private developers or the institutional investors, to come and resolve the housing crisis. Money has been thrown at them. They do not pay any taxes on rental income when they are real estate investment trusts, REITs.

There is the Croí Cónaithe scheme and the HAP scheme, which costs more than €1 billion per year, and there are other subsidises to landlords every single year. There is the waiver of development levies. Money is thrown at these developers and private landlords. The crisis has got worse not better. The Government goes back into the same toolbox - one marked “free market fundamentalism” - and says we need rents to rise further because that is what is going to resolve the crisis as it will attract investment. The Government expects us to believe that it has no ideology. It is free market fundamentalism. It is a trickle-down idea of what is going to happen with housing.

It is interesting to read the report that the Government is basing its own proposals on rental pressure zones and increasing rents further. It is clear there that institutional investors are making healthy profits in the rental sector in Ireland. They are not making a loss; they are making a healthy profit. The idea is that we need to give them even more profit so that they invest here in this sector rather than somewhere else. How, without free market fundamentalist ideology, does it make any sense that we transfer more money of workers, either directly or indirectly through the State or directly from workers through paying more rent, to the super rich in the hope that they are will resolve the housing crisis? How does that make sense as opposed to saying that we have money and financial surpluses, we have a housing crisis, building housing creates revenue and we therefore need to build social and genuinely affordable housing at scale, directly through a State construction company? That is the answer to the housing crisis and the centre of the answer for supply. The reason it is not pursued is ideology and what lies behind that ideology are class interests. The Government fundamentally does not represent renters, workers and young people. Instead, it represents big landlords, big private developers and the rest.

**Deputy Peter ‘Chap’ Cleere:** This Government is protecting renters. Not only are we

protecting renters, we are moving as quickly as possible on this. In line with last week's Government approval for the urgent drafting of legislation to extend and expand the operation of the RPZs, I welcome the publication of the necessary legislation, the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill, for urgent enactment today. The reality is that if we did nothing, the rent pressure zones as they stand would have fallen at the end of this year. That is a fact. It is essential that we provide all who rent with absolute certainty and also provide certainty to those who want to invest in home and apartment building. While I acknowledge that the rental measures announced recently have been necessarily complex to respond to different situations in our rental market, the key message here is simple. The Government wants to provide certainty, clarity and stability for the rental sector, including for those who rent and those who let their properties. It is therefore essential, as an interim measure, for all tenants to be protected as soon as possible under the current rent increase restrictions that apply to RPZs. This Bill will provide that necessary protection for all tenants until 28 February 2026, but to be absolutely clear, for the almost 200,000 people who are renting in a tenancy that is part of an RPZ right now, absolutely nothing will change. Their rents cannot be reset after six years if they remain in their tenancies. They remain in a rent pressure zone. The bottom line is that, as a result of these reforms, renters will have much stronger protections than ever before. All renters across the country will now be covered by RPZs, including in my constituency of Carlow-Kilkenny, which I am delighted about.

The only way we can deal with the housing crisis is to dramatically increase supply. I think everyone is in agreement about that. However, we have increased it from 2020 onwards to about 30,000 units per year. Until then, we had 20,000 units per year. We have to get to 50,000 units per year. We need public investment, which we are providing as the State is the largest investor in the housing market at the moment. Almost €7 billion will be invested in 2025 alone, but we need more. It is envisioned that €20 billion will be required to get to the necessary targets. It cannot be done alone. We need substantial private sector investment as well. We are in a crisis we need to deal with as a society, but it cannot be done with State investment alone. We need the private sector to play its part as well and it needs to be helped and supported to do so.

**Deputy Ryan O'Meara:** I say again that housing is the number one issue affecting my generation. It was the biggest issue by far and away for me on the doors, whether I was speaking to people my own age; getting messages from people on social media saying they would love to be able to come home and afford a home; parents who said when I knocked on doors that their adult children were still living at home, as I am also; or grandparents worried about their grandchildren's future in this country and how they will be able to afford to live here, rent or buy an affordable home.

I welcome and support this Bill which is about protecting renters. We are moving swiftly on this as a Government and I welcome the work of the Minister of State and that of his colleagues in the Department on it. Following last week's approval by the Government of the urgent drafting of the legislation to extend and expand the operation of the rent pressure zones, we are now bringing this Bill to the House today. While the rental measures announced have been necessarily complex for what is a very complex issue to respond to the different situations we are seeing in the rental market, it is important we provide clarity, stability and certainty for the rental sector, including those who rent or let properties. There was a balance to be struck between trying to get more investment into the private market, which is essential, and protecting renters. We have some of the most protective measures in any rental market in Europe and one of the highest levels of regulation in the European Union.



It is important, as an interim measure, for all tenants to be protected as soon as possible under the current rent increase restrictions that apply to the RPZs. This Bill provides that necessary protection for all tenants until 28 February 2026. It provides for a two-month extension, until February 2026, to the operation of the existing RPZs. It also provides for non-rent pressure zones to become rent pressure zones, including in my constituency, from the day after enactment of the Bill. This is about providing certainty, clarity and stability for the rental market. It is important as an interim measure for all tenants to be protected as soon as possible under the current rent increase restrictions that apply to RPZs. The Bill provides that necessary protection for all tenants.

The simple fact is that we have a record level of State investment in housing, but State investment alone cannot fix this problem. I recognise that supply has increased but we have a long way to go. A big part of that simply has to be the private market. The State is doing an enormous amount of work. It needs to do an awful lot more, but opening up private investment to come into the market to build in particular the apartments we need at scale will be a key component of how we start to reach those targets.

While I discussing housing, I will go slightly off topic and take the opportunity to again mention log cabins, modular buildings and modern methods of construction. I welcome what has been done by the Government to date and what has been spoken about to date. We need to see urgent action but we need to go beyond the planning exemption for back-yard dwellings and go to more modular units and log cabins where it is appropriate, that is, where planning is appropriate and we can get connections to utilities such as wastewater treatment and so forth. There is a place for them in the market. I am convinced of that. For young people who want their own homes, those who have a site and home and want to build, the only way it would be affordable is through those and I ask the Minister of State to seriously take that into account.

I look forward to supporting this Bill and introducing more measures and protections for renters currently in the market, but also spurring on supply from the private sector, along with all the massive work being done through public investment in housing.

**Deputy Edward Timmins:** I welcome the extension of rent pressure zones to all parts of the country. By any measure, this Government and the previous one have done many things to protect renters.

I want to blow away the myth that tenants are not protected in this country. I have experience of other European countries. These are often cited as being much more favourable to tenants. This is often not the case. In Germany, for example, if tenants do not pay their rent for two months in a row, landlords can quickly get a court order to evict them. This is quickly followed by a bailiff coming to evict. That is not the case in this country. Similarly, no-fault evictions apply in Germany if landlords wish to use the property for themselves or their families. This Bill protects tenants and that protection also takes effect the day after its enactment.

However, the best way to protect tenants is to have an increased supply. We can bring in all the rules in the world, but if there is a shortage of houses, those rules have limited impact. They can also often have unintended consequences. For example, many landlords have left the market in the past few years because of more and more regulation. The challenge in this country arose because of a successful economy that has delivered 100,000 additional jobs per annum along with the resulting increase in population. Jobs and population increases happen much more quickly than house building. A tap cannot be switched on for house building. It

occurs on a longer timescale than increases in demand and, equally, it can quickly fall away.

The Government continues to make many changes that will speed up house building. To give an international context to this, many countries have severe challenges with house and apartment building. For example, China had a massive oversupply until a year ago, with 60 million empty units at one stage. On the other hand, Germany has a housing shortage, like us, and had a target of 400,000 units for 2024, but only completed approximately 230,000. That is equivalent to Ireland having a target of 25,000 and building 14,000 because Germany's population is 16 times bigger. We need to put our situation in context.

I have yet to see a convincing policy from the Opposition that would make a difference in housing delivery. The solution to housing supply is not a few particular elements. It is a combination of a huge number of things. Recent proposals from the Government are just one part of the solution. We must continue to bring more changes to maintain this momentum. For example, the cost of building a home is too high. We must look at moves to reduce this cost. In many parts of the country, the cost of building a home exceeds the market price so no one will build. Hence, no new house building is taking place, yet there is demand for housing in these areas. This is a clear example of where Government intervention would help, for example, by reintroducing a waiver for development levies. This worked well in the past and can be the difference between a builder deciding to build or not. Alternatively, we could consider a temporary reduction in VAT to kick-start building. A special focus on affordable housing is also needed to allow it to be expanded. Finally, the main focus must be on all the State agencies and local authorities working closely together to solve this big problem.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** We saw the rent pressure zones as limited and imperfect, but the idea was that it was better to have some element of defence rather than none whatsoever. We have seen that they are incapable of holding back the tide of rent increases. While we might not oppose this legislation, we are utterly opposed to what is being proposed by the Government. We have all spoken about the issues in the House. The issue is that rents are through the roof and are constantly going up. The only thing that we see in regard to what is being proposed by the Government is that rents will increase again. House prices have been astronomical. People who previously could have afforded a house based on what would previously have been considered very good jobs cannot afford one at this point. That does not look like it is going to be improved in any way, shape or form. Homelessness numbers are through the roof, and they will continue going through one roof after another. These are the targets the Government seems to have no difficulty surpassing. It just gets worse and worse. That is the problem.

We are doing what we are doing not on the basis of protecting renters. I agree with many that there are plenty of issues regarding landlords and tenants, who have not been protected over many years. However, this is about investment funds having the ear of the Government. It is incredibly saddening that we are not talking about anything that will rapidly increase supply. I agree that we need to deal with the issues of planning, Uisce Éireann and our lack of infrastructure. We know the gamut of issues that exist in the planning process in the context of builders who cannot access finance and who are constantly impacted by all the red tape that we are very good at producing.

We have all seen the problems when trying to deal with the local authorities. The local authority in my constituency was building a particular project and had to deal with two elements of the Department. The project was tendered but it took so long to get agreement between the two arms of Government that the tender ran out. When it was okayed, the local authority went

back to ask if the developer would follow through, but he said “No”, so the tender process started again. Luckily, we are now further on, but these are the things that are constantly happening. It is a matter of ensuring that we have the funding, that we do not have obstacles in the way and that we get very serious. That is going to mean serious investment and the delivery of social and affordable rental and affordable purchase homes, which is what we really need to see.

I want to use this opportunity to deal with the issue of disability housing. Unfortunately, housing adaptation grants have come to a crux in Louth County Council, which is in need of further money. This is impacting people’s ability to live in their own homes, and it needs to be dealt with. I have raised the issue of the capital assistance scheme for disability housing a number of times in recent days. The St. John of God organisation contacted me regarding the fact it was in discussions with the two local authorities in Meath and Louth about the purchase of a number of homes. I have spoken to the Minister about this previously. I got a reply to a parliamentary question which said that CAS funding was open. However, the issue is that CAS funding is now part of the same social housing acquisition fund as the tenant in situ scheme and all the rest. County councils are telling St. John of God that they do not have enough money. This previously was not part of that allocation so it has created a huge issue. We are talking about a number of people with disabilities. We all want to see decongregated settings and we do not want to go back to what we had previously. However, there are a number of properties that cannot be bought at this point. I accept that this is an unintended consequence. I have issues with what has happened around the tenant in situ scheme, but I ask the Minister to address this matter as soon as possible.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the Bill. The Minister will know I am not a man who is interested in theatrics or Government back-pats, but a Deputy elected by the people of west Cork to speak truthfully and plainly about the reality we face in the absolute failure this emergency RPZ Bill represents. This legislation is not a solution. It is a symptom of a Government chasing headlines and running away from problems of its own creation while abandoning the very families it claims to serve. It is not Independent Ireland’s vision for a better, fairer or freer housing system.

The Minister wants us to believe that this Bill is about stability but for whom? It is certainly not for young people trying to buy their first home, the small landlord trying to rent fairly or the nurse commuting 90 minutes because she cannot afford a flat near the hospital. This Bill is about one thing: the illusion of control. It is panic dressed up as a policy. Rent pressure zones were meant to be temporary. Like every half-baked policy this Government has brought forward, however, they have become a permanent fixture, stifling supply, squeezing out small landlords and doing precious little to meaningfully reduce rents. Now, with this emergency legislation, the Government wants to stretch that failed model across the country like a Band-Aid on a broken leg. This Bill discourages the very participation it needs to work. It tells landlords they are not partners in the housing solution; they are the problem. That is not just wrong; it is reckless. It is undermining supply and undermining communities.

In my constituency of Cork South-West, I speak weekly to builders and farmers’ sons and daughters who are trying to build on family land. Every one of them has hit a brick wall, be it with planning, bureaucracy, rising materials costs or rental laws written with Dublin 4 in mind, not Dunmanway or Bantry. What does this legislation offer them? It offers more red tape, more fear and more planning restrictions. The Bill expands RPZ restrictions without one meaningful commitment to increase housing supply in rural Ireland.

Independent Ireland has called loudly for streamlined rural planning for in-person preplanning meetings and for modular and prefabricated homes that can be built affordably and quickly. We propose doubling the rear extension allowance in order that elderly parents can downsize and stay close to their families. These are solutions that build communities whereas this legislation builds resentment. Let us talk about fairness. This Bill, in all its haste, refuses to recognise the lived experience of students, front-line workers or those in the rental trap through no fault of their own. It offers no flexibility and no understanding. We in Independent Ireland have been clear that in view of students' specific housing needs, they need specific solutions. We need to expand campus building. Let us allow developers to use log cabins and prefab buildings to meet seasonal demand. This Government would rather throw a one-size-fits-none net across the country and call it reform.

While we are at it, let us talk about short-term letting. Instead of clear rules that distinguish between home shares and commercial operators, the Bill hits everyone with the same regulatory hammer. A family trying to rent a room in their home for a few weeks a year now faces bureaucracy that rivals the corporate sector, with forms, fines and enforcement, all while vacant State buildings rot in plain sight. Is that fairness? Is that common sense?

We need housing policies that incentivise development, not punish effort. Independent Ireland has proposed tax incentives to bring vacant properties back into use. We have urged the Government to reduce VAT on building materials, reform mortgage access and bring home our builders from abroad with tax reliefs and real opportunity. This Bill does none of that. Instead, it drives out small landlords, pushes out developers and paints anyone with property as an enemy of progress. That is not the issue. That is scapegoating. Where are the real reforms? The Minister has been in government for almost six months. In that time, all he has come up with is a Bill that looks like it was written on the back of a cigarette packet on Monday night or Tuesday morning. There is a hollow brass-plate name change to An Bord Pleanála, a new chairman with little or no obvious experience in the construction or planning sectors and a press release promising that an "Enhanced LDA will beef up delivery of homes across the country". There are six key promises that appear to me to be nothing more than waffle.

While talking about waffle, I have to mention one person who spoke a lot of waffle the last two times he spoke in the Dáil, criticising Independent Ireland's policies, and that is Deputy Mattie McGrath. The same TD voted against Independent Ireland's motion on housing to hold the Government accountable. The same TD voted for the Taoiseach. The same TD voted against our proposals on NGOs. He voted with the Government to allow Deputy Michael Lowry additional speaking time. He also voted with the Government on the national framework. A man who hails himself as the so-called independent Opposition is almost more Fianna Fáil now than he ever was in his life. He was criticising Independent Ireland's housing policies. We can stand over them. All he ever has is a blank piece of paper. We have policies and we can stand before the people with them.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Maybe Deputy Collins can have a chat with him on a personal matter.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** I will do my best. I cannot do any more.

**Deputy Richard O'Donoghue:** For people who do not understand it, RPZs are rent pressure zones. Where do we go? How did we get here in the first place? We got here because of a lack of infrastructure. What have we done over the past six years? I have been asking our

Government to look at development-led infrastructure but what we did was that we set up Irish Water. Irish Water was set up to collect money for existing water products. It was set up to put in meters to collect money from people for the usage of water. It is now a runaway train. There is no accountability and no project is on time or in budget. What do we do to fix it? We go to people who can deliver infrastructure. When they deliver the infrastructure, they are on time and in budget. If they are not, they are out of business because they are not playing with the taxpayers' but playing with their own money. They have to deliver it so they have to make a profit. They can make a profit but we have agencies looking for millions upon millions of euro, even up to a billion euro, from the Government to create infrastructure. If we audit what they are delivering and audit them against international contractors, they deliver 50% less. The Irish taxpayer who pays money for something is not getting value. If they make a mistake, there is no accountability yet they are moved and promoted up the ladder, rather than be told to get out because they cannot do what they are meant to do. Give me somebody who will deliver.

I would like the Minister of State to look at Pallaskenry. I contacted Uisce Éireann regarding 42 houses being built in Pallaskenry to help the Government to meet its housing targets. On the website, it stated that Pallaskenry was a green flag, ready to build. We contacted Uisce Éireann and advised it we had an out-of-date letter for the 42 houses so we could deliver for the people, through the Government. I do not care who delivers them as long as the houses are there. It said it was sorry but it had to do research on the plant. This plant was delivered by a developer who is no longer developing. The 42 houses were being built for the people of the local area to meet the Government's housing target and to put roofs over people's heads.

I will tell the Minister of State how long it took to get an A4 sheet of paper on which all it had to do was change the date. It took 29 emails, 36 phone calls and eight weeks. It said it had to go back and do an analysis on the system. Everyone knows that for a sewerage system, the analysis is done on a weekly basis to know how the plant is working. However, it took that amount of administration, going through all the different layers and going around the house twice, to send us an email with an A4 sheet of paper. How does the Government expect to get delivery at that rate? How does it expect to meet its targets on that basis?

I have offered solutions before. I can stand on this side of the House and criticise all day long. I would be justified in doing that but I am also giving solutions to help the Government to meet its targets. It is one thing to stand here and criticise but another to say you have a solution. The solution here is to dissolve Uisce Éireann, give the water infrastructure back to the local authorities where we had no problems. Get developer-led infrastructure and when it is done, hand it back to the local authorities to maintain it.

Uisce Éireann cannot deliver with the money it is given. There is no accountability and no budget and that is why we are not getting delivery. I want to help the Government. Send me into any of the projects for which it has given the Government the figures and I will offer solutions. The existing plants could be modified to keep going until the Government has the money to invest in them so that we can build more houses on existing systems. I can help to deliver the project on time.

**Deputy Peadar Tóibín:** The past ten days have been a time of deep frustration and nearly depression among people. The omnishambles of the Government's approach to the RPZs in the past ten days has really frustrated people at home. Fianna Fáil obviously has a history in terms of the housing crisis. The Taoiseach, Deputy Micheál Martin, was a Minister in the Government that created the first bubble, a Minister in the Government that crashed housing prices



around the country and now he is the Taoiseach who has led to the big spike in house prices and rents again. That incompetence has nearly been crystallised into the past ten days. There has been confusion, chaos and contradiction from the Minister and from the Government.

The story about the changes in the rent pressure zones broke last week before the Cabinet had even discussed the issue. The Government chopped and changed its plans on a daily basis. It announced the plans for next March. Landlords listening to that confusion from the Ministers concluded that they could evict their tenants now, rack up the rents before this happens and significantly increase their levels of profit. I have no doubt that the statistics will show that in this past week landlords started to move in that direction, because of the Government's plan.

Then the Government said it had planned all along to bring in this legislation this week. There was no time made available for this. To make time available, the statements on nursing homes had to be cancelled. It was complete confusion again in the Government's approach to this. The Government's approach feels like amateur hour. It is not good enough by half.

We are under so much pressure in terms of the housing crisis that we need professionalism, well thought out plans and a Government that knows what it is doing. This level of instability within the Government is in itself a cause to stop and slow down the building of homes throughout the country. I believe there are serious flaws in relation to this. There are flaws in terms of what is happening to students. It is wrong that students are going to have to go back to tenancies on an annual basis and see those rents racked up. In regard to the no-fault eviction element of this, there is a positive in that up to half the tenants will be covered. However, it strikes me as incredible that the Government is now voting for no-fault evictions when it basically threw Neasa Hourigan out of government for doing the same thing in the last Government. This shows another flip flop in terms of the Government's approach to this.

Not all people will be covered by this. There will be many people who have cancer, mothers who are pregnant and about to give birth and 80-year-old people living in tenancies who will not be covered by elements of the no-fault eviction. No doubt, some profit-motivated landlords will look to put pressure on tenants to push them out so they can increase rents. There are good and bad landlords, and good and bad tenants but this particular Bill will incentivise the bad landlords to profiteer.

We support the rolling out of these rent caps to the counties that were previously not covered. However, the whole centre part of the plan is to increase rents. That is the design of it. The Taoiseach said so openly. The Government wants to increase market activity and the only way it can see to increase market activity is to increase rents. Rents are €2,000 per month on average for a new rental agreement. That is already excessive, damaging and too high. At the core of the project is to increase rents further. That is a phenomenal so-called solution from a Government that has been involved in the housing crisis for so long.

One of the ways market activity could be increased would be to decrease VAT, to zero rate VAT for a three- or five-year period. That would take €50,000 off the price of a house. It would bring in a lot of the builders who are not currently building. It would make it cheaper to build homes. It would increase market activity and make it easier for families to build. Representatives from Uisce Éireann were before the committee last week. I asked them how long it would take to fill the gaps in the water system that are preventing houses being built. They said they will not have those gaps filled until 2050, which is incredible. I asked the representatives An Bord Pleanála how long it takes on average to turn around an application for planning permis-

sion. They said they did not know and could not answer. I speak to builders who say it takes more than a year to turn around an application. We have 4,000 empty local authority homes. It is taking eight months to turn them around. We have 160,000 empty homes, yet the grants to refurbish them are taking forever. The Government is not doing its job. It is damaging the housing sector. It needs to cop on.

**Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty:** This proposal is basically to kick to touch until next March. There is no cohesive Government strategy that I can see. The Government was put in place in January. Almost six months later, we should have a proper, far-reaching plan, but we do not. We have this proposal, which no one can disagree with in the first instance, to extend the rent pressure zones across the country. I comment the Ministers for doing that much but we are not looking at the bigger picture. What type of landlords want to get out of the market? It is the smaller landlords who inherited properties and who rent them out at a reasonable price. They want no-hassle tenants who they can keep there for ten or 20 years - no bother, lower rent and everyone is happy. These people are being forced out of the market. Meanwhile, a new investment fund can come in from abroad. The Minister is saying we need to have outside investment to build houses, but these funds set the rents at the top end of the market. They are the ones who push it up. The Government's over-dependence on the HAP scheme means that the taxpayer will be footing the bill for these higher rents for years to come and for those families and individuals who have been evicted and who may find newer properties down the line. The Government is actually subsidising these funds on the double.

Many Deputies have asked why the State cannot be the single biggest construction company. It would not have to directly employ builders, but it could set up a scheme whereby it would be in charge and would have a strategic plan. In terms of targeting housing and putting certainty into the market, every housing development should be part of a strategic development zone. This would give certainty as to what communities are going to have. It would give a push to Government. These zones are not always perfect. Clonburris was not as good as Adamstown in my constituency. It would give a little bit of certainty about where areas are going to be built.

Six months ago, I mentioned a couple of things. I referred to the issue of allowing people to build in their gardens. There was some talk that the Government was going to move on that, which is very welcome.

Aside from Croí Cónaithe, which I do acknowledge has been welcome, there are still barriers to redeveloping derelict units over shops in towns and villages around the country. They could be rented out or purchased, for example where post offices and banks are closing. I still cannot see the logic whereby someone who is on a Dublin council housing list cannot move down the country, try out living there, try those better pupil-teacher ratios in schools and see if they can get a job working from home or in the local community. If they do not like it, why can they not have a five-year period on the housing list in order that they come go back to Dublin? No one is going to take a risk for a potential opportunity that would spread the load and put new homes into the market, with incentives for people who own over-the-shop properties. It would be a win-win situation for all. We do not have that. We have restrictions every step of the way.

I do not know what the legal parameters are - I would like to know - but when it comes to these investment funds coming in, why can the Government not enter into a 50-50 partnership? The Government would then get the return that could be used to purchase more properties down the line.

**Deputy John Connolly:** It has been very interesting to observe the debate and listen to the significant criticism and disapproval on the part of Opposition Members of what the Minister is bringing forward. Those same Members then say they do not intend to vote against the measure. In a very challenging scenario, the Minister has brought balance to a situation in which it is difficult to do so. Primarily, it is to his credit that he is protecting existing tenancies. The inference, namely that existing tenants will face substantial rent increases as a result of this, is simply untrue. It is important to state that clearly, as many of my colleagues have done. There are people who have the sense that what we are doing today will have that impact. It is important to state clearly and with certainty that it is not the impact of the provisions. In fact, this will do the opposite. It will extend the rent controls and protections that tenants enjoy in certain locations at the moment to the rest of the country. It is notable that the Housing Agency review, published before the legislation came to us, found that tenants outside RPZs did face higher rent increases due to the lack of protection in those locations. The Minister is to be commended on making sure the protection of the zones is extended to all tenants throughout the country. It is also important for existing tenants to know that the terms of their tenancies will not change, despite some of the inferences that have been made.

Another thing that is really good about what is coming forward here is that from next March, each tenancy will have a duration of six years. That is very welcome. It will abolish any uncertainty that tenants and families have that a landlord could, at any point and under certain circumstances, end their tenancy. That six-year duration is timed well, and I commend the Minister. It is something that will help build communities. The sole effect of it will, of course, be to protect the family or tenant, but it will also have the impact of helping to build communities. The Minister has made efforts to balance the desire for greater security for tenants with the needs of smaller landlords who have three properties or fewer. In the event that they or their family find themselves in difficult financial circumstances, they will be able to sell the property. They will continue to be able to do that if a family member requires the home. The Opposition will claim that we are doing this to facilitate large landlords and major investors. From next March, those landlords will have no cause to evict a tenant. There will be total ban on no-fault evictions. That is commendable. Opposition Deputies know well that this is a good measure, and they will be willing to support it when it comes to the vote this evening.

**Deputy Cormac Devlin:** I welcome the opportunity to examine the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill 2025. I thank the Minister for bringing it before the House.

This is a decisive Bill that extends rent pressure zones to every county, something that Members from all sides of the House sought. It reflects the Government's commitment to renters, to stability and fairness and to delivering real protections in an often volatile housing market. At its core, the Bill will ensure that all tenants in Ireland, whether in Donegal, Dublin, Dún Laoghaire or Drumshanbo, will be protected from excessive rent increases. Until now, rent pressure zones covered around 83% of tenancies nationwide. That still left one in five tenants outside the reach of these protections, exposed to the full force of market rent inflation. That changes now. This Bill will extend the RPZ rules to every corner of the country, applying the 2% rent cap nationally until 28 February 2026. That means renters in counties like Leitrim, Roscommon, Donegal, Clare and Mayo, areas not previously covered, will now benefit from the same safeguards as those in urban centres. That is fair and it is a necessary step. Whether you rent in Blackrock or Ballaghaderreen, your right to affordable and predictable rents should be the same.

We know these reforms are needed. The Housing Agency's review shows that tighter rent controls have helped to moderate price growth, but also that supply has been impacted, particularly following the 2021 restrictions. The challenge we face is how to protect renters without discouraging badly needed investment in our housing supply. This Bill strikes that balance. It protects tenants in the short term through nationwide RPZ coverage. It gives certainty to landlords and investors by signalling future changes will be indexed to inflation and capped. It gives renters peace of mind to know their tenancies are secure and sudden sharp increases will no longer be the norm. From 1 March 2026, the reforms will go even further. No-fault evictions will end for the majority of new tenancies, tenancies will be guaranteed for six years and rents will be linked to inflation, providing long-term stability. These are not just technical changes, but changes that will impact thousands of households, including people planning their family's future, saving for a home or just trying to get by.

We acknowledge these are complex reforms but complexity can never be an excuse for inaction. Instead, the Government must act decisively and responsibly to bring clarity, certainty and fairness to Ireland's rental sector. These changes will introduce a degree of predictability to the rental market, thereby encouraging much-needed investment in new housing units.

To those struggling to afford rent, the answer is supply and continued support from the State. We have seen the rental tax credit and HAP be increased in the past few years, and now the rent controls are being extended to the entire country. The Government is moving forward to provide certainty that will improve supply. This Bill is the first step in that strategy, with more legislation to follow. I hope it will be supported by TDs from across this House. I thank the Minister for not only having the Housing Agency review the report of the commission in May 2024 but also for his work in this area.

**Deputy Micheál Carrigy:** I welcome this legislation. As the Chair of the housing committee, I also thank its members from all parties for waving pre-legislative scrutiny at a meeting yesterday so this Bill could be on the agenda here today and passed before the week is out. I just wanted to put that on the record.

Ultimately, this Bill is about protecting tenancies and trying to create an environment to get inward investment into the building of apartments. As Deputy Devlin said, the report of the Housing Commission was referred to the Housing Agency, and that body was tasked with coming up with recommendations on the RPZs and the best formula going forward. We had representatives of the Housing Agency before the housing committee yesterday and members put these questions to them. They asked for clarification concerning why this recommendation was put forward. The Housing Agency looked at four recommendations. I went back over the text because I feel it is important that these reasons be known. Regarding the first option, while it was felt it might encourage more supply, it would be detrimental to tenants who would experience very large increases in rent. It was felt the second option would not encourage further investment. The third option, a points-based system as used in Europe, was felt to be a system that could not be introduced here. This is why the fourth option - to expand the RPZs across the country - was the recommendation put forward by the Housing Agency, which had been charged with looking at the best system for tenants here. Ultimately, this is about having a system that will protect tenancies and create investment. Yesterday, we heard that approximately 55% of the units being built currently are being supported by the State. This is not sustainable into the future. We need to get leveraged finance from our own financial institutions, but we also need international finance coming into the country to support housing construction.

I have a few queries. Specifically regarding my area of Longford-Westmeath, the initial legislation referred to rent levels above the rental average in the State. Our rental average would be quite a bit lower compared with other counties. I would, therefore, like to query the implementation of this aspect in every county. Concerning my home county, we have a short supply of hotel accommodation and many people are doing short-term lettings. I refer to viability in this regard, if the Minister could give me an answer on these points on behalf of people in those areas.

I am delighted, however, to be able to support this legislation and will be supporting the further legislation when it comes before the Dáil in the autumn term. I also look forward to having the opportunity, along with my colleagues, to scrutinise that legislation when it comes before the housing committee.

**Deputy Conor D. McGuinness:** The policy the Government is now pursuing when it comes to rent is a cynical attempt to drive rents even higher for tens of thousands of people already struggling to keep a roof over their heads. There is no denying that the Minister has chosen to side with corporate landlords, institutional investors and developers and to throw renters under the bus. I want to see RPZs - those modest protections - extended to the 17% of tenancies not currently covered. We know what will follow, however, because the Minister has told us. This one protection that renters have will be gutted and replaced with chaos. It is a reckless policy. The Minister can shake his head, but it is a reckless policy and dangerous. The Government is opening the door to a surge of evictions, especially for renters with pre-2022 Part 4 tenancies. Many of these tenancies are due to expire and what the Minister is proposing - in the round and not the Bill in front of us - gives landlords every incentive to remove tenants and jack up the rent. It gives renters little to no protection at all.

Meanwhile, the Taoiseach is wringing his hands, the Tánaiste briefs the media and the Minister seems to be scratching his head. It has been blunder after blunder all week. He botched the announcement, forgot to mention the RPZ extension at the beginning and changed the line three times in three days. One minute, he was waiting until March and the next it had always been his plan to move now. The real plan, and the only consistent thread in this mess, is to push up rents. Every single renter will be hit eventually - maybe not today but soon. The average tenancy, and the Minister knows this, lasts 3.4 years, so all this talk of six years is not fooling anybody. Anyone who moves for work, study or family reasons runs the risk of being fleeced. It is adding fuel to the fire already raging across the State. In quarter 1 of this year, as the Minister knows, average rents across the State rose by 7.3%. In County Waterford, the situation is far worse. It is far above the average, with rents having gone up by an eye-watering 12.1%.

These are not just numbers. Real people are being priced out of their communities, forced to move, forced into debt or forced into the trauma of homelessness. What happens when people are pushed out of secure housing? Well, we see it all around the State. Almost 15,500 people are officially recorded as homeless, but we know the truth is that there are many more. At the current rate, child homelessness will hit 5,000 by the end of September. It is the most visceral indicator of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael's systemic failure in housing. I would really like to know how they handle the shame of it. I do not mean to personalise it, but I would really like to know how those supporting this Government and its predecessors handle the shame of 5,000 children being homeless by the end of the summer if the trends continue, and all the signs are they will.

This approach will hammer healthcare workers, students, construction workers, gardaí, pensioners, those on HAP and those whose modest wish is that, someday, they might be able to



begin putting some money away to be able to afford a home of their own. It will hand another massive pay day to vulture funds, developers and the big landlords who already dominate the rental market. Taken together, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and some of their Independents have had 12 years to get this right. In that time, we have seen spiralling rents, broken promises and the shame of increasing homelessness. It is time to say “Enough”. While I welcome the extension of the RPZs, the Minister should leave it at that. It is enough. Let that be the positive move this Government makes and do not hollow out those modest protections any further.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** I, too, am glad to be able to speak on this Bill. I am as confused as many others. We have a desperate housing crisis that we have failed to tackle. We have debate in this House. We have ideology, really, coming from the left and a lack of solutions coming from the centre, which I have always been proud to represent, and the Government parties. Panic has set in. I wish the Minister and the Ministers of State well in this endeavour, but I honestly think we have lost our way. We should not be talking about RPZs here, although there is a need for them in many areas. Instead, we should be talking about the pressure cooker that is the lack of housing for the young and not so young - many of them are quite old - and the inability to solve the housing crisis. I know it is not simple. I have no ideological hang-up about foreign investment and foreign banks being involved. We need that kind of leverage. The previous speaker mentioned that almost 48% of houses had some Government involvement. That is not sustainable. If we go back to Seán Lemass and how we built houses in those years, we had no AI, none of the geniuses and none of the degrees coming out of their ears that we talk about now. We had plain, common sense and hard graft. We mentioned builders, such as Michael Hally Construction in Ardfinnan. I am sure the Ceann Comhairle had many of them in her constituency. There were many other contractors as well. They employed hundreds of men. Indeed, my late dad was a small contractor and built some houses. Deputy McGuinness might like to know that some of those houses were in Waterford County Council, while others were in Tipperary County Council. He did this as a small set-up and self-employed man. He was able to build those houses for the Land Commission. That is not today or yesterday. It is so difficult now, however. We have completely tied ourselves in red tape, hobby-horses and other views.

We probably had too much zoned land. The previous Government, of which Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael were part of, appointed a new Office of the Planning Regulator. We never had one before and I do not know if we ever needed one. It is like all the quangos we set up now. They are big organisations with nice, fancy offices and brass plates of their own. It is quango land. The Planning Regulator overstepped his mark completely. Tipperary County Council, of which my daughter is a councillor for the Cahir district, had 60 acres of zoned land and the Planning Regulator put it down to ten acres. The councillors are now grappling with ideas after being told by management that it wants to rezone some of that land again. This is only in the past two years. We are going to have to contravene the development plans that are all made. That is unnecessary bureaucracy that was brought in and resulted in confusion reigning. While there was a need for planning regulation, he went off on a tangent dezoning all this land. Whatever he thought that was going to get him, I do not know. It is a mess; nothing short of it. I do not know how he feels now when the Minister speaks about zoning land. He made his name *de facto* by this policy and by being a tough man who was going to teach all the councils a lesson by dezoning all of this land. In the past, councils could do what they liked but the Planning Regulator has overruled the whole lot. That was a big mistake. Is he going to be relieved of his post and that office stood down? Obviously, if we are going to completely change policy and rezone more land, it fundamentally makes his position untenable. That is one issue.

Another issue is Uisce Éireann. Most of the towns and villages I know are at capacity. They do not have the funds. These things are costing too much. Uisce Éireann is not fit for purpose. It was set up by elements of Fine Gael under Phil Hogan. It has been an unmitigated disaster. Uisce Éireann is not interested in local knowledge or talking to local people, including the workers who worked for councils for decades and now work for Uisce Éireann. It does not want to listen. It knows it all. That is a bad thing for anyone in any job to say he or she knows it all.

The Government has made the standards of houses unattainable. In actual fact, the standards are unhealthy. I am not a scientist or a medical person but those standards are unhealthy. That have locked up all the people who have gone to work and there is not a breeze going through them. That is fine for private houses if they want, but the Government has decided to have the BER rating. I am looking forward to having an engagement with the Minister at another forum very soon about this issue. Although the Minister can correct me, what I heard from the Cabinet was that the Minister was going to tell councils to ignore the BER stuff and to prioritise getting houses fixed. There is only €11,000 available to take back each void. An amount of €11,000 will not do the windows, doors and insulation, never mind a full retrofit. There is not a smell or hope of that. With regard to the costs of everything, Government policies, especially the carbon tax, have driven up the cost of insulation and meddled with the rising price of oil, which is about to rise again because of what is happening outside of our control. And then there are the BER ratings.

I did not believe the story a man told me when he came to me from Contae Phóirt Láirge - Deputy McGuinness' constituency - approximately seven years ago. He was a single sole trader delivering coal and briquettes and he provided a great service to ordinary people. He explained to me that he was being put out of business. When I asked him what was wrong, he explained that any house that goes back to Waterford County Council, such as when a person dies, the keys go back or for whatever reason, the first thing the council does is block the chimney. That is utter madness. A lot of measures have been brought in. I know we have to heat our houses and not be wasting all of it through chimneys, but we have gone over the top ridiculously. Taking out chimneys is shocking. During the snowstorm last year, people could not boil the kettle in these modern houses. The Ceann Comhairle is not as old as I am. I remember the half doors on many houses. Plenty of fresh air flowed through the houses, yet people lived, had families and survived. They were not frozen with the cold or at the doctor every day sick either. We have lost our way in many areas.

Regarding the whole situation of short-term lets, such as Airbnb, we are going to wipe out an industry. It is an industry. I call it the cottage industry mainly. Many people have farm houses. There are a number of them quite close to me. They are derelict. Big families were raised in them. Nine people went to the school in the morning in the one I am talking about. There was nine of them on the same road. They were a fine family. They are all married and moved off and the farmer has a new house on the land. There is a lovely, thatched house there, which is doing a great job. It is pretty busy. He did it lovely. There are two things in this regard. First, the council decided – I tipped him off at the time because I was on the council – that thatched houses were going to be on the register. That meant that you could not do anything with them and just had to maintain them, but the councils did not give any grants for that maintenance. While they might have given a couple of hundred of euro, that would not pay the thatcher for two days. The lovely restoration of many old farm houses and other houses is at risk. People are petrified. The Government thinks there is a magic wand and that it is going to get a mas-

sive supply of houses, but it will not. People will not give them up. They are going to let them go back into disrepair again. That is the rock the Government is going to perish on. Although some people claim otherwise, there is not a magic figure.

Regarding bedsits, I remember there was a big furore in this Chamber, maybe from the left again, about bedsits being terrible because there was only one bed. There was a roof over people's heads. There were a thousand of them in this city alone. Bedsits were wiped out overnight with a piece of legislation. Many of those people were made homeless as a result. I asked the question whether they were better off in the bedsit, albeit a small, cramped one with everything in the one room? They were happy there and people were happy to provide that service to them. Bedsits were banned because we had to be so upright with all these standards. We could not have these dastardly things anymore. We have to get real and crawl before we walk.

I was raised in a house of nine, including my mother and father, thank God. Three or four workmen were in the house every day. People lived in cramped conditions. When my parents got married, they lived in a room in someone else's house. Now, however, we want a magic wand to get rid of all the people who supplied those bedsits, the Airbnb and the short-term lets. We are going against what the Government is aiming to do, that is, provide houses for people. The left hand does not know what the right hand is doing. As far as I am concerned, we have too many advisers and too many people on every radio show and everything else who claim to know everything about housing and how to house people and what to do.

There are basic things we need to do. We must go back to basics. Instead of this Bill, we should treat this as a housing emergency and go back to the State providing houses by stimulating contractors. I am talking about the big REITs and the big outside people who came in and bought all the properties. We should tax the hell out of them because they have done nothing only destroy people. Rather, we should stimulate the local contractor and deal with the planning laws. We should tell the Planning Regulator to take a holiday or send him out to do some other job in the Middle East for two or three years so that we can go back to the basics. We need to keep the zoned land we had. What did rezoning land do? It meant that the land that was left zoned saw higher costs. Kindergarten children would not do this.

We have to call in the Secretaries General of the Departments because they are and should be accountable. They have not been accountable across the board. A couple of years ago, a Secretary General was asked to move from one Department to another. He kicked up and got an extra €60,000. Secretaries General are well paid. They should be accountable. They are the Accounting Officers as well as everything else. They are not accountable currently for costs, waste and the fact that there are voids and everything else and many other issues. We see how we cannot build the children's hospital. We do not have a light rail network. We do not have a transport link to the airport, and God knows how many more things. How could we do all of this stuff back in the era of Lemass? There was the likes of T. K. Whitaker and visionaries in those Departments. Now all little fiefdoms have built up and people are all watching their jobs, promotions and space. Governments come and go but they are still there - the permanent government.

If we were serious, we would wipe VAT off houses. Between VAT, planning charges, fees to Irish Water and road charges for anyone building their own house, it is more than half the cost of the house. We would get houses built if we had common sense. We cannot build houses by taxing the people.

There are at least 20 couples in my constituency, some of whom are farmer's sons and some of whom are not, who have sites and a reasonable amount of savings for a deposit but they cannot get planning because of this, that and the other, and An Taisce and other bodies are sticking their oar in as well. We have all these well-heeled organisations that are wreaking havoc. It is a case of "I'm all right, Jack" and of pulling up the ladder on everybody else.

Go back to basics and put away some of these grandiose powers and call it an emergency. Get rid of VAT and these taxes, not forever but for five years. Do something meaningful.

What happened with the mica? The big businesses - the Minister knows who I am talking about - the block companies or the cement companies should have paid the money there. We added 5% to the price of concrete. What does that do? It automatically adds to the price for everyone putting in a foundation and doing plastering. It is on every bag of cement you buy. We have all these big plans but we forget the little things. If we thought of all the little things, went back to basics and got it sorted, it would be a big help.

We have a great man in Tipperary County Council, the newly appointed director of services for housing, Jonathan Cooney. For a long time, I was the chair of a voluntary housing association, Caislean Nua voluntary housing, but I am the vice chair now. We built 14 lovely houses. We had a public meeting after the horrific beating of a man of 95 years of age. Thank God he is alive. We decided that rather than curse the dark, we would light a candle. We were told we would not be able to build these houses but we negotiated with the council and got the site. Some 11 lay people, not one engineer, not one architect or not one solicitor, built 14 houses. We had to hire all those advisers but we built them. Thankfully, we did it in about two years even though we were told it would take five years. The council was building in the same field and there were four winters with houses with no roofs on them, with contractors going bust and everything else.

Support the ordinary basic assisted housing associations rather than the many big conglomerates that have grown up. There are around 300 of them around the country building 14 or 15 houses. If every parish built ten to 17 houses, that would make a nice dent and the elderly would be happy in their own villages. However, now most villages cannot do that because the sewerage infrastructure is at capacity. When I was going to school, a septic tank was built and it is still there. It is at capacity now and we cannot build anything else.

Councillor Máirín McGrath and her group Positive Steps want to build a special unit for adult children with disabilities but they are caught. They cannot do anything. They have a willing developer and a site but there is no capacity in the sewerage infrastructure. They cannot do anything; their hands are tied behind their backs. We are blindfolded and we muzzled as well. That is the problem we have to break - the red tape, the bureaucracy and the legions of NGOs. Many of the NGOs are costing the State a fortune and are getting their oars in as well. All the fellows with brass plates outside their offices are pushing paper.

When building those houses, the late TD Noel Davern helped us out, and I will never forget when he phoned me to say we had been approved for the money. A couple of stages had to go through the Department. After that, it went to seven different places, between the county council, the Departments of the environment and housing and different offices. It went through all those stages, back and forward, pushing paper. I think that has been cut to about three but it is still way too slow. The council will send something but it will take three to six months for the Department to look at it. It then goes back to the council. It goes up and down and around the

houses like the man on the radio years ago who said “Round the house and mind the dresser”. I forget his name but he was a great presenter on the radio. That is what is going on and we cannot build the houses.

We are spending and gobbling up the money on all those things. We have created quango after quango. Every time I see something here a new office is set up or a new outfit is set up. Trim down the outfits, cut away the waste and allow the councils to do it. They did it in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The madness came in during the 1990s and in the boom and we got bad buildings. They were very bad buildings and we still have them. With all the regulation and all the standards, we are still getting bad buildings and defective buildings. How can we allow the children’s hospital scandal to go on for this length of time? We need a total re-evaluation.

I am sure there are visionaries like T. K. Whitaker and people in the Minister’s vein. I know they have some good ideas, they are interested and they want to make a difference. How many housing Ministers have we had? How many housing Ministers have stood here and said they were going to build so many houses? It is not happening because it is convoluted and we are convulsed with paperwork, architects and design artists. If the county council decided it wanted to build four houses in my village tonight, it would have to go to tender for architects. Surely to God it could have a template for a four-house scheme and it could apply to all the villages. They would have to tweak it to the sites but why do we have to have all that bureaucracy, the appointment of architects and all these stages? We have lost our way.

We need to open our eyes and ears and cut out the regulators and all the regulations. I am not saying to build things without council planning - of course, we have to have planning – but we have tied ourselves up in knots. All the well-meaning things we are doing here will not do it.

We have the left ferociously opposed to the views of the landlords but we need to come together, the whole lot of us. Ní neart go cur le chéile. This is too serious. I heard another Deputy attacking me a while ago saying I never had a policy paper. I have had plenty of policies and I have done the work with other people. I could not do it on my own. They are not even listening to that because they are going nowhere. We need to sit down together on the housing committee. I was on the housing committee for five years but honest to God, I ran off it because if talk and debates would built houses, we would not be short a house. We need action. The time for the words is over. We need common sense above all else.

An focal scoir. Many small, ordinary landlords tell me they are out of the game. What we will be doing with this legislation taking away so many houses beforehand. The magic thing might happen afterwards, or it might not work, but they will flee the market and that is what we do not want. We have the experience with the bedsits. We wiped out a thousand of them with one piece of legislation or a statutory instrument. We thought it was a great idea. People were living in these bedsits. People would be far better off living in those bedsits - many people were so happy in them – than being out on the street, with Fr. Peter McVerry or wherever.

It is time to refocus. That is why it would probably take a national government, although that is not going to happen. We need national imaginative focused development. The Government should start by cutting VAT and taxes and try to accept it is an emergency rather than talking about it. It should try to do something to build houses and allow the people who can build their own houses to build them. They are being nobbled and stopped.



Debate adjourned.

### **Visit of New Zealand Delegation**

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I welcome to the Chamber Mr. Trevor Mallard, our New Zealand ambassador who is accompanied by Mr. Chris Hipkins, leader of the opposition Labour Party, and by Ms Toni Grace. They are all very welcome.

### **Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill 2025: Second Stage (Resumed)**

Question again proposed: “That the Bill be now read a Second Time.”

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy James Browne):** We know there is a housing crisis and the only way to address that is by increasing supply. We have increased it from 20,000 to 30,000 homes. We need a step change to get to 50,000 homes and more so that people have the homes they want to live in where they want to live in their communities.

Rent pressure zones were due to end this year, as Deputies well know. If the Government and I did not take action everything would go back to market rates and we were not prepared to allow that to happen. The Government’s proposals are balanced, considered and measured and they ensure a continuation of tenants’ protections. They also make necessary adjustments to help promote investment in the sector. We have to increase supply. For anyone who is currently renting, there is no change. It is important to state that those in a tenancy will face increases of 2% or the rate of inflation, whichever is the lower. That was a decision of the Cabinet last week. It was in a memorandum. All of the deliberate confusion by the opposite side is not good. It is a fact. It is a decision. People can have their opinion, but facts are facts. People cannot make them up, which is what those in opposition are trying to do.

A memorandum that we would move to one national rent control went to Government last week. That was a Cabinet decision taken last Tuesday. That we would do it as a matter of priority and with urgency, separate from the main legislation, was also agreed at Cabinet last week. Not only that, but the heads of the Bill went to Cabinet last Tuesday. These are all facts. What the Opposition is trying to do, in a really dishonest way, is try to deliberately create confusion and whip up false anger among people for purely political ends. It is putting politics before people. It is a dishonest approach.

We are doubling down on protections for renters. The tenancies of indefinite duration continue, and we are adding the additional protections of security of tenure. Threshold welcomed this. The Simon Community gave it a cautious welcome. Mick Byrne commented. People Deputy Ó Broin regularly likes to cite in this Chamber are being conveniently ignored on this occasion. Yesterday and today, we heard a lot of personalisation of politics, criticisms and clichés, but no solutions.

Sinn Féin’s manifesto from last year, a policy of a home you will never own, has been quietly shelved. It is currently trying to work out new proposals. We no longer hear about its manifesto. The only thing Sinn Féin has mentioned here is freezing the current housing situation. How does that give us more homes? That does not solve anything, as Deputy Ó Broin

knows full well.

We have to get supply going. There are no solutions coming. We need private investment to do that. The Government is delivering over 50% of all of the homes in the State. We will deliver more social and affordable homes, but if we are going to reach a target of 50,000 homes and more, we need private investment. Nobody in opposition has said where we are going to get this funding from, which is deeply frustrating.

Very few Members know procedures as well as Deputy Ó Broin. He knows that a Bill cannot go on the Order Paper until it is approved by Cabinet. The Bill to which the Deputy referred could not go on the Order Paper. The heads of the Bill went to Cabinet last Tuesday and the policy was approved. Yet, Deputies from Sinn Féin, the Labour Party and the Social Democrats, all of whom know the procedure, deliberately stated that because the Bill is not on the Order Paper, it would not happen and there would be some sort of sudden and fast change. That is the kind of politics we see from the far right being introduced here.

Ordinary people cannot be expected to understand the procedures in a Chamber like this. Procedures are not political. Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Independents, the Labour Party and the Social Democrats do not own the procedures; the House does. Yet, the Opposition deliberately misrepresented the procedures to whip up a false narrative. Can the Opposition not see the danger in using the Chamber to whip up that kind of false anger? It is deeply dishonest. It is a Faustian pact. Labour did that to get into Government before, and it is going down the same path again. When people make a Faustian pact to whip up anger and try to get into Government, they should bear in mind that the Opposition in the previous Dáil at least tried to be constructive. This is pure populism. If the Opposition gets into Government on the back of whipping up that kind of anger, it should note what happened to the Labour Party the last time. That is what happens. When people mislead people, they burn.

The protections we are introducing are important. As I said, Threshold, the Simon Community, Mick Byrne and others have welcomed these provisions. Those protections are fundamentally changing our landlord and tenancy law for the better in order to protect tenants across this country. The measures in the Bill today, which the Opposition will vote for despite all of the giving out, will extend rent pressure zones nationally. The first thing the Opposition will do is vote for our measures, which is instructive in terms of trying to have it both ways.

As I said, we are doubling down on rent protections. We had more misinformation today, that somehow in the Bill there is some incentive for landlords to put people out. There is no incentive to put people out because if a landlord serves a notice to quit, they cannot reset the rent. It is as simple as that. Rent can only be reset if the tenant voluntarily leaves. That is an essential protection. There is no incentive for landlords to put people out. This is only one of a series of measures.

We made the decision to extend planning permissions to preserve the pipeline. Another decision protects renters, but also makes a small adjustment to try to remove a blockage from investors who will not invest with a 2% rent cap in new buildings because they can make a loss and investors simply will not do that. We will make other decisions in the coming weeks to make sure we can address the viability issue because we were never going to make renters address that.

People in all counties will now be in rent protection zones. These proposals are fair and

balanced. There are safeguards. The measures are sustainable. We are moving from a rolling rent pressure zone with a level of uncertainty where nobody really knew where they were going to be to permanent national rent control. That is a phenomenal change.

We are also providing security of tenure. We talked about this for decades when I studied and practised law. Other Deputies know the fundamental change being introduced. Rather than having a rational discussion and engaging, the Opposition simply wants to whip up anger with misrepresentations and misleading comments in the hope it can create confusion.

I am a TD and I speak with people in my constituency every day. The confusion to which other Deputies referred is not there. People know the crisis we are in and want us to do things, including make bold decisions, and that is what we are doing. Making personal attacks, stating clichés and offering no solutions are not what people want. That approach is clearly not working.

Regarding the national planning framework, in the next couple of weeks, I will write to every local authority to request that it massively increase the amount of land to be zoned. We are addressing planning exemptions. We will take a whole raft of work off our planners. We have a shortage of planners and it will take time to increase their number because it takes time to train them. Becoming a planner takes a long time.

We will give people control of their own properties in respect of health and education services, transport and other areas. We will address the small adjustments that have to go to planning. People sometimes like to take enforcement proceedings away from the planners, but we will allow people to work quickly in those areas. We can get planners to focus on the big decisions they need to make in terms of delivering homes.

We are reforming the Land Development Agency. One of the key aspects will be having a master plan for key areas. The housing activation office will deal with the other end of the LDA and will work on the ground to help to unlock sites for which it will have master plans. It will also review the secure tenancy affordable rental, STAR, programme.

We have proposals and plans. The Opposition does not have to like them, but it needs to start coming forward with its own solutions and not simply insult everybody and insult the intelligence of the general public by deliberately confusing them. The deliberate misrepresentation of the rules of this House is a dangerous precedent to set.

Question put and agreed to.

### **Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill 2025: Committee and Remaining Stages**

Section 1 agreed to.

#### **NEW SECTION**

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Amendments Nos. 1, 2 and 9 are related and will be discussed together.

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** I move amendment No. 1:

In page 3, between lines 13 and 14, to insert the following:

**“Amendment of section 19 of Principal Act**

2. Section 19(4)(b) of the Principal Act is amended, in the definition of “relevant percentage”—

(a) in paragraph (a), by the substitution of “0 per cent” for “2 per cent”, and

(b) by the deletion of paragraph (b).”.

One of the great things about the truth is that it always comes out.

Over the coming months and into next year, the impact of the changes the Minister is making, not just here but in the coming months, will be plain for everybody to see. We warned when the Minister’s predecessor, Simon Coveney, introduced the rent pressure zones that they would lead to a two-tier rental market, exclude large numbers of renters and create widespread difficulties for many and we were proven right. Interestingly, Simon Coveney made many of the same charges then that the Minister is making now. He was proven wrong. He ran screaming from the Department of housing but renters were left with the consequences of his actions. We will return to the debate over how this operates in real time in the coming months.

I want to speak specifically to the amendments. I am delighted the Minister referenced Dr. Michael Byrne from UCD because he is one of the most astute observers of the private rental sector. One of the central criticisms he has made in public and in writing of the Minister’s proposals is that they would wipe out all of the affordability gains of the rent pressure zones since 2016. This is exactly what he has said. He has indeed welcomed some of the security-of-tenure provisions but he also says, in his article in the *Irish Examiner* today, that what the Minister is doing on rents, which is what we are here to discuss today, will not only wipe out those affordability gains but will actively undermine the Minister’s security-of-tenure measures. I agree with him. Therefore, I have no difficulty whatsoever quoting him on the floor of the Dáil.

I repeat that the Minister will wipe out all of the affordability gains that renters have secured. Why is this? It is because the majority of renters do not stay in their rental properties for more than six years. It is not simply a question of choosing to stay. Almost 5,000 notices of termination are issued quarterly. We still have a significant number of single property landlords availing of what was always their intention to cash in on their pension pot lump sum, which is entirely understandable when market prices were so high. The tenants of those properties will have to find somewhere else to live. That is the whole problem. The fact the average tenancy is less than four years means the churn in the 240,000 registered tenancies will have an impact that I am not even sure the Minister fully understands when the substantive proposals he will bring forward in the autumn come into force from 2026 onwards.

The Minister is right that the minority of renters who have very long-term tenancy arrangements will get the protections he has outlined but the more than 80% of renters who are not in that position will be badly damaged by what the Minister is doing. I do not say this to misrepresent or to scare. I say it because I understand the private rental sector, how it operates and how bad Government policy impacts on it. The only confusion that has been sown in recent weeks is on the Government side. This is not me saying this. I am sure the Minister or his advisers read all the Sunday newspapers. That is the conclusion they reached and I agree with them.

With respect to the amendments, the problem is that right now rents are simply too high for existing and new renters. Let us look at the figures. The figures in the Residential Tenancies

Board report for quarter 4 last year showed new rents averaging out State-wide at €1,680 and in Dublin at €2,477. State-wide new rents were up 5.5% last year. With regard to existing rents, including those renters allegedly protected by the rent pressure zones, State-wide average rents were €1,440 and in Dublin they were €1,865. Last year, average rents for existing renters, 83% of whom are in rent pressure zones, rose by 4.6%. Some of this is because of the exemptions in the RPZs but I have no doubt that a large volume of it is because of non-compliance.

Worse still, when *daft.ie* published its quarter 1 report for this year, so this is more up-to-date information, average new rents throughout the State were €2,023. In Dublin city the average rent was €2,470. Many of us who represent large urban constituencies know that a new rental coming on the market today costs €3,000 or €3,500. This is even in the suburbs I represent, such as Clondalkin and Lucan.

What the Government should be doing in the first instance is preventing rent increases across the board for an emergency period. Renters simply cannot afford more rent increases. This is why amendment No. 1, and almost all of the other amendments I have in this group and others, seek to do several things. Amendment No. 1 seeks to amend the principal Act so that for a period of three years rents cannot be increased for all renters across the State. Meanwhile, all of the detailed, concrete proposals for addressing supply, which not only have I published but which I speak about on a regular basis, could be activated.

The fundamental flaw in the core argument on the Government side is that this is all about supply. What this misunderstands is that if it is the right kind of supply in the right place at the right price, it does not meet people's housing needs. It is not that anybody on this side of the House is against private sector investment but there is a particular category of private sector investor who is only interested in high-price, high-yield, high-density developments in expensive parts of Dublin and, possibly although not guaranteed, in the docklands of Cork, where rents will be set at a level even higher than now and will never come down. This rental stock will have no impact on renters everywhere else. It is not just about supply. It is the right kind of supply in the right place at the right price. This is something the Minister's predecessor did not understand, and it seems the Minister and his colleagues do not understand it today.

I make no apology for saying that a Government that stands up for renters should stop rent increases for an emergency period. This would not be indefinitely or in perpetuity but for an emergency period. It would create a breathing space for renters, alongside which a Government that was serious about tackling the supply and affordability issues would put in place the types of policies that I and others have set out in great detail. Sinn Féin's alternative housing plan, A Home Of Your Own, is still our housing plan and I still speak about it on a regular basis. The Government continues to ignore or fails to implement the overwhelming majority of the Housing Commission's proposals. Ultimately, this comes down to choices. The choice in the debate today is very simple. Does the Minister want a policy that will allow the rate of increase of rents for renters to accelerate at a greater pace this year, next year and the year after that or does he say enough is enough, renters cannot afford further rent increases and we have to stop it right now? That is what the amendments are about and I commend them to the House.

**Deputy Conor Sheehan:** I am quite personally aggrieved and insulted that in his contribution the Minister compared me and the Labour Party to the far right. I certainly try to avoid making personal charges against individuals. I certainly do not go around the place whipping up hate. As a proud anti-racist, I genuinely urge the Minister to withdraw the remark.



Amendment No. 2 is in my name and its purpose is to provide for no rent increase in rent pressure zones for the relevant period specified in section 2(b) of the proposed Bill. I am doing this because rents are already at record levels. The average rent is more than €2,000 a month and people simply cannot afford to pay any more. We need a rent freeze and we need to give people in tenancies some comfort over the next two years.

Rents are already rising more than what is allowed under the RPZ legislation. That legislation is frequently flouted, as we know. I reject the idea that we have to strike a balance between investors and renters, purely because the entire housing system as it stands is so imbalanced against renters. The changes the Government proposes will not necessarily address the viability issue. There are still issues with roadblocks to planning and infrastructure. The Labour Party believes this will not address the key issue for us, which is protection and affordability for renters, as it will deliver a certain kind of unaffordable build-to-rent supply specifically in Dublin. This is a simple and practical amendment that will give renters some breathing space for a defined period of two years.

**Deputy Rory Hearne:** I speak in favour of the amendments as put forward. The Minister is trotting out this line, as the Taoiseach has, that we have no solutions. That is utter crap and he knows it. I have emailed him with the homes for Ireland State savings scheme proposal. It is not correct that we have not put forward solutions. He might disagree with them-----

**Deputy James Browne:** Correct.

**Deputy Rory Hearne:** -----but it is not true that we have not put them forward. The Minister can mutter under his breath-----

**Deputy James Browne:** I am not.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Please, Deputies. The Deputy to continue.

**Deputy Rory Hearne:** We have put forward solutions. The Social Democrats has put forward a number of solutions. I have written books on it. To say we have not put forward solutions is just untrue. The Minister should be more honest and say he disagrees with our proposals and on what is put forward and outline why.

There is a hole in the Minister's argument. We are separating what has been brought forward today and what will be brought forward in the coming months. We are not opposing what the Government is bringing forward today on the basis that renters need that protection immediately. It is as a result of the changes it is bringing forward in the coming months from March that this emergency legislation is needed and we called for it. I do not believe the Government was planning to bring it forward. If it was, it would have announced it immediately as part of the overall announcement.

As I said, there is a hole in the middle of the Minister's argument that he is protecting renters. If the Government were protecting renters, and that is the sole outcome of these measures, then where is the incentive for more supply? Where is the incentive for landlords to stay in the market? If the Government is doing this with the singular purpose of protecting renters, which means ensuring rents cannot increase further and that renters have protection from eviction, it would not have any measures that incentivise supply through these measures. However, the truth is there are incentives for supply as the Government has set out in its legislation, the most significant of which is the intertenancy change in rent caps. The Government will bring in this

change from 1 March. The situation currently is that when a renter leaves a property, be it voluntarily or through an eviction notice - a notice to quit - on the basis of sale or a family member, and a new tenant comes in, the rent charged to the new tenant coming in is still only 2% higher than the existing rent when they get their rent increase. What the Government is changing is that when a new tenant comes into that property, the landlord will be able to increase the rent to the market rent. Is that correct? “Yes” or “No”. The Minister does not know.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Deputy is speaking to his colleagues’ amendments.

**Deputy Rory Hearne:** Okay. That is what the Government has set out. When a tenant leaves the property and a new tenant comes in, the rent will be able to increase to market rent. That is one of the Government’s clear incentives. It is not true for the Government to say it is protecting renters, because those new renters who are trying to find properties have to then pay the market rent. That is where this will lead. As the Housing Agency said very clearly, this will lead to higher average rents across the board.

That is a really important measure for institutional investors. I am not saying that; the institutional investors have been arguing and lobbying for it for years. Pat Farrell, the head of Irish Institutional Property, has been in and out and he is a former Fianna Fáil chairperson. We know they have been lobbying really hard and that getting rid of the intertenancy was one of the key things. The Government is removing it with these measures. The Government will be removing the intertenancy rent cap. That is not us sowing confusion; that is us being straight. The Government needs to be honest and straight with people that it is removing some of the rent regulation, namely, removing the intertenancy rent cap. That will lead to higher rents. Renters, as they leave tenancies, and young people, as leave their homes to try to enter the rental market, will be facing higher rents in new tenancies.

As I said, institutional investors were looking to get rid of the intertenancy rent cap and increasing rent in line with inflation. The Government is bringing that in for new apartments that have commenced from last week. What that means is the Government has removed the rent cap for new build apartments and linked it to inflation. If inflation goes to 3%, 4%, 5% or 20%, the rent will increase to that level. There will be a different rental regime for those new renters. As I said earlier, it will pull up the ladder for those renters and for others who are trying to find a rental property. We are not sowing confusion or misleading anyone; that is what the Government is doing and what it has presented. On that basis, I support these amendments.

As I said earlier, there is a gap with regard to the protection from eviction. Renters will have no-fault eviction protection when renting from large landlords - those with four or more properties - and corporate landlords. Smaller landlords, however, whom hundreds of thousands of renters will go through in the coming years, will not have the same no-fault eviction obligations. Is it legal to have a form of legal protection for one set of renters and none for another set? Is there an element of discrimination to that? I do not know, but what is clear is that it will provide a lower level of security of tenure for tenants of smaller landlords. That will be the reality.

As I said earlier, we know that there are thousands of landlords every year who breach and break the rental laws. They do it through illegal evictions and illegal rent hikes. The Government is now leaving loopholes open for them where they will be able to continue to engage in forms of breaking the law because there is not sufficient enforcement or regulation. We do not have a culture that means that renters feel empowered. Unfortunately, renters will not feel more

empowered with these measures. That is the unfortunate reality. Renters know that rents can be increased to the market rate, as Mike Allen said.

**Deputy James Browne:** I will speak to amendments Nos. 1 and 2, which appear to have the aim of introducing a ban on rent increases. The Government's view is that the imposition of a ban on rent increases is highly likely to be subject to a legal challenge and would almost certainly deter continued investment in the rented accommodation market and cause a greater recourse to the State for social housing supports.

The current rent pressure zone arrangements, under which rent increases are capped at 2% per annum *pro rata* where inflation is higher, were introduced as a balanced set of arrangements to regulate rents. The most effective way to reduce and stabilise rents in the medium to long term is to increase supply and accelerate the delivery of housing for the private rental, cost rental and social rental sectors. Allowing a rent increase of up to 2% per annum *pro rata* is considered to provide a reasonable balance between stable rent control and allowing landlords to adjust rents in line with general inflation, bearing in mind that achieving 2% general inflation is the stated price stability mandate target of the European Central Bank.

If a notice of termination is served, the rent cannot be reset. It does not matter if it is a matter of selling, putting a family a member in or whatever the case may be. If a notice of termination is served, the rent cannot be reset. There is no incentive there.

*6 o'clock*

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 66; Níl, 87; Staon, 0. Tá Ahern, Ciarán. Bacik, Ivana. Bennett, Cathy. Brady, John. Buckley, Pat. Byrne, Joanna. Carthy, Matt. Clarke, Sorca. Collins, Michael. Connolly, Catherine. Conway-Walsh, Rose. Coppinger, Ruth. Cronin, Réada. Crowe, Seán. Cullinane, David. Cummins, Jen. Devine, Máire. Doherty, Pearse. Donnelly, Paul. Ellis, Dessie. Farrelly, Aidan. Farrell, Mairéad. Fitzmaurice, Michael. Gannon, Gary. Gibney, Sinéad. Gogarty, Paul. Nicholas. Gould, Thomas. Graves, Ann. Guirke, Johnny. Hearne, Rory. Kelly, Alan. Kenny, Eoghan. Kenny, Martin. Kerrane, Claire. Lawless, Paul. Lawlor, George. Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig. McDonald, Mary Lou. McGettigan, Donna. McGuinness, Conor D. Mitchell, Denise. Murphy, Paul. Mythen, Johnny. Nash, Ged. Newsome Drennan, Natasha. Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh. Nolan, Carol. O'Donoghue, Robert. O'Hara, Louis. O'Reilly, Louise. O'Rourke, Darren. Ó Broin, Eoin. Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh. Ó Murchú, Ruairí. Ó Snodaigh, Aengus. Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán. Quaide, Liam. Quinlivan, Maurice. Rice, Pádraig. Sheehan, Conor. Smith, Duncan. Stanley, Brian. Tóibín, Peadar. Wall, Mark. Ward, Charles. Ward, Mark. Níl Aird, William. Ardagh, Catherine. Boland, Grace. Brabazon, Tom. Brennan, Brian. Brennan, Shay. Brophy, Colm. Browne, James. Burke, Colm. Burke, Peter. Butler, Mary. Butterly, Paula. Buttimer, Jerry. Byrne, Malcolm. Byrne, Thomas. Cahill, Michael. Callaghan, Catherine. Calleary, Dara. Canney, Seán. Carrigy, Micheál. Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer. Chambers, Jack. Cleere, Peter 'Chap'. Clendennen, John. Collins, Niall. Connolly, John. Cooney, Joe. Cummins, John. Currie, Emer. Dempsey, Aisling. Devlin, Cormac. Dillon, Alan. Dolan, Albert. Dooley, Timmy. Feighan, Frankie. Fleming, Seán. Foley, Norma. Gallagher, Pat the Cope. Geoghegan, James. Grealish, Noel. Harkin, Marian. Harris, Simon. Healy-Rae, Michael. Heneghan, Barry. Heydon, Martin. Higgins, Emer. Keogh, Keira. Lahart, John. Lawless, James. Lowry, Michael. Maxwell, David. McAuliffe, Paul. McCarthy, Noel. McConalogue, Charlie. McCormack, Tony. McEntee, Helen. McGrath, Mattie. McGrath, Séamus. McGreehan,

Erin.McGuinness, John.Moran, Kevin.Boxer.Moynihan, Aindrias.Moynihan, Michael.Moynihan, Shane.Murphy, Michael.Naughton, Hildegard.Neville, Joe.O'Brien, Darragh.O'Callaghan, Jim.O'Connell, Maeve.O'Dea, Willie.O'Donnell, Kieran.O'Donovan, Patrick.O'Meara, Ryan.O'Shea, John.Paul.O'Sullivan, Christopher.O'Sullivan, Pádraig.Ó Cearúil, Naoise.Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.Ó Muirí, Naoise.Richmond, Neale.Roche, Peter.Smith, Brendan.Timmins, Edward.Toole, Gillian.Troy, Robert.Ward, Barry.Staon

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Eoin Ó Broin and Pádraig Mac Lochlainn; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Amendment declared lost.

**Deputy Conor Sheehan:** I move amendment No. 2:

In page 3, to delete line 22 and substitute the following:

“December 2025”,

and

(c) by the insertion of the following subsection after subsection (6):

“(7) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, rent payable under the tenancy of a dwelling shall not be increased during the relevant period.”.”.

Amendment put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 66; Níl, 87; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Ahern, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Aird, William.</i>	
<i>Bacik, Ivana.</i>	<i>Ardagh, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Bennett, Cathy.</i>	<i>Boland, Grace.</i>	
<i>Brady, John.</i>	<i>Brabazon, Tom.</i>	
<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	<i>Brennan, Brian.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Joanna.</i>	<i>Brennan, Shay.</i>	
<i>Carthy, Matt.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	
<i>Clarke, Sorca.</i>	<i>Browne, James.</i>	
<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	<i>Burke, Colm.</i>	
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	
<i>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i>	<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	
<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>	<i>Butterly, Paula.</i>	
<i>Cronin, Réada.</i>	<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>	
<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	<i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i>	
<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Cummins, Jen.</i>	<i>Cahill, Michael.</i>	
<i>Devine, Máire.</i>	<i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	
<i>Donnelly, Paul.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	<i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i>	

<i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i>	<i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i>	
<i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	
<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	<i>Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.</i>	
<i>Gannon, Gary.</i>	<i>Clendennen, John.</i>	
<i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	
<i>Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.</i>	<i>Connolly, John.</i>	
<i>Gould, Thomas.</i>	<i>Cooney, Joe.</i>	
<i>Graves, Ann.</i>	<i>Cummins, John.</i>	
<i>Guirke, Johnny.</i>	<i>Currie, Emer.</i>	
<i>Hearne, Rory.</i>	<i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i>	
<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	<i>Devlin, Cormac.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i>	<i>Dillon, Alan.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	<i>Dolan, Albert.</i>	
<i>Kerrane, Claire.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	
<i>Lawless, Paul.</i>	<i>Feighan, Frankie.</i>	
<i>Lawlor, George.</i>	<i>Fleming, Seán.</i>	
<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>	<i>Foley, Norma.</i>	
<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	<i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i>	
<i>McGettigan, Donna.</i>	<i>Geoghegan, James.</i>	
<i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	
<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	<i>Harkin, Marian.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	
<i>Mythen, Johnny.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>	
<i>Nash, Ged.</i>	<i>Heneghan, Barry.</i>	
<i>Newsome Drennan, Natasha.</i>	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	
<i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i>	<i>Higgins, Emer.</i>	
<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	<i>Keogh, Keira.</i>	
<i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</i>	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
<i>O'Hara, Louis.</i>	<i>Lawless, James.</i>	
<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	
<i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i>	<i>Maxwell, David.</i>	
<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	<i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i>	
<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	<i>McCarthy, Noel.</i>	
<i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	<i>McCormack, Tony.</i>	
<i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i>	<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	
<i>Quaide, Liam.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	<i>McGrath, Séamus.</i>	
<i>Rice, Pádraig.</i>	<i>McGreehan, Erin.</i>	
<i>Sheehan, Conor.</i>	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	
<i>Smith, Duncan.</i>	<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	
<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	



<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	
<i>Wall, Mark.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Shane.</i>	
<i>Ward, Charles.</i>	<i>Murphy, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ward, Mark.</i>	<i>Naughton, Hildegard.</i>	
	<i>Neville, Joe.</i>	
	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>	
	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	
	<i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i>	
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
	<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>	
	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
	<i>O'Meara, Ryan.</i>	
	<i>O'Shea, John Paul.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Christopher.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Pádraig.</i>	
	<i>Ó Cearúil, Naoise.</i>	
	<i>Ó Fearghail, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Ó Muirí, Naoise.</i>	
	<i>Richmond, Neale.</i>	
	<i>Roche, Peter.</i>	
	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Timmins, Edward.</i>	
	<i>Toole, Gillian.</i>	
	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>	
	<i>Ward, Barry.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Conor Sheehan and Duncan Smith; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Amendment declared lost.

Section 2 agreed to.

### SECTION 3

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Amendments Nos. 3 to 5, inclusive, and amendment No. 8 are related and may be discussed together by agreement. Is that agreed? Agreed.

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** I move amendment No. 3:

In page 3, line 25, to delete “28 February 2026” and substitute “23 June 2028”.

The amendments in this group are straightforward. They are connected to the amendment No. 1, the purpose of which was to ensure that rent could not be set above zero, effectively giving rise to a ban on rent increases. This was to change the principal Act and the amending legislation in order that the ban would last for three years. As I articulated on Second Stage and while speaking on the first group of amendments this evening, our view is that renters are paying rents that are too high and that we need an emergency ban on rent increases. That should be for a period of three years. Crucially, and contrary to the misrepresentation by the Minister earlier, it is not a question of doing this and nothing else. It is to create space, in particular breathing space for renters while better policies and investment measures for increasing social and genuinely affordable rental and purchase, but also for large-scale private sector investment for good quality homes in every county in the State for working people to buy, could be delivered. On that basis, I commend amendment No. 3 to the House.

**Deputy Conor Sheehan:** I support the amendment. This is something we have called for since my colleague Deputy Bacik introduced her renters' rights Bill in 2021. The provision of a three-year rent freeze is contained within that Bill. We believe that a three-year rent freeze is prudent and necessary in order to create space, particularly in view of how much rents have risen in the past decade.

**Deputy Thomas Gould:** I support the amendment. There has been a call for a rent freeze for renters. People need it. There is a choice. I was on a show on RTÉ earlier. The Minister has a choice. He can support renters or he can support big business, but he cannot do both. The Government must make a decision. The Minister's argument relates to how we are going to get private money in to develop more houses and apartments. How are we going to stop more people from becoming homeless? How are we going to help more people to keep a roof over their heads? Where is the priority? To me, the priority is to ensure that we do not see any more people - families and children - becoming homeless by having a three-year rent freeze. This would give some support and protection to them.

**Deputy James Browne:** I cannot accept amendments Nos. 3 to 5, inclusive, and 8, which appear to have the aim of extending the operation of rent pressure zones to 23 June 2028. As Members are aware, on 10 June last, the Government approved policy measures to provide for the enhancement of rent controls and tenancy protections from 1 March 2026. Last week, the Government also approved, as an interim measure, the provision of a two-month extension of rent pressure zones and the deeming of all areas of the country as a rent pressure zone from the day after the passing of this Bill until 28 February 2026 when the general legislation will commence. Accordingly, there is no apparent reason for the Sinn Féin amendments to cover the period until 23 Jun 2028, as new national rent controls will come into operation on 1 March 2026 and upon the expiry of RPZs. The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill 2025 will protect tenants in non-RPZs who have not had their rent reviewed in the past 24 months from high rent inflation during the period from the day after the Bill passes to 28 February 2026. The Government intends to seek the early signing of this Bill into law by President Higgins and it is important for all tenants to be protected as soon as possible under the current rent increase restrictions that apply in rent pressure zones. The Government will introduce a more comprehensive Bill as soon as possible to give effect to the enduring policy measures announced last week to provide for the enhancement of rent controls and tenancy protections for new tenancies created.

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** One of the issues the Minister did not respond to at the closing of his Second Stage speech was raised by his Government colleague Deputy Carrigy and I. One of the consequences of extending the rent pressure zones to areas currently not designated is

that, theoretically speaking, Eoghan Murphy's 2019 short-term letting regulations would apply. Obviously, the Government has decided to take a different course, which is Peter Burke's short-term letting register, and the Minister, Deputy Browne, and his officials will produce new planning guidelines to go along with those. One assumes that will make a distinction between areas that are currently designated rent pressure zones, where there is a very high demand for rental properties and the need to take a very tough line on unregulated short-term letting, and a more flexible approach that will allow local authorities to have more discretion to ensure a balance between the tourism economy and long-term housing need. Given the fact that there are a lot of people engaged in the provision of tourism products in those rural countryside, high-tourism areas, who will be looking at this, I invite the Minister to use his response to clarify whether it is his intention to seek the application of Eoghan Murphy's 2019 short-term letting regulations to the areas that are coming in to the RPZs. We know that is not going to work anyway because those regulations are unenforceable. If that is not the intention, which I presume is the case because the Minister is working with his colleague, the Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, Deputy Burke, some clarification here or communicated to the local authorities would be reassuring for people. We all accept that there has to be regulation of short-term letting in high-demand urban areas as well as rural countryside areas, but what I have outlined is one of the consequences of the rushed nature of this legislation. Therefore, I am not inviting the Minister to continue arguing with me about a three-year rent freeze, as we do not agree on that, but it would be valuable for him to clarify what his view is of the application of the 2019 short-term letting regulations on these new areas the day after this comes into effect until the short-term letting register and consequent planning guidance is issued by his Department.

**Deputy James Browne:** This is not an issue on this amendment, and the Deputy is at pains to look concerned but has not expressed his own opinion on it. We are not surprised there. The rent pressure zones-----

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** To be very clear, my view is that the Eoghan Murphy 2019 regulations should not be applied because, first, they are unenforceable and, second, the Government and the Opposition are currently working on a mechanism to do that. Therefore, I am inviting the Minister to say that they will not be applied.

**Deputy James Browne:** I welcome the clarification. Rent pressure zones have been extended to new areas again and again since 2019. On every one of those occasions, short-term lets have been brought in with them. That is the law at the moment and that is how the law will continue.

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** That is factually not the case. In fact, in the original rent pressure zones of Dublin and Cork, and also in the successive waves of rent pressure zones, those short-term lets operating outside of planning law continue to operate outside of planning law. The reason for this - the Minister was not responsible for it - is that Eoghan Murphy did not put any effective enforcement mechanism into the 2019 regulations. Dublin city and Cork city attempted, very valiantly, to enforce the 2019 regulations but, unfortunately, because the burden of proof is so high when one goes into court, which is what ultimately had to happen, they were not able to proceed. Whatever one's view of short-term letting in urban and rural areas is, that has created a situation right across the country where, in the overwhelming majority of cases, short-term lets are operating outside of planning law. It is not a bad idea for the Government to introduce a register, subject to the details. It is not a bad idea for the Government to have a twin-track approach on the planning side by differentiating areas of high housing demand versus areas where there is a requirement for tourist accommodation. I would like to see the

details of all of that. In the interim, a change is being made and the Minister seems to be suggesting that, from the day after this Bill passes, he is expecting local authorities to enforce the 2019 short-term letting regulations in the new areas coming under the RPZ rules. That is not possible. They are unenforceable. It would be better if we were just honest with people and dealt with short-term letting through Peter Burke's legislation and the Minister's new planning rules. I am just unclear what the Minister thinks will actually happen in that respect after this Bill passes.

**Deputy James Browne:** I want to be clear. After a week and a half of Deputy Ó Broin complaining about there being too many tracks in this legislation and too many different applications, he is now calling for a new track to create a geographical difference between rent pressure zones that have been extended to date where short-term lets are affected and extending it now to where they would not be affected. The Deputy needs to listen to what he is talking about. After a week of giving out about too much complexity and tracks, he wants a new one introduced. That is what he is calling for now.

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** That is not the proposal. I am asking for the Minister to clarify his position on it. That is all. It is a reasonable request. His own Government colleague from Fine Gael, Deputy Carrigy, the Chair of the housing committee, asked for the Minister to clarify and he ignored him as well as me.

**Deputy James Browne:** The Deputy is now calling for more exceptions, more tracks-----

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** That is not what I am calling for.

**Deputy James Browne:** -----and more differentiation. After the past week, it is extraordinary that he would call for more exemptions.

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** Just to be very clear, I am not calling for any legislative change. A set of regulations were introduced in 2019 that do not work and are completely unapplicable. That is why in Dublin, for example, where we need a very tough approach to unregulated short-term letting, we need new regulations. We have been calling for that for a long time. All I am asking the Minister to do is clarify his intentions, but it is clear. He seems to be suggesting he will expect local authorities to enforce a set of 2019 regulations that are utterly unenforceable. All I was asking for was clarity. I am not proposing any change to the legislation. Given it is a matter that many Government members of the housing committee raised, I was inviting the Minister as a courtesy to clarify it. Instead, he has decided to go off on some track to try to misrepresent the Opposition once again. That is his prerogative. It is an issue that, because of the rushed nature of this, he gave no consideration to. When we ask for clarification, he refuses to provide it, but that is the Minister's prerogative.

Amendment put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 67; Níl, 87; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Ahern, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Aird, William.</i>	
<i>Bacik, Ivana.</i>	<i>Ardagh, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Bennett, Cathy.</i>	<i>Boland, Grace.</i>	
<i>Brady, John.</i>	<i>Brabazon, Tom.</i>	
<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	<i>Brennan, Brian.</i>	

<i>Byrne, Joanna.</i>	<i>Brennan, Shay.</i>	
<i>Carthy, Matt.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	
<i>Clarke, Sorca.</i>	<i>Browne, James.</i>	
<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	<i>Burke, Colm.</i>	
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	
<i>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i>	<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	
<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>	<i>Butterly, Paula.</i>	
<i>Cronin, Réada.</i>	<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>	
<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	<i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i>	
<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Cummins, Jen.</i>	<i>Cahill, Michael.</i>	
<i>Devine, Máire.</i>	<i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	
<i>Donnelly, Paul.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	<i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i>	
<i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i>	<i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i>	
<i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	
<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	<i>Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.</i>	
<i>Gannon, Gary.</i>	<i>Clendennen, John.</i>	
<i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	
<i>Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.</i>	<i>Connolly, John.</i>	
<i>Gould, Thomas.</i>	<i>Cooney, Joe.</i>	
<i>Graves, Ann.</i>	<i>Cummins, John.</i>	
<i>Guirke, Johnny.</i>	<i>Currie, Emer.</i>	
<i>Hearne, Rory.</i>	<i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i>	
<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	<i>Devlin, Cormac.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i>	<i>Dillon, Alan.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	<i>Dolan, Albert.</i>	
<i>Kerrane, Claire.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	
<i>Lawless, Paul.</i>	<i>Feighan, Frankie.</i>	
<i>Lawlor, George.</i>	<i>Fleming, Seán.</i>	
<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>	<i>Foley, Norma.</i>	
<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	<i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i>	
<i>McGettigan, Donna.</i>	<i>Geoghegan, James.</i>	
<i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	
<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	<i>Harkin, Marian.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	
<i>Mythen, Johnny.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>	
<i>Nash, Ged.</i>	<i>Heneghan, Barry.</i>	
<i>Newsome Drennan, Nata-sha.</i>	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	
<i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i>	<i>Higgins, Emer.</i>	
<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	<i>Keogh, Keira.</i>	



18 June 2025

<i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</i>	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
<i>O'Flynn, Ken.</i>	<i>Lawless, James.</i>	
<i>O'Hara, Louis.</i>	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	
<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	<i>Maxwell, David.</i>	
<i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i>	<i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i>	
<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	<i>McCarthy, Noel.</i>	
<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	
<i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i>	<i>McCormack, Tony.</i>	
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	
<i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
<i>Quaide, Liam.</i>	<i>McGrath, Séamus.</i>	
<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	<i>McGreehan, Erin.</i>	
<i>Rice, Pádraig.</i>	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	
<i>Sheehan, Conor.</i>	<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	
<i>Smith, Duncan.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	
<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	
<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Shane.</i>	
<i>Wall, Mark.</i>	<i>Murphy, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ward, Charles.</i>	<i>Naughton, Hildegard.</i>	
<i>Ward, Mark.</i>	<i>Neville, Joe.</i>	
	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>	
	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	
	<i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i>	
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
	<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>	
	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
	<i>O'Meara, Ryan.</i>	
	<i>O'Shea, John Paul.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Christopher.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Pádraig.</i>	
	<i>Ó Cearúil, Naoise.</i>	
	<i>Ó Fearghail, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Ó Muirí, Naoise.</i>	
	<i>Richmond, Neale.</i>	
	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>	
	<i>Timmins, Edward.</i>	
	<i>Toole, Gillian.</i>	
	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>	
	<i>Ward, Barry.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Eoin Ó Broin and Pádraig Mac Lochlainn; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler

and Emer Currie.

Amendment declared lost.

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** I move amendment No. 4:

In page 3, line 27, to delete “28 February 2026” and substitute “23 June 2028”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** I move amendment No. 5:

In page 4, line 11, to delete “28 February 2026” and substitute “23 June 2028”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Section 3 agreed to.

#### SECTION 4

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Amendments Nos. 6 and 7 in the name of Deputy Sheehan have been ruled out of order as they are not within the scope of the Bill.

Amendments Nos. 6 and 7 not moved.

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** I move amendment No. 8:

In page 4, line 14, to delete “28 February 2026” and substitute “23 June 2028”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Section 4 agreed to.

#### NEW SECTION

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** I move amendment No. 9:

In page 4, between lines 14 and 15, to insert the following:

##### **“Report on ban on rent increases**

**5.** Within a week of the passing of this Bill the Minister for Housing will publish a report on the introduction of an emergency ban on rent increases for all private rental tenants, including existing tenancies, new tenancies in existing rental stock and new tenancies in new rental stock.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Section 5 agreed to.

Title agreed to.

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Bill reported without amendment, received for final consideration and passed.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The Bill will now be sent to the Seanad.

*7 o'clock*

Mental Health Bill 2024: Committee Stage (Resumed)

#### SECTION 43

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler):** I move amendment No. 132:

In page 57, lines 17 and 18, to delete “ (in this Chapter referred to as “information relevant to the decision”)”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 133:

In page 57, to delete line 21 and substitute the following:

“(2) Subject to *Sections 47, 49 and 50*, a person may, at any time do either or both of the following:

- (a) refuse any treatment proposed to him or her;
- (b) withdraw his or her consent to any treatment.”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 134:

In page 57, between lines 27 and 28, to insert the following:

“(5) Each consent to or refusal of treatment under this Chapter shall be made in relation to the specific treatment proposed a person shall not make a decision that has the effect (whether intentional or otherwise) of providing general consent to or, as the case may be, general refusal to consent to all forms of treatment without considering each specific treatment proposed.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 43, as amended, agreed to.

Section 44 deleted.

#### SECTION 45

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 135:

In page 58, line 18, to delete “consent to, or to refuse, treatment, the consultant psychiatrist” and substitute “consent to or refuse treatment, the responsible consultant psychiatrist”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 136:

In page 58, line 19, to delete “a second” and substitute “another”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 137:

In page 58, line 29, after “of” to insert “a capacity assessment under *subsection (1)*, or”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 138:

In page 58, line 32, after “to” to insert “or refuse”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 45, as amended, agreed to.

## NEW SECTIONS

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 139:

In page 58, after line 40, to insert the following:

### **“Treatment of persons lacking capacity to consent, or otherwise, under *Chapter 3***

(1) Where, prior to his or her involuntary admission or following an application under *Section 48*, an involuntarily admitted person is declared under Part 5 of the Act of 2015 to lack capacity to consent to or refuse a proposed treatment, the treatment may be administered to him or her if—

(a) in a case where there is a decision-making representative duly authorised by the Circuit Court to make decisions relevant to the person’s mental health-care and treatment, the decision-making representative concerned consents to the treatment proposed in accordance with the Act of 2015, and

(b) in a case where the Circuit Court has made a decision-making order under *Section 38* of the Act of 2015, the order of the Court provides for consent to the specific treatment proposed.

(2) Where an involuntarily admitted person has been assessed to lack capacity to give consent to or refuse treatment under *Section 45* and there is a valid advance healthcare directive in place in respect of the person, which is relevant to the specific treatment proposed, the treatment may be administered to him or her if a provision of the directive, or a designated healthcare representative duly authorised under the directive, provides for consent to the specific treatment proposed.

(3) A decision-making representative or a designated healthcare representative duly authorised to represent an involuntarily admitted person in respect of that person’s mental healthcare and treatment shall perform his or her functions in accordance with the Act of 2015.

(4) Where an involuntary admitted person has been assessed to lack capacity to give consent to or refuse treatment under *Section 45* and *subsection (1)* and *(2)* do not apply, treatment may be administered to him or her in accordance with *Section 47, 48* or *49*, as the case may be.

(5) Where treatment is administered to an involuntarily admitted person without consent under this Chapter, the absence of consent and details of the treatment or treatments shall be noted in the medical record of the person.”.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** This section has been deleted by way of Committee Stage amendment and instead has been placed into the new section 48.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I am not sure whether this was a genuine oversight, but amendment No. 140’s subsection (3)(a) references “A responsible consultant psychiatrist”. However, under the section of the interpretation No. 2, in the Bill in the area that deals with discharge No. 4 under No. 41, refusal of treatment No. 50, section 91, it also refers to the multidisciplinary team-----

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I am sorry, but which section did the Deputy mention? We are on-----

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I am discussing amendment No. 140.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** We are only on section 46 now.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** We are dealing with amendment No. 139.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** My apologies. For once, I am ahead of schedule.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Acceptance of amendment No. 139 involves the deletion of section 46 of the Bill. It was already discussed with amendment No. 131.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 140:

In page 58, after line 40, to insert the following:

**“Administration of treatment following admission**

(1) Subject to *subsections (2), (3), (4), (5)* and *(8)*, where, following the making of an involuntary admission order—

(a) a person is assessed under *Section 45* as lacking capacity to consent to or refuse treatment, or

(b) a capacity assessment or a second capacity assessment is being carried out under *Section 45*, but that assessment has not been completed,

treatment may be administered to the person concerned for a period not exceeding 21 days from the date of making of the involuntary admission order (in this Chapter referred to as the “initial treatment period”).

(2) Treatment may be administered to a person under *subsection (1)* where—



(a) such treatment is immediately necessary for the protection of life of the person or that of another person,

(b) such treatment is necessary for protection from an immediate and serious threat to the health of the person, or that of another person, or

(c) the person has a mental disorder, the nature and degree of which is such that—

(i) he or she requires treatment immediately,

(ii) the treatment required to be given to the person cannot be given to that person other than in a registered acute mental health centre, and

(iii) the treatment of the person concerned would be likely to benefit the condition of that person,

and there is no alternative safe and effective treatment available.

(3) A responsible consultant psychiatrist may extend an initial treatment period for a further period not exceeding 21 days (in this Chapter referred to as a “further treatment period”), commencing on the date of the expiration of the initial treatment period, if—

(a) he or she is of the opinion that the criteria in *subsection (2)* continue to apply in respect of the involuntarily admitted person, and

(b) in advance of the expiration of the initial treatment period, another consultant psychiatrist who is not involved in the care or treatment of the involuntarily admitted person confirms, in a form and manner specified by the Commission, that he or she is also of the opinion that the criteria in *subsection (2)* continue to apply in respect of that person.

(4) Where there is—

(a) a decision-making representative appointed under the Act of 2015 duly authorised to make decisions relevant to an involuntarily admitted person’s mental healthcare and treatment, or

(b) a valid advance healthcare directive in respect of an involuntarily admitted person which is relevant to the specific treatment,

treatment under this Section may only be administered to that person in accordance with *Section 46(1)* or *(2)*, as the case may be.

(5) Treatment may be administered to an involuntarily admitted person under *subsection (1)* or *(3)* until such time, whichever is the sooner, as any of the following occurs, upon which any initial treatment period or further treatment period shall cease:

(a) the person is assessed to have capacity to consent to or refuse treatment under *Section 45*;

- (b) an application is made to the Circuit Court under *Section 48*;
- (c) the person is discharged as an involuntarily admitted person;
- (d) the responsible consultant psychiatrist discontinues the treatment;
- (e) the expiry of the initial treatment period or further treatment period.

(6) Where *Section 48* applies and a person is receiving treatment under *subsection (1)* or *(3)*, the application referred to in *Section 48* shall be made by the responsible consultant psychiatrist before the expiry of the initial treatment period or further treatment period, as the case may be.

(7) Where a responsible consultant psychiatrist proposes to administer treatment to a person beyond the initial treatment period or any further treatment period, such treatment may only be administered in accordance with *Section 43, 46, 49 or 50* as the case may be.

(8) A reference to treatment administered under *subsection (1)* shall not include treatment administered under *Section 51*.”.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I am unsure if this is a genuine error. Under amendment 140, section 47(3)(a) references “A responsible consultant psychiatrist may extend an initial treatment period”. However, under section 2 on interpretations, the area that deals with discharge under section 41, refusal of treatment under section 50, where the Bill proceeds to speak about children - section 91 under care plans - and sections 180, 181 and 197, it also references multidisciplinary teams. I wonder why it is not included here, also. Is there a reason for the presence of a multidisciplinary team? The Bill talks about it being there at the assessment for the psychosocial assessment, it talks about it for an adult and for a child, but when it comes to this section - extending the initial treatment period - it is not included. When it comes to the review, it is likewise not included. There is a gap. Why would it be referenced at the beginning, and when a person is being discharged, but why not have it in the centre when a review is being carried out?

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I am a little thrown. I believe we have already discussed amendment No. 140 under amendments Nos. 136 to 146. I stand open to correction. Perhaps we have not.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Amendment No. 140 has already been discussed with amendment No. 131.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** We have already discussed amendment No. 140. We discussed amendments Nos. 131 to 134 and Nos. 136 to 146.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I will raise the matter again as we get to other sections of the Bill.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I will try to respond to the Deputy then. I am somewhat trí na chéile trying to find the right section.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 141:

In page 58, after line 40, to insert the following:

**“Application to Circuit Court in certain circumstances**

48. Where an involuntarily admitted person has been assessed as lacking capacity to consent to or refuse a proposed treatment under *Section 45* and there is not—

(a) a decision-making representative appointed under the Act of 2015 duly authorised to make decisions relevant to the person’s mental healthcare and treatment,

(b) a valid advance healthcare directive in respect of the person which is relevant to the specific treatment proposed, or

(c) a decision-making order made by the Circuit Court under Section 38 of the Act of 2015 which is relevant to the specific treatment proposed,

an application shall be made by or on behalf of the responsible consultant psychiatrist to the Circuit Court under Part 5 of the Act of 2015 prior to any treatment, other than treatment provided under *Section 47, 49 or 50*, being provided to the involuntarily admitted person.”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 142:

In page 58, after line 40, to insert the following:

**“Treatment without consent pending Circuit Court determination**

49. (1) Without prejudice to the generality of *Section 43*, treatment specified in *subsection (2)*, may be given to the involuntarily admitted person concerned where—

(a) an application has been made to the Circuit Court in relation to an involuntarily admitted person under *Section 48* but no determination has yet been made in relation to the application, or

(b) after the initial treatment period and any further treatment period, a capacity assessment or a second capacity assessment is being carried out under *Section 45* but an application to the Circuit Court under *Section 48* has not yet been made.

(2) Treatment may be administered to a person under *subsection (1)* where—

(a) such treatment is immediately necessary for the protection of life of the person or that of another person,

(b) such treatment is necessary for protection from an immediate and serious threat to the health of the person, or that of another person, or

(c) the person has a mental disorder, the nature and degree of which is such that—

(i) he or she requires treatment immediately,

(ii) the treatment required to be given to the person cannot be given to that person other than in a registered acute mental health centre, and

(iii) the treatment of the person concerned would be likely to benefit the condition of that person,

and there is no alternative safe and effective treatment available.

(3) A reference to treatment administered under *subsection (1)* shall not include treatment administered under *Section 51*.

(4) Subject to *subsection (5)*, the continued administration of treatment to an involuntarily admitted person under this Section shall be—

(a) reviewed every 3 months by a consultant psychiatrist who is not involved in the care and treatment of the involuntarily admitted person concerned, and

(b) where that consultant psychiatrist is of the opinion that the criteria in *subsection (2)* continue to apply, approved in a form and manner specified by the Commission.

(5) Treatment may be administered to an involuntarily admitted person under this Section until such time, whichever is sooner, as any of the following occurs:

(a) the Circuit Court makes a determination under Part 5 of the Act of 2015 in relation to an application under *Section 48*;

(b) the person is discharged as an involuntarily admitted person;

(c) the responsible consultant psychiatrist discontinues the treatment;

(d) the person is assessed to have capacity to consent to or refuse treatment under *Section 45*.”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 143:

In page 58, after line 40, to insert the following:

**“Application to High Court for treatment order in certain circumstances\***

50. (1) Where treatment cannot be administered to an involuntarily admitted person because the person—

(a) has capacity to make decisions about his or her treatment but refuses to consent to the treatment concerned, or

(b) has a relevant decision-making representative, or has a valid and relevant advance healthcare directive or a relevant designated healthcare representative appointed under an advance healthcare directive relevant to the treatment concerned and that representative refuses to consent to the treatment concerned or the advance healthcare directive specifies that there is not consent to the treatment concerned,

an application may be made by or on behalf of the responsible consultant psychiatrist to the High Court specifying the proposed treatment and seeking an order

to administer the treatment concerned to the person (in this Section referred to as a “treatment order”) where all of the following apply, namely:

(i) the treatment concerned is immediately necessary for the protection of life of another person or persons, or necessary for protection from an immediate and serious threat to the health of another person or persons;

(ii) the involuntarily admitted person requires the treatment concerned immediately;

(iii) there is no alternative safe and effective treatment available;

(iv) it is likely that the condition of the involuntarily admitted person will benefit from such treatment.

(2) A refusal to consent to the treatment referred to in *subsection (1)* may be withdrawn at any time, and any application made to the High Court under that subsection may be withdrawn, where—

(a) the person has capacity and decides to withdraw his or her refusal and to now consent to the treatment,

(b) the decision-making representative withdraws his or her refusal to consent to the treatment and now consents to the treatment, or

(c) the relevant designated healthcare representative appointed under a valid and relevant advance healthcare directive has authority within the appointing directive to do so, he or she determines that it is now the will and preference of the person that the refusal be withdrawn and treatment be consented to.

(3) Where an application for a treatment order is before the High Court, the Court may, pending its determination on the application, of its own motion or on the application of any person, give such interim directions as it sees fit as to the care and treatment of the person who is the subject of the application but any such direction shall cease to have effect immediately on the determination by the Court of the application before it.

(4) An application may be made by or on behalf of the responsible consultant psychiatrist

to the High Court to renew a treatment order made under this Section, subject to any directions of the Court, where the involuntarily admitted person the subject of the treatment order continues to satisfy the criteria in *subsection (1)*.

(5) Where an application to the High Court has been made under *subsection (1)* or (4), treatment may be administered to the involuntarily admitted person prior to the hearing of the application, for a period of 72 hours after its initiation or until the hearing of the application by the High Court, whichever is sooner, where, in the opinion of the responsible consultant psychiatrist, the person the subject of the application meets all of the criteria set out in *subparagraphs (i) to (iv) of subsection (1)(b)*.



(6) A treatment order shall, subject to any directions of the High Court, have effect for period not exceeding 3 months.

(7) An application to the High Court made under *subsection (1)* or *(4)* shall be deemed to be withdrawn where the involuntarily admitted person concerned is no longer subject to an involuntary admission order or renewal order under this Act.”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 144:

In page 58, after line 40, to insert the following:

**“Electro-convulsive therapy**

(1) Subject to *subsection (2)*, electro-convulsive therapy shall not be administered to a person unless he or she gives consent in writing to the administration of the therapy.

(2) Where the person has been found to lack capacity to give consent to a proposed treatment under *Section 45*, then the provisions of *Section 46* shall apply.

(3) The Commission shall, with the consent of the Minister, following consultation with the Minister and the Minister for Justice, make regulations providing for the use of electro-convulsive therapy in a registered acute mental health centre or a designated centre.

(4) In particular, but without prejudice to the generality of *subsection (3)*, regulations under *subsection (3)* may provide for any or all of the following matters:

(a) the administration of electro-convulsive therapy, including using the therapy with dignity and respect for the person;

(b) assessment of persons prior to the administration of electro-convulsive therapy;

(c) the interaction of the administration of electro-convulsive therapy and the guiding principles;

(d) the records to be maintained in relation to the administering of electro-convulsive therapy to a person;

(e) facilities and staff to be provided in a registered acute mental health centre or designated centre for the use of electro-convulsive therapy;

(f) the training and experience of relevant health professionals or specified persons who are administering electro-convulsive therapy;

(g) clinical governance of the use of electro-convulsive therapy, including written policies by a registered acute mental health centre or designated centre on the use of electro-convulsive therapy;

(h) communication with a nominated person regarding the use of electro-convulsive therapy;

(i) any other matters which are necessary or expedient for the purposes of giving effect to *subsection (3)*.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 46 deleted.

Section 47 deleted.

## NEW SECTION

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I move amendment No. 145:

In page 60, between lines 14 and 15, to insert the following:

### **“Safeguards for Treatment Without Consent**

(1) No person shall be administered treatment without their consent unless a formal capacity assessment has been completed and the person has been found to lack the capacity to consent to the treatment in question, in accordance with the provisions of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015.

(2) An exception to *subsection (1)* shall apply only in circumstances of emergency, where such treatment is—

(a) immediately necessary for the protection of life of the person or that of another person, or

(b) necessary for protection from an immediate and serious threat to the health of the person, or that of another person,

and where no safe and effective alternative treatment is available.

(3) Where a person is deemed temporarily unable to participate in a capacity assessment due to their mental or physical condition, this shall not be presumed to indicate a lack of capacity and in such cases:

(a) the reasons why a capacity assessment could not be completed must be clearly recorded in the person’s medical file;

(b) a formal capacity assessment shall be conducted as soon as practicable, and in all cases within 24 hours of the administration of treatment;

(c) the person shall be supported to participate in the assessment as soon as they are able, in accordance with their rights under the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015.

(4) The Mental Health Commission shall establish procedures for independent auditing and review of all instances where treatment is administered without consent and before a capacity assessment is completed and this review shall consider:

(a) compliance with time limits;

(b) documentation of rationale;

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(c) involvement of independent advocacy where applicable;

(d) steps taken to support the person's participation.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I move amendment No. 146:

In page 60, line 17, to delete “unless” and substitute “except after having considered all viable alternatives and”.

Amendment put and declared lost

Sections 48 to 51, inclusive, deleted.

## SECTION 52

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Amendments Nos. 147 to 150, inclusive, 152 to 156, inclusive, 189 to 191, inclusive, 193, 194, 196, 197 and 199 are related and may be discussed together.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 147:

In page 63, line 29, after “after” to insert “the initiation of”.

I do not intend to support amendment No. 148. I believe it is unnecessary because section 56 already states that a restrictive practice cannot be applied except in accordance with that section and regulations made under section 57. Just for that reason; it is already there.

I cannot accept amendment No. 149 following discussion with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel. “In the care of” is used 11 times in the Bill already. Seclusion and restraint are some of the most serious infringements on the bodily rights of a person and these provisions required extensive, careful consideration. “In the care of” is a term that is appropriate in this context. In the existing Mental Health Act, section 69 of the Act sets out very basic information regarding the use of seclusion and restraint. It states that the Mental Health Commission shall make rules in relation to seclusion and restraint, and any seclusion or restraint may only be applied if it has been determined “to be necessary for the purposes of treatment or to prevent the patient from injuring himself or herself or others and unless the seclusion or restraint complies with such rules.” The expert group review recommended that the use of restrictive practices be used only as a last resort, that provisions on restrictive practices include manual-physical restraint and all forms of seclusion, and that the provisions explicitly apply to the Central Mental Hospital.

Considering the serious infringement on the bodily rights of a person involved in the use of a restraint or seclusion, these provisions were subject to extended, comprehensive consultation between Department officials and legal advisers, as well as with the HSE and the Mental Health Commission. The view was taken that a significant additional number of provisions on the use of restrictive practices would need to be included in the Bill compared with the existing Act. The provisions on restrictive practices in the Bill are greatly enhanced and are much more comprehensive in protecting and vindicating the rights of people on whom a restrictive practice might be used. The new safeguards in the Bill include provisions related to the process of applying a restrictive practice, such as who can order it and who can apply it, and principles that underpin the application of a restrictive practice, including that it should only be for as short

a duration as possible, where there is no safe alternative and in rare and exceptional circumstances.

The Bill provides for the Mental Health Commission to make regulations in relation to the use of restrictive practices - it is really important that it is the Mental Health Commission that will make the regulations in relation to the use of restrictive practices - and for any use of a restrictive practice to comply with those regulations. The Bill also contains provisions in relation to the recording and notification of a restrictive practice. The Bill includes separate Chapters in relation to the use of restrictive practices for adults and for children.

The amendments I am moving in relation to restrictive practices do not make any significant changes to the provisions in the Bill as initiated. Amendments Nos. 147, 152, 153, 155, 156, 189, 190, 193, 196, 197 and 199 are mainly technical in nature. Amendments Nos. 150, 154, 156, 191 and 194 all provide for increased safeguards, such as the requirement that any use of a restrictive practice is deemed to be the least restrictive option available and that the commission is informed of each episode of a restrictive practice being applied.

Just to reiterate, the Mental Health Commission will make regulations in respect of the use of restrictive practices, for any use of a restrictive practice. The Bill provides that the commission be informed of each episode of a restrictive practice being applied.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I will speak on amendments Nos. 148 and 149. Amendment No. 148 sought to provide legal consistency throughout the Bill. The amendment sought to tie the provision directly to the safeguards already outlined in section 56, ensuring consistency and coherence throughout the legislation. It also sought to strengthen patient protections by explicitly linking actions to sections. It reinforces that any application of treatment must follow the existing rights-based procedures and conditions already established in said section.

Amendment No. 149 is intended to clarify the legal meaning, replacing “in care of” with “present in” to remove ambiguity and ensure that the provision applies to all individuals physically within the facility, regardless of their formal care status. It also seeks to close any potential loopholes insofar as the term “in the care of” could be interpreted narrowly, potentially excluding individuals temporarily in that facility, for example, during a transfer or for an assessment only. This amendment seeks to ensure full coverage. It also seeks to ensure safeguarding. Everyone present in a registered acute mental health centre should be subject to the same standards of protection and treatment oversight.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** We looked carefully at amendment No. 149. I had to take advice from the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel. Initially I thought that we would be able to accept it but “in the care of” is used 11 times in the Bill already. Seclusion and restraint, as the Deputy said, are some of the most serious infringements on bodily rights. Under careful consideration, the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel and the Attorney General felt that “in the care of”, after having been used 11 times in the Bill already, is a term that is appropriate in this context. That is the reason I am not accepting the amendment.

Amendment put and declared carried.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I move amendment No. 148:

In page 63, line 30, after “applied” to insert “in accordance with section 56 and”.

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Amendment put and declared lost.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I move amendment No. 149:

In page 63, lines 30 and 31, to delete “in the care of” and substitute “present in”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Section 52, as amended, agreed to.

Sections 53 to 55, inclusive, agreed to.

## SECTION 56

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 150:

In page 65, between lines 4 and 5, to insert the following:

“(c) where it is the least restrictive practice possible in the circumstances,”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 151:

In page 65, line 15, to delete “view” and substitute “opinion”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 152:

In page 65, line 18, to delete “registered acute mental health centre or designated centre” and substitute “registered proprietor of a registered acute mental health centre or designated centre”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 153:

In page 65, line 22, to delete “centre” and substitute “registered acute mental health centre or designated centre”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 154:

In page 65, between lines 33 and 34, to insert the following:

“(5) A registered proprietor of a registered acute mental health centre or designated centre shall ensure that the Commission is notified, in the form and manner specified by the Commission and within the period specified by the Commission, of each application of a restrictive practice in respect of a person in that registered acute mental health centre or designated centre concerned.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 56, as amended, agreed to.



*Dáil Éireann*  
SECTION 57

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 155:

In page 65, line 35, after “Minister,” to insert “and following consultation with the Minister and the Minister for Justice,”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 156:

In page 66, to delete lines 4 to 6 and substitute the following:

“(c) the interaction of the application of a restrictive practice and the guiding principles;”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 57, as amended, agreed to.

Section 58 agreed to.

SECTION 59

Question proposed: “That section 59 stand part of the Bill.”

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I inform the Deputies present that section 59 provides for the application of the relevant provisions of the Child Care Act 1991 to proceedings involving the courts in this Bill. I will move further amendments in this regard on Report Stage. I just wanted to flag this point.

Question put and agreed to.

SECTION 60

Question proposed: “That section 60 stand part of the Bill.”

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Amendment No. 157 has been ruled out of order.

Amendment No. 157 not moved.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I want to put on record my real disappointment that our proposed amendment No. 157 was ruled out of order. This was raised last Wednesday when we were here. Not only is it a missed opportunity to ensure this legislation is compliant with the requirements of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, but it is a breach of children’s rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to place them in an institution setting not tailored to their needs or capable of safeguarding their welfare. It is grossly inappropriate for any child to be in an adult facility receiving treatment simply because no space is available in a child centre due to the lack of resources or whatever. A child being in an adult psychiatric facility or an adult mental health facility is something we should be moving away from as a State urgently and with the utmost speed.

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** I echo Deputy Clarke’s points. The Minister of State said last week that it was important not to tie the hands of psychiatrists in this regard because they often have

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to make very difficult decisions at critical times and may not have a bed available in a CAMHS inpatient unit. This is a valid concern for a psychiatrist in that particular context. What we are doing here, however, is legislating for the continued under-resourcing of essential CAMHS inpatient beds. If we go ahead with this, we will be reinforcing a situation where we will be just accepting young people can be admitted inappropriately into adult placements. The very reason we are undertaking this legislation in the first place is to strengthen the rights of service users, including children. It would be very regrettable if this provision were to be included.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** We did speak about this aspect last week. I explained to Deputy Clarke, and she took on board, that that amendment was ruled out of order not by me but by the Bills Office. It is important to state that good progress has been made over many years. Last year, for example, five young people aged 17 plus were admitted, with the consent of their parents, to adult psychiatric wards for a short time. We are in June now, and two young people have been admitted so far this year. No consultant psychiatrist in the multidisciplinary team wants to do that but I cannot tie the hands of a consultant psychiatrist in a unique situation in real time. I have said that, I will continue to say it and if it was included in the Bill, I would stand over saying it. It could be 2 a.m. or 3 a.m. when a young person who may be self-harming or suicidal is in front of a consultant psychiatrist. We must consider such a situation in a context where the consultant psychiatrist was not in a position to offer supports overnight, with the support of that young person's parents. It is important to make this point. I want us to get to a situation where zero young people have to be in those circumstances.

It is disappointing, however, that Deputy Clarke would align one of her first comments with a lack of funding. The mental health budget has increased by 44% over the past five years. When I took office in 2020, the mental health budget was €985 million, while this year it is €1.5 billion and I will do more again in next year's budget. We have built on supports and services across Ireland incrementally year on year. In 2008, there were 247 admissions of children to adult units and there have been two so far this year. Every effort is being made to prevent that happening, but when you have to choose life over death by admitting a young person to a hospital because nothing else is available other than a place in an adult psychiatric ward, in a room of their own and being monitored 24-7 for a short space of time, I will pick life any day of the week.

Question put and agreed to.

Section 61 agreed to.

## SECTION 62

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 158:

In page 69, line 13, to delete "view" and substitute "opinion".

Amendment agreed to.

Section 62, as amended, agreed to.

Section 63 agreed to.

## SECTION 64

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** I move amendment No. 159:

In page 70, line 19, to delete “a mental disorder” and substitute “mental health difficulties”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** I move amendment No. 160:

In page 70, lines 25 and 26, to delete “mental disorder” and substitute “mental health difficulties”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** I move amendment No. 161:

In page 70, line 31, to delete “mental disorder” and substitute “mental health difficulties”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** I move amendment No. 162:

In page 70, line 33, to delete “a mental disorder” and substitute “mental health difficulties”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** I move amendment No. 163:

In page 71, line 4, to delete “a mental disorder” and substitute “mental health difficulties”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Section 64 agreed to.

## SECTION 65

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** I move amendment No. 164:

In page 71, line 17, to delete “a mental disorder” and substitute “mental health difficulties”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Amendment Nos. 165, 167 and 168 are related and may be discussed together.

**Deputy Marie Sherlock:** I move amendment No. 165:

In page 73, between lines 2 and 3, to insert the following:

“(10) Where an application is made to the District Court under *subsection (1)* for an order authorising the reception, detention, and care and treatment of a child in a registered acute mental health centre, the Executive shall report to the Court—

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(a) whether the centre concerned is age-appropriate for a child, and

(b) if not, whether a place is or may become available in a centre that is age-appropriate for a child,

the Court, of its own motion or on the application by any person, shall include such directions in its order as it considers necessary or expedient as to the reception, detention or transfer of the child in order to secure, in so far as is practicable, that the child receives care and treatment in an age-appropriate environment.”.

Amendment No. 165 relates to the age-appropriate environment for the care of the child, specifically when a child is detained. We are conscious that the Ombudsman for Children and Mental Health Reform are calling for an explicit prohibition on children being treated in adult facilities. We are also conscious of the misalignment in the ages that children age out of paediatric mental health services and paediatric physical health services. Children age out at 16 in physical health services and at the age of 18 in mental health services. There is a question about the appropriate physical accommodation, particularly for children aged 16 and 17.

At a committee meeting last week, we listened to the IMO raise issues about the appropriateness of 16- and 17-year-olds being cared for in a paediatric centre when their care may be more consistent with that of an adult rather than that of a child who is much younger. That is also relevant in cases where that 16- or 17-year-old may require a continuum of care right into adulthood. Nonetheless, it is not good enough that we have what one could call a haphazard system at the moment.

The number of children being looked after in adult facilities has gone way down and we welcome that. This amendment is designed to introduce the court as a sort of check and balance when those decisions are being made for children, particularly if they have to be put into adult facilities. In that regard, we believe it is important that the executive shall report to the court whether the centre is age appropriate for the child. If it is not age appropriate for that child, it shall report on whether a place may become available in a centre that is age appropriate. The executive must, in effect, report to the court in that regard and the court would then make a direction. I am conscious the Minister of State is supportive of this. I understand there are issues with our amendment. We are happy to work with the Minister of State on this amendment. I do not know whether it is appropriate now or later to say that we want to move and withdraw this amendment with the right to reintroduce it on Report Stage.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Section 65 agreed to.

## SECTION 66

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** I move amendment No. 166:

In page 73, line 25, to delete “a mental disorder” and substitute “mental health difficulties”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Section 66 agreed to.

Section 67 agreed to.

#### SECTION 68

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 167:

In page 74, between lines 37 and 38, to insert the following:

“(b) the Commission,”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 68, as amended, agreed to.

Section 69 agreed to.

#### SECTION 70

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 168:

In page 77, after line 42, to insert the following:

“(8) The Executive shall notify the Commission, in the form and manner specified by the Commission, of the decision to involuntarily admit or the decision not to involuntarily admit a child under this section.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 70, as amended, agreed to.

#### SECTION 71

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** I move amendment No. 169:

In page 78, line 3, to delete “a mental disorder” and substitute “mental health difficulties”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 170:

In page 78, line 6, before “take” to insert “take all reasonable measures necessary to”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 171:

In page 78, line 12, to delete “a Superintendent or Chief Superintendent” and substitute “a member of An Garda Síochána not below the rank of Inspector”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 172:



In page 78, to delete lines 20 to 25 and substitute the following:

“(4) Where a member of An Garda Síochána takes a child into custody under *subsection (1)* and the parents of the child, or either of them, or guardian, or, in the case of a child the subject of a care order, the Child and Family Agency are contacted, the child shall be released into the care of that person or persons, unless in the opinion of the member or members of An Garda Síochána responsible for the child there is an immediate and serious risk to the health or welfare of the child by releasing the child into the care of that person or persons.”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 173:

In page 78, to delete lines 26 to 30.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** I move amendment No. 174:

In page 78, line 32, to delete “a mental disorder” and substitute “mental health difficulties”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 175:

In page 78, line 38, to delete “view” and substitute “opinion”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 176:

In page 78, lines 39 and 40, to delete “it is unsafe or not in the best interests of the child to release the child into the care of that person or persons” and substitute the following:

“there is an immediate and serious risk to the health or welfare of the child by releasing the child into the care of that person or persons”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 177:

In page 78, line 41, to delete “shall arrange for the child to be released” and substitute “may request that the child be released”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 178:

In page 79, between lines 2 and 3, to insert the following:

“(7) Where the member or members of An Garda Síochána make a request to the Executive under *subsection (6)*, the Executive shall comply with the request as soon as practicable.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 71, as amended, agreed to.

## SECTION 72

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 179:

In page 79, line 7, to delete “view” and substitute “opinion”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 180:

In page 79, lines 8 and 9, to delete “it is unsafe or it is not in the best interests of the child to do so” and substitute the following:

“there is an immediate and serious risk to the health or welfare of the child by releasing the child into the care of that person or persons”.

This amendment was drafted following consultation with An Garda Síochána, as queries were raised as to how “unsafe” might be defined and who would be responsible for assessing whether a situation was unsafe or not. The wording aligns closely with section 12 of the Child Care Act 1991, which provides for the use of Garda powers in relation to taking a child into safety.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** I move amendment No. 181:

In page 79, line 18, to delete “a mental disorder” and substitute “mental health difficulties”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 182:

In page 79, line 21, to delete “view” and substitute “opinion”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** I move amendment No. 183:

In page 79, line 21, to delete “a mental disorder” and substitute “mental health difficulties”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 184:

In page 79, line 26, to delete “view” and substitute “opinion”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 72, as amended, agreed to.

Sections 73 to 82, inclusive, agreed to.

### SECTION 83

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Amendment No. 185 is in the names of Deputies Clarke and Cullinane. Amendments Nos. 185 to 188, inclusive, are related and may be discussed together.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I move amendment No. 185:

In page 88, line 31, to delete “without” and substitute “except after having considered all viable alternatives and with”.

This amendment strengthens the rights of individuals receiving mental health treatment by tightening the conditions under which treatment can proceed without consent. It seeks to remove the vague and overly permissive word “without” which currently allows for treatment without consent without requiring any prior effort to explore less evasive or more rights-respecting options.

The new language “except after having considered all viable alternatives and with” adds a critical safeguard ensuring that involuntary treatment is not a forced or routine step. The change reflects the core principle of a rights-based mental healthcare proportionality. Any infringement on a person’s autonomy must be justified, necessary and the least restrictive option available. By requiring that all viable alternatives be considered first, by varying degrees regarding the patient’s needs, the amendment pushes for a more compassionate approach such as community supports, psychosocial interventions or peer-led services.

It also aligns with values and framework of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015, which centres on supporting individuals to make their own decisions wherever possible. This wording ensures greater accountability from clinicians and services. They will need to demonstrate that not only was that treatment necessary but also that other options were actively explored and ruled out. It offers better protections to those who may otherwise be subjected to coercive treatment unnecessarily, especially people in vulnerable states who may have been able to consent had they been better supported.

A robust mental health system starts from a position of supporting people and not overriding them, and that is what this amendment prioritises. It is about changing the culture of care from one of convenience or containment to one of dignity, recovery and respect for individual rights.

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** On a point of clarification, I am seeking the removal of section 83. Is that under consideration at the moment?

**Deputy Mary Butler:** We are discussing that now.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** We are discussing section 83 and we are on amendment No. 185. The Deputy is opposing the section in total. We will deal with amendment No. 185 first.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** Would Deputy Quaide like to speak to it and then I can come in?

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** We will deal with that at the end. We will go through the amendments and then we will get to Deputy Quaide. We are on amendment No. 185, which Deputy Clarke has moved.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** Okay. I have heard Deputy Clarke and I have read what the other

Deputies have sent in. I do not have a prepared speaking note because I want to work with both Deputies on getting this right for Report Stage. We know that in the past ten years there have been no cases where ECT has been used on 16- or 17-year-olds. We also know it is necessary to go to the High Court to get approval.

I have thought long and hard about this since last week and have thought long and hard about it all afternoon. I do not feel comfortable with legislating even as it is in the original Bill, where it would have to be brought to the High Court. I have asked my officials to consider a new amendment on Report Stage to prohibit ECT for children aged 16 and 17. It is already prohibited for those aged 15 up to 16 years. I want to work with everyone here. Contrary to what my colleague in Waterford, Deputy McGuinness said at the weekend, namely, that I was not prepared to accept any amendments, I am prepared to work with all Deputies here to get the correct wording because we cannot have any unintended consequences. If the Deputies are supportive, I propose to ask that section 83 be withdrawn at this time and reintroduced, if required, so that there are no unintended consequences.

For anyone aged 18 years or over, ECT is available if that is the clinical decision and they agree. They may not agree, as the case may be. We are changing consent in this Bill down to age 16 years, but I still think we need to protect the 16- and 17-year-old in relation to ECT. This Bill does not provide for ECT from ages 16 and below. I want to work with the Deputies on this. I have only landed this on my officials in the past hour and a half. I have spoken to several consultant psychiatrists on this this afternoon and they varied on it. However, my opinion, as someone who has put four years into this Bill, is that I am not minded to include it in the Bill. Because I am not prepared, the only thing I can do now is to remove the section, withdraw it for now and reintroduce it and I will work with the Deputies in the interim to come up with a wording that is suitable to us all. I give my word on that.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I accept the Minister of State's bona fides on this. It is something on which we have an obligation and we have a moral obligation that we should get this right. It is a rather vulnerable age group at the best of times before a young person needs a form of care, be it medical or mental health-related. I am willing to meet the Minister of State halfway on this and try to find a way we can get the best possible lines in this Bill. None of us want to be back doing this legislation again in a few years because something that was unintended has presented as a significant problem, whether for the service users, the courts system or those we are asking to provide the services. Therefore, I will withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I move amendment No. 186:

In page 89, line 11, to delete "may provide for any or all of" and substitute "shall provide for".

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 187:

In page 89, to delete lines 15 and 16 and substitute the following:

"(c) the interaction of the administration of electro-convulsive therapy and the guiding principles;"

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Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 188:

In page 89, between lines 29 and 30, to insert:

“(i) the provision of informed consent from a person to whom ECT shall be administered;”.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Deputy Quaide wishes to delete the section. The Minister of State has indicated that this section will be withdrawn in total.

Question proposed: “That section 83 be deleted from the Bill”.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I am agreeable to deleting section 83 with the opportunity to reintroduce a section 83 along the lines of what we have discussed. There may be no need for it but I must keep the opportunity open in case wording is required. However, its purpose will be that we will not be legislating for 16- and 17-year-olds to have access to ECT.

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** I welcome that the Minister of State is withdrawing the section and her words of caution around it. From my experience in working in mental health services, it is unheard of in recent times for ECT to be administered to young people. I received a reply to a parliamentary question in the past week which outlined its use in the past five years in Ireland. The youngest person who was administered ECT was 21. As far as I am aware and pretty much all my colleagues in mental health are aware, there is no clinical indication for ECT. My worry is that if we included it in the legislation, it would give a sense of legitimacy of that as a treatment option. The UK’s National Institute for Health and Care Excellence does not recommend ECT for under-18s. It is important to say that while it is used in adult services, it is also very contentious in adult services. In some parts of the country it is unheard of. A joint document from the WHO and the UN recently concluded that ECT is “not recommended for children, and this should be prohibited through legislation”. It is important to bear in mind that young people’s brains are at a sensitive stage of development and we do not know the potential adverse impact of ECT on a developing brain. Therefore it is very welcome that we are withdrawing the section.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** To be clear, what we are agreeing is that section 83 be deleted from the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

#### SECTION 84

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 190:

In page 90, lines 1 and 2, to delete “after such application, but no later than 24 hours after the application concerned” and substitute “, but no later than 24 hours after the initiation of the application”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 84, as amended, agreed to.



Sections 85 to 87, inclusive, agreed to.

#### SECTION 88

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 191:

In page 91, between lines 4 and 5, to insert the following:

“(c) where it is the least restrictive practice possible in the circumstances,”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 192:

In page 91, line 20, to delete “view” and substitute “opinion”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 193:

In page 91, line 22, to delete “registered acute mental health centre” and substitute “registered proprietor”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 194:

In page 91, after line 37, to insert the following:

“(5) A registered proprietor of a registered acute mental health centre shall notify the Commission, in the form and manner specified by the Commission and within the period specified by the Commission, of each application of a restrictive practice in respect of a child in that registered acute mental health centre.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section No. 88, as amended, agreed to.

Section 89 agreed to.

#### SECTION 90

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 195:

In page 92, line 39, to delete “sections” and substitute “section”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 196:

In page 93, line 1, to delete “should” and substitute “shall”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 197:

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In page 93, line 6, after “Where” to insert “, in the opinion of the responsible consultant psychiatrist,”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 198:

In page 93, line 19, to delete “view” and substitute “opinion”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 199:

In page 93, line 21, after “guardian” to insert “, the Child and Family Agency”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 90, as amended, agreed to.

## SECTION 91

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 200:

In page 93, lines 25 to 29, to delete all words from and including “(1) Subject to” in line 25 down to an including line 29 and substitute the following:

“(1) Subject to *subsection (3)*, the responsible consultant psychiatrist or another member of the multidisciplinary team of a child admitted under *section 61, 63 or 65*, shall inform the parents, or either of them, or guardian of the child as soon as possible after admission of the application of restrictive practices on children in that registered acute mental health centre.”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 201:

In page 93, line 30, to delete “*sections*” and substitute “*section*”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 202:

In page 93, lines 34 and 35, to delete “consultant psychiatrist responsible for the care and treatment of the child,” and substitute “child’s responsible consultant psychiatrist”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment 203:

In page 94, lines 2 and 3, to delete “consultant psychiatrist responsible for the care and treatment of the child,” and substitute “child’s responsible consultant psychiatrist”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 91, as amended, agreed to.

*Dáil Éireann*  
SECTION 92

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Amendment No. 204 has been ruled out of order due to a potential charge on Revenue.

Amendment No. 204 not moved.

Question proposed: “That section 92 stand part of the Bill.”

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I want to make a brief comment on section 92 as a whole. My amendment also was ruled out of order because of a potential charge on the State. I find that any amendment which explicitly refers to a statutory right to advocacy could be ruled out of order will be a very tough pill to swallow for a lot of the advocates, patients and service users.

With respect to Deputy Quaide, amendment No. 204 lays out very clearly what could be a very effective system for those who want and ask for a statutory right to advocacy. I could not let the section pass without saying that this ruling sticks in my craw. My amendment would not have resulted in a cost to the State; rather, it would have involved a transfer of funds into a different part of the system. The amendment did not propose an additional service. Should an amendment to be ruled out of order because of a potential charge, I would like information to be provided as to where that might be and how much it might cost for budgeting reasons, if not any other.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** On patient advocacy services, when I took over as Minister of State with responsibility for older people in June 2020, I discovered very quickly that there were patient advocacy services only in public and community hospitals and public nursing homes. I moved very quickly to expand patient advocacy services across all public, private and voluntary nursing homes. I am currently expanding this provision to mental health, long-term residential care facilities. Some 10% of residential care facilities have patient advocacy services.

I will seek more funding in the budget for these services. The organisation that provides advocacy services has had to scale up considerably. We are working with it and I will continue to expand that service. It is important that any service user in any long-term residential care facility, especially after what we saw last week on the “RTÉ Investigates” programme, has access to advocacy services. I will continue to roll that out.

Question put and agreed to.

SECTION 93

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** Amendments Nos. 205 to 212, inclusive, are related and will be discussed together.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 205:

In page 95, line 6, after “the” to insert “rights and”.

Amendment No. 205 is a technical amendment to include protection of a person’s rights, along with their interests, in the functions of the commission. I do not intend to support amendment No. 206 as this amendment duplicates what is already in the Bill elsewhere.

Section 177 of the Bill provides for the commission to make codes of practice regarding various matters under the Bill, including the preparation and issuing of a code of practice on ca-

capacity assessments. Section 177(2) provides for the commission to publish a draft of any code of practice and allows any person to make representations about the draft. The commission is required to consider any representations before finalising and issuing the final code. Section 177 also provides for the commission to amend or revoke a code as necessary.

Section 181 of the Bill, as initiated, provides for the Minister to make regulations regarding care plans. I note there is an amendment from Sinn Féin to delete and replace section 181 so that the Minister would not have the ability to make regulations on care plans. I believe section 181 of the Bill, as initiated, is necessary.

Amendments Nos. 209 and 210 are technical amendments to insert a reference to the CEO with the staff of the Mental Health Commission, in regard to amending the superannuation scheme, as the CEO is not covered in staff of the commission provisions.

I do not intend to support amendment No. 211 because I do not think that this is appropriate for primary legislation. The commission is independent in its functions and I have concerns about dictating what the commission must include in its annual report in primary legislation.

The commission is not responsible for implementing mental health services; it is the regulator. It would be inappropriate to require the commission to estimate the required numbers of whole time equivalents and funding in mental health services. Similarly, it would be inappropriate to require the commission to develop a youth mental health clinical specialty. The allocation of fully staffed mental health services and estimating levels of new additional funding are both resource allocation matters for the Minister for Health and the Government as a whole to consider as part of the annual Estimates process, and is not a function appropriate to the commission.

Furthermore, the reference to CAMHS in this amendment is inappropriate. The term “CAMHS” is not defined anywhere in the Bill, nor are child and youth mental health services. However, I believe in the importance of the transition from child mental health services to adult mental health services.

Recommendation No. 36 of Sharing the Vision indicates that appropriate supports should be provided for on an interim basis to service users transitioning from CAMHS to general adult mental health services. The age of transition should be moved from 18 to 25, and future supports should reflect this. This is being progressed under the implementation of Sharing the Vision.

The enhanced transition between CAMHS and general adult mental health services is also a key theme of the new child and youth mental health action plan, which was launched recently. The plan includes implementing the enhanced transition plan developed by the Sharing the Vision youth mental health transitions specialist group for children moving from CAMHS to general adult mental health services. The enhanced transition plan recommends that moving from CAMHS to general adult mental health services be treated as a continuation of care, rather than as a new referral, which is important.

The action plan also includes revising the CAMHS operational guidelines to ensure the recommendations from the enhanced transition plan are considered and ensuring any operational guidance for general adult mental health services aligns with the recommendations of the enhanced transition plan.

*8 o'clock*

Other elements of the action plan include robust governance structures that enable national oversight of the implementation of the enhanced transition plan and continuing to survey people to seek their views and experience of transitioning from CAMHS to adult mental health services. This will ensure that when young people move from child and youth mental health services to adult mental health services it will be a seamless transition of care.

I do not intend to support amendment No. 212. I do not believe this requires an amendment in primary legislation. The Bill strengthens the requirement that people receiving treatment in a registered acute mental health centre be given information on the complaints procedure in the centre. This is true for involuntary and voluntary admitted people. The 2006 approved centre regulations include a regulation relating to complaints procedures. These regulations will be replaced under the new enactment and I expect greater detail on complaints procedures will be included in the new regulations. I refer again to what I spoke about a few minutes ago, regarding patient advocacy services in every long-term residential care facility. We are rolling these out at present.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** Amendment No. 206 seeks to require a formal code of practice for assessments and care planning, ensuring all service users receive a consistent rights-based standard of care in all services. Sinn Féin seeks clear binding guidance on any assessments carried out, including capacity and care planning, to help to protect individuals' rights and ensure ethical accountable decision-making. We seek to mandate collaborative care plans. The amendment reinforces recovery-oriented practice and ensures that individuals are partners in their own treatment decisions. The amendment proposes a national code of practice to give mental health professionals clear expectations, reducing inconsistency and uncertainty across services. By requiring regular review and consultation with service users and professionals, the amendment would ensure that practice evolves with changing needs and maintains accountability. The inclusion of consultation with stakeholders echoes the standards set by the World Health Organization and UN bodies, ensuring policies are responsive to those most in need.

Amendment No. 211 directly aligns with our previously introduced Bill to regulate and reform CAMHS by establishing clear reporting and accountability on progress towards creating a comprehensive youth mental health service up to the age of 25. Extending CAMHS to the age of 25 through a children and youth mental health service, CYMHS, model reflects the reality that mental health needs do not stop at 18. That clear cut-off is not always as clear for some younger people. The amendment would ensure that the Government plans, tracks and resources this crucial reform. While I understand the Minister of State's position that in her opinion it does not belong in primary legislation, I fundamentally disagree. Primary legislation is where it needs to be.

The amendment also seeks to acquire an estimate of figures for whole-time equivalent clinicians and staffing shortfalls, and the pressure on the system to move towards full safe staffing levels. Without this level of detail, and without this level of data, no Department will be in a position to react as quickly as it should where these issues present or may arise. The amendment also seeks to mandate estimates of the funding required for full, safe and timely access to services. This is to provide transparency on how far current resources fall short and to put pressure on the Department, the Government, policymakers and all of us to ensure the gap is closed. By embedding these reporting requirements into law, the amendment seeks to ensure that progress on workforce planning and youth mental health reform is regularly scrutinised. It



is about long-term planning, transparency and meeting the mental health needs of young people and adults alike, and ensuring policy and practice are aligned with our wish, desire and intention to ensure we have a fully functioning mental health service for all who require it.

Amendment No. 212 would ensure that complaints processes are not only functional but genuinely independent, fair and effective in protecting the rights and dignity of service users. Sinn Féin has consistently highlighted how many families and service users have felt ignored or failed by the existing complaints system. We have not been alone or in isolation in raising these concerns. The amendment is a direct response to this and to concerns raised by others, such as the Mental Health Commission. By mandating a formal review and report within a set timeframe, the amendment seeks to ensure the State would critically assess whether current systems are working, where they are working, where they are not working, and what action needs to be taken. Independent and trustworthy complaints mechanisms are fundamental to a culture of continuous improvement and accountability in all health services.

Alongside the proposal for CAMHS reform and for stronger regulation, the amendment ensures that service users in all age groups have recourse for when things go wrong. Individuals in mental health services are often in a position of reduced power. They may feel their voice is not as strong or as powerful as others. The amendment seeks to strengthen the complaints system to give them a real avenue to be heard and to be protected. The requirement to publish a report within 12 months ensures urgency and action. Knowing that a complaints system is independent and thoroughly in line with the asks of service users helps to produce a healthcare system that is open, just and patient focused.

I heard what the Minister of State said earlier when she criticised my opening remarks on funding for mental health services. I have to put it to her at this point that the reply to a parliamentary question I received last week stated the current waiting list for CAMHS is 4,554. In 2020, when the Minister of State came into government, it was 2,112. This is an increase of 215%. Each and every one of these children, because they are children, is in distress. They are not numbers; they are children whom our services have identified as having a moderate to severe mental health need. We all know that CAMHS does not correlate and does not retain information on children whom they do not see in their service who may be referred back to a GP or a psychologist.

**Deputy Conor D. McGuinness:** I will speak on amendment No. 211 on child and youth mental health services. Sinn Féin's policy for a considerable amount of time has been to change CAMHS to a broader service and to increase the upper age limit to 25. This would be an important step if it were to be adopted. I note what the Minister of State said earlier about listening to the Opposition and working with us but I also note that no amendment has been accepted from the Opposition at this point. If the amendment were to be accepted, child and youth mental health services would have an upper age limit of 25. This would stop the practice whereby young people who receive very important treatments, and who are recovering well and perhaps have been engaging with CAMHS for a long period of time, age out of services as they enter adulthood. A child and youth mental health service would avoid this. It would allow treatment to continue into early adulthood as that young person finds other services or finds their way through recovery.

The other proposal we are making in amendment No. 211, that staffing levels have a legislative basis, would be very helpful to the Minister of State when it comes to budgets and making the argument internally within government on the budget allocation to mental health services.

The Minister of State could point to a legislative basis for the staffing levels in the services. I ask the Minister of State to consider that this could be a help rather than a hindrance for her in her role. On this basis I ask her to consider accepting it.

The purpose of amendment No. 212 is to ensure that the complaints process is working, that it is available to people who need to make a complaint, and that it is robust and accessible to people who might be very vulnerable, to people who might find it challenging to advocate for themselves for myriad reasons, and to people whose families might find it quite difficult to advocate on their behalf. The Minister of State might consider accepting the amendment, which proposes that there be a report within the first 12 months.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** I want to speak to amendment No. 206. It is straightforward. We probably spent an awful lot of time the last day going over and back. There is probably an element, at times, when dealing with the reality out there, that sometimes what is lacking is a code of practice. It would ensure communication. It is an absolute necessity to make sure that this is happening within the service. It makes absolute sense with regard to capacity assessments and care plans. It is important that we have straightforward guidelines and communications and that everyone is on song in order that we can provide best practice regarding treatment for those who have particular challenges and particular issues within the mental health field.

I refer to amendment No. 211. We all know the logic, and we have seen it once again, regarding best practice. When talking about the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, the age of 25 is probably more logical. We have always talked - perhaps beyond mental health services - about the idea that a patient falls off a cliff. This prevents this circumstance from arising and that treatment can be followed through on. There is a greater logic to the age of 25 than to the age of 18. This is just making sure that we come up with something that works regarding resourcing and staffing. In fairness, Deputy McGuinness put it well in the sense that this could be leveraged and that a Minister in the future could be happy with it. It is about the delivery of a system that works.

Amendment No. 212 contains provisions for a complaints process. This is a protection for all, including those who work in the mental health sphere. We all know of issues that have arisen and of really tragic conditions. We also know families who have been absolutely distraught and not particularly happy. We know that there will be a variance between them and where they are coming at it from with those who work in mental health services. It makes absolute sense, not only that we would have a robust complaints process that actually works, but that it is also seen to work and is as transparent as possible. I see an absolute logic in that regard. Again, these amendments are trying to make sure that we have a system that is fit for purpose in delivering the treatment that is necessary.

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** I speak in support of amendments Nos. 211 and 212. Deputies McGuinness and Clarke made the point about having whole-time equivalent clinicians benchmarked and having that as a basic requirement that the Mental Health Commission adjudicates on for service provision. When the Mental Health Commission is doing an inspection and is writing a report, there is a whole litany of conditions that must be met by a service. Staff are extremely focused on meeting all of those requirements. More basic to all of that, however, is to have adequate staffing in place in the first instance. It was a real strength of *A Vision for Change*, a document that is nearly 20 years old now, that it set out the staffing levels that were required per care group per 100,000 population across all services. It has been really regrettable that *Sharing the Vision* dispensed with that benchmarking, because with a *Vision for Change*,

one could refer to those proposed staffing levels each year and see to what degree we were meeting those basic requirements - not even targets. If the Government were to sediment it in law that services, in order to operate safely, as is in the proposed wording, had to have a minimum complement of staff, it would be a really basic and important provision to make. It would actually make life easier for the Minister of State. I encourage her to consider that. There is very good evidence internationally to extend the age of CAMHS to 25. The points made on the independent complaints mechanism were very well made as well.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I thank all the Deputies for their comments.

The reason why amendment No. 206 is not being accepted is because this amendment duplicates what is already in the Bill. There are 223 sections in the Bill. It is huge and very complex. There is a lot in it and it is hard to take every bit of it in, but that amendment is a duplication. That is the only reason why it is not being accepted.

I do not disagree with the Deputies regarding the upper age for CAMHS. Some of the Deputies might know Mark Smyth, who was head of the Psychological Society of Ireland for a long time. He chaired a committee under the national implementation and monitoring committee, NIMC, for the last number of years looking at the whole transition between CAMHS and general adult mental health services. When discussing increasing the transition to age 25, it is important to note that this would pertain to community supports. It would be much more difficult to do it with in-patient supports. We could not have a situation where in-patients supports for young people are extended to age 25. There might be a 13- or 14-year-old young girl with an eating disorder such as anorexia nervosa. There could not be a situation where they would be treated alongside a 22- or 23-year-old. We concentrated on the outpatients' perspective in that regard. We are looking for a more streamlined approach. Take the example of an 18-year-old in the care of CAMHS for a couple of years. The child is probably doing the leaving certificate and going to college for the first time and is being asked to leave the supports that are very good. A huge number of people have good supports and good outcomes in CAMHS. Asking them to move on to adult mental health services is difficult. That is an area in which we have done a huge body of work to try to make that transition more streamlined.

I agree with Deputy Clarke regarding safe staffing levels. They are really important. The problem we all have, as the Deputies know, is that the Mental Health Commission has a defined role within mental health services. It is responsible for the regulation of mental health services, of vindicating the rights of involuntarily admitted people through the operation of mental health review boards and setting of standards for best practice. It has a similar role to what HIQA does. We could not have a situation where the commission becomes responsible for implementing mental health services and policy and being responsible for allocating resources regarding funding and whole-time equivalents. As the Deputies know, that is a role in proper for the Minister for Health and the Government of the day. The Government is accountable to the Irish public and must be in control of the State's purse strings. The commission is a key partner in the delivery of mental health services, but the Government, any government, must be responsible for the allocation of services.

I take Deputy Quaide's point regarding A Vision for Change, but our policy since 2020 has been Sharing the Vision. What I like about Sharing the Vision is that it is person-centred. Second, what Sharing the Vision has that A Vision for Change never had was the national implementation and monitoring committee, which holds me, the HSE, service deliverers and the Department of Health to account. It meets regularly. We are now on our second iteration of it,

with Catherine Brogan as its second chair. I set it up in November 2020. Every quarter without fail, a report is laid on its website, where people can read about the short-term, medium-term and long-term aspirations and where we are. It is a really important aspect because it shows us where we are on target and where we are not.

Deputy Clarke raised CAMHS waiting lists. I am not one bit happy about the waiting list. There are 4,544 people on it. I have been doing a couple of things. The budget for CAMHS in 2023 was €137 million. In 2025, the budget is €167 million, an additional €30 million in two years, which is a lot of money. I am not seeing the output for that additional money, however. Recently, I undertook a tour of CAMHS teams all over the country. I started in Cork and Kerry. Deputy Quaide would know well that they have the highest waiting list for CAMHS in the country of approximately 24%. I do not have the figures in front of me. I visited several CAMHS teams, some in the counties and some in the city. It was stark to look at the waiting lists and see where some teams are performing very well and others are not performing as well. I continued to Ashbourne, County Meath and Swords. I visited there as well. The real contrast was with Monaghan and Cavan which have no waiting list for CAMHS. They had seven on the waiting list the day I was there, but Deputy Ó Murchú's area, and we have discussed it many times, is very challenged. There are 19 teams in that area and you would wonder how some teams can do so well and others do not. I travelled to Limerick a couple of weeks later, and Limerick is an exemplar at this stage. It has reduced its waiting list of more than 12 months by 90% and its waiting list under nine months by 59%, down to a total of 167.

The current challenge we have, and the Deputy will see this from the parliamentary question response, is three regional health areas in the country are carrying 70% of the entire waiting list for CAMHS. Dublin south east and my area, which is also that of Deputy McGuinness, are the only areas in the last quarter which showed a reduction in their waiting lists. I have asked that there not be anyone waiting more than 12 months. We have some waiting more than 18 months and some more than 12 months. I asked as a first step that this be reduced, and it was. I get the figures every week. What I am saying is that we have three areas carrying 70% of the waiting list. We have one area doing extremely well, which is Limerick, at about 4% of the waiting list, and we have a few other areas - the Galway area in the west, Dublin south east, and our area, the southeast of the country, carrying 7% to 8% of the waiting list.

I am trying to delve down into some of the issues because there are some areas where they have the most staff and a smaller catchment area but their waiting list is higher than what it should be. From what we have seen, the amount of referrals have grown exponentially in the past four to five years. We are also seeing young people and children presenting with much more complexity than they were previously. Young people who receive the support of CAMHS, if they meet the criteria, can often be in its support for three to four years. Once upon a time, when a child entered CAMHS, we had another child leaving, whereas now the situation is that for every three children coming into CAMHS, we have only one child leaving.

That is what I am currently at. I have visited four of the areas and have two more to do. As I said, an additional €30 million has been provided in the past two years plus a waiting list initiative. Just before the election last year, the waiting list was at 3,700. When I came back after my re-election and reappointment as Minister of State for Mental Health, the waiting list was at 4,200. I was not one bit happy. None of those children deserves to be on a waiting list. I have a complete focus on this at present and my officials know that. As I said, we are visiting these areas but I cannot understand how some of the country and teams can produce a really good outcome. We are delving down into how many referrals they get, how many are accepted and

the standard operating procedures, but I am not seeing any output or improvement in output. I do not say this lightly but I have not seen any improvement in output of the number of children being seen with the additional €30 million provided in the past two years.

We have 81 CAMHS teams across the country now. I am pleased to see the Cork and Kerry region, where I met with the REO, Dr. Andy Phillips, has come back with a comprehensive plan to reduce its waiting list for anyone waiting more than 18 months and then for anyone waiting more than 12 months and to work this down. It has a good approach down there for ADHD - I think it is called SNAP-IV. The agreement is any young child or young person presenting with ADHD will be seen quickly by that particular team. They will then be referred back to their CAMHS team in the area, having a diagnosis and medication if appropriate.

We are taking the learnings from different areas to see if we can streamline it, but I must give all credit to Limerick. That area has seven CAMHS teams, and it must be complimented on having reduced its waiting lists by 90% for those waiting more than 12 months and reduced numbers for those under nine months by 59%. My point is that, if they can do it in some parts of the country, why can they not do it in all of them? I accept it is under my watch and that is why I am in the weeds of the teams to see if we can get more output.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I thank the Minister of State for her comprehensive response. She should absolutely go to every single CAMHS team to find out what the best practice is and have it replicated around the country. This should be standard procedure. However, for those 763 kids who are waiting more than a year for a CAMHS appointment, that is not what their parents or guardians want to hear. They want to know when their child is going to be seen. I am deeply concerned because not only do we have this exploding CAMHS list on one hand, we also have hundreds of children waiting more than a year for psychology. These children are presenting with distress and a very clear need. They either have to go to CAMHS or psychology. It is one or the other, but both these lists appear to be growing at an exponential rate and that is simply not good enough.

I want to see waiting lists coming down if it means children have been given the service they need. That is the critical part of this. When we look at numbers, the financial is important but the level of delivery is more important, the level of kids who are being seen and getting services. Again, I must put it to the Minister of State it cannot be best practice that CAMHS does not keep a record of the number of children it does not see. Where are these kids going? Have they simply gone from one list to another as they were not on the first list because CAMHS refused to see them?

**Deputy Mary Butler:** Sorry to cut across the Deputy. Those are not accepted. It is because their referrals are not accepted.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I also have that in a reply to a parliamentary question that it does not keep a record of the children it does not see. To get a holistic and overarching view, those critical pieces of information and data must be collated. The tracking of the child's needs from when they present to when they accept or receive an offer of services is vital. What we will find is children who have been refused an appointment with CAMHS two or three times and who may end up waiting five or six years for any level of services. This is not good enough for anybody.

Any child who could be waiting for that extended period puts these figures of 763 kids wait-



ing for more than a year in a ha'penny place. What about their families, the ones who are their primary carers and their primary support, the parents who have become the psychologist, the OT and everything overnight because the services within the State system simply are not there to support them?

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I have a couple of points to make as I have spoken extensively on the waiting lists. It is important to acknowledge, however, that last year there were 233,000 appointments allocated by CAMHS and approximately 8% or 9% were not attended for a myriad of reasons. For some, they may have aged out and, for others, they may have gone privately, and there may be other reasons they did not attend. By the end of April of this year, CAMHS had already offered 85,000 appointments.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** Brilliant.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** In fairness, 97% of all urgent referrals to CAMHS were responded to within three days up to April 2025, and they are the latest figures I have received. What often happens is children might present to CAMHS and whatever diagnosis they have may not be as severe as others and they become the long waiters. That is the area I am not happy about. The other thing is the consultant psychiatrist and clinicians in the multidisciplinary team determine whether the child meets the criteria. I do not have a clinician's background and cannot determine whether a child meets the criteria. Children must have a primary diagnosis of mental health to be accepted into CAMHS. Many children will also have a dual diagnosis. They may have mental health plus ASD or mental health plus an intellectual disability. Parents often come to me in my constituency office to say they cannot get into CAMHS or they are not accepted into CAMHS because the team has deemed the child has not met the criteria. One of the worries with that is it varies from team to team.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** The consistency.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** Some teams accept more referrals while others accept less. All I can say on the floor of the Dáil is my commitment to trying to provide additional funding. We have 81 teams. We have relocated many CAMHS teams into good primary care centres, which have good locations, yet we are still seeing the waiting lists grow. We have 1.2 million young people in the country, whereas five years ago, we had 900,000. This is a 25% increase. We are seeing more presentations since Covid. We are seeing an exponential growth in the number of young people presenting with eating disorders and self-harm issues. I know I am digressing now but I put much of it down to social media and what young people have access to on their phones.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy Ó Murchú you were to come in the last time so if you want to come in now or would you like Deputy Clarke to conclude? Deputy Clarke.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I fully agree with the Minister of State's point about social media - I will not drag this on much longer, a Cheann Comhairle - particularly on the issue of eating disorders. This really strikes me. I remember when I was a teenager that the pro-ana or pro-anorexia movement was on MySpace and Bebo. This is not a new phenomenon but we have to get to the bottom of it because people are losing their lives to eating disorders. People are losing years of quality of life to eating disorders. At this stage, in 2025, the Internet has been around for a while and Google since 1998. We need to get a grip on this.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I want to reiterate that there is not a time limit on the debate on these amendments. They are very important.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** Regarding the amendments, what we have said and why we have tabled them is straightforward. I accept what the Minister of State said regarding amendment No. 206. The big thing is reiterating the point about codes of practice and guidelines and making sure that we have internal communications where they need to be. It is always frightening to hear the figures that Deputy Clarke spoke about. The Minister of State referred to the 4,500 on the waiting list and the 763 who have been waiting over a year. We are dealing with a huge number of families who are going to be under severe stress. There is complete logic to what Deputy Clarke says, in the sense that all information needs to be contained. We also accept that referrals will be made. Sometimes it is a different service that is required. It is about making sure that the information is widely available and also that we are all aware that a child approached CAMHS because that is where the referral was sent. That was not the service that was deemed to be required. At that stage, we are into the “no wrong door” and all the rest of it, even that single point of access that we have spoken about for a long time. However, we have all dealt with those issues in CAMHS. It is easy to say that this should have been done before and whatever else. If there are places that are operating with best practice, it is essential that the piece of work regarding what the Minister said about digging down into the weeds and doing due diligence is done as soon as possible. We need to find the means of transferring that, while ensuring that everyone who requires treatment is getting the appropriate and required treatment. Obviously, it is not much addition if someone is playing around with figures or whatever. I am not for a second saying that is the case but it is a matter of doing that piece of work as soon as possible and making sure we can deliver something that is a lot better. At this time we have too many people who have been failed. We all know the issue. The Minister of State spoke earlier about eating disorders. We all know that for parents of young people or adults who needed to get treatment for an eating disorder, it often took far too long. The treatment that was required ended up being a hell of a lot more acute and required emergency beds, sometimes not in this State. We really need to get that piece a lot better. We often talk about early interventions. We need to make sure that they happen. It is fit for purpose and we just need to get to that point as soon as possible. We cannot be operating with these long waiting lists because they serve nobody.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I move amendment No. 206:

In page 95, between lines 7 and 8, to insert the following:

- “(e) prepare and issue a code of practice for—
- (i) the conduct of psychosocial and capacity assessments, and
- (ii) the formulation and implementation of collaborative care plans,
- (f) review and update such codes of practice periodically, and
- (g) consult with service users, mental health professionals, and other stakeholders in the preparation of such codes.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Section 93, as amended, agreed to.

Section 94 agreed to.

*Dáil Éireann*  
SECTION 95

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 207:

In page 96, line 36, to delete “shall” and substitute “may”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 95, as amended, agreed to.

Sections 96 to 110, inclusive, agreed to.

SECTION 111

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 208:

In page 104, line 15, to delete “section 48” and substitute “section 10”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 111, as amended, agreed to.

SECTION 112

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 209:

In page 105, line 3, to delete “such members of the staff of the Commission” and substitute “such members of the staff of the Commission and the Chief Executive Officer”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 210:

In page 105, line 7, to delete “former members of the staff of the Commission” and substitute “former members of the staff of the Commission and former Chief Executive Officers”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 112, as amended, agreed to.

Sections 113 to 118, inclusive, agreed to.

SECTION 119

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I move amendment No. 211:

In page 108, between lines 27 and 28, to insert the following:

“(d) the progress towards and resource requirements for the extension of CAMHS towards a CYMHS for young people up to the age of 25, and the development of youth mental health clinical specialty,

(e) the estimated number of whole-time equivalent clinicians to fully and safely staff public mental health services, and

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(f) the estimated level of new additional funding required to provide full and safe services with timely access to care.”.

Amendment put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 67; Níl, 84; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Ahern, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Aird, William.</i>	
<i>Bacik, Ivana.</i>	<i>Ardagh, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Bennett, Cathy.</i>	<i>Boland, Grace.</i>	
<i>Brady, John.</i>	<i>Brabazon, Tom.</i>	
<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	<i>Brennan, Brian.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Joanna.</i>	<i>Brennan, Shay.</i>	
<i>Carthy, Matt.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	
<i>Clarke, Sorca.</i>	<i>Browne, James.</i>	
<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	<i>Burke, Colm.</i>	
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	
<i>Cronin, Réada.</i>	<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	
<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	<i>Butterly, Paula.</i>	
<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>	
<i>Cummins, Jen.</i>	<i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i>	
<i>Devine, Máire.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	<i>Cahill, Michael.</i>	
<i>Donnelly, Paul.</i>	<i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	
<i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
<i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i>	<i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i>	
<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	<i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i>	
<i>Gannon, Gary.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	
<i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i>	<i>Cleere, Peter ‘Chap’.</i>	
<i>Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.</i>	<i>Clendennen, John.</i>	
<i>Gould, Thomas.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	
<i>Graves, Ann.</i>	<i>Connolly, John.</i>	
<i>Guirke, Johnny.</i>	<i>Cooney, Joe.</i>	
<i>Hearne, Rory.</i>	<i>Cummins, John.</i>	
<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	<i>Currie, Emer.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i>	<i>Daly, Martin.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	<i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i>	
<i>Kerrane, Claire.</i>	<i>Devlin, Cormac.</i>	
<i>Lawless, Paul.</i>	<i>Dillon, Alan.</i>	
<i>Lawlor, George.</i>	<i>Dolan, Albert.</i>	
<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	
<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	<i>Feighan, Frankie.</i>	
<i>McGettigan, Donna.</i>	<i>Fleming, Seán.</i>	

<i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i>	<i>Foley, Norma.</i>	
<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	<i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	<i>Geoghegan, James.</i>	
<i>Mythen, Johnny.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	
<i>Nash, Ged.</i>	<i>Harkin, Marian.</i>	
<i>Newsome Drennan, Natasha.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i>	<i>Heneghan, Barry.</i>	
<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	
<i>O'Donoghue, Richard.</i>	<i>Higgins, Emer.</i>	
<i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</i>	<i>Keogh, Keira.</i>	
<i>O'Flynn, Ken.</i>	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
<i>O'Hara, Louis.</i>	<i>Lawless, James.</i>	
<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	
<i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i>	<i>Maxwell, David.</i>	
<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	<i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i>	
<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	<i>McCarthy, Noel.</i>	
<i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	<i>McCormack, Tony.</i>	
<i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i>	<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	
<i>Quaide, Liam.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	<i>McGrath, Séamus.</i>	
<i>Rice, Pádraig.</i>	<i>McGreehan, Erin.</i>	
<i>Sheehan, Conor.</i>	<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	
<i>Sherlock, Marie.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	
<i>Smith, Duncan.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	
<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Shane.</i>	
<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	<i>Murphy, Michael.</i>	
<i>Wall, Mark.</i>	<i>Neville, Joe.</i>	
<i>Ward, Charles.</i>	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>	
<i>Ward, Mark.</i>	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	
	<i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i>	
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
	<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>	
	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
	<i>O'Meara, Ryan.</i>	
	<i>O'Shea, John Paul.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Christopher.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Pádraig.</i>	
	<i>Ó Cearúil, Naoise.</i>	
	<i>Ó Fearghail, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Ó Muirí, Naoise.</i>	
	<i>Richmond, Neale.</i>	



18 June 2025

	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>	
	<i>Timmins, Edward.</i>	
	<i>Toole, Gillian.</i>	
	<i>Ward, Barry.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Sorca Clarke and Conor D. McGuinness; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Amendment declared lost.

Section 119 agreed to.

## SECTION 120

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I move amendment No. 212:

In page 109, between lines 5 and 6, to insert the following:

“(3) The Commission shall within 12 months publish a report on the quality and independence of complaints processes and make recommendations for the strengthening of such processes.”.

Amendment put:

<i>The Committee divided: Tá, 65; Níl, 86; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Ahern, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Aird, William.</i>	
<i>Bacik, Ivana.</i>	<i>Ardagh, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Bennett, Cathy.</i>	<i>Boland, Grace.</i>	
<i>Brady, John.</i>	<i>Brabazon, Tom.</i>	
<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	<i>Brennan, Brian.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Joanna.</i>	<i>Brennan, Shay.</i>	
<i>Carthy, Matt.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	
<i>Clarke, Sorca.</i>	<i>Browne, James.</i>	
<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	<i>Burke, Colm.</i>	
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	
<i>Cronin, Réada.</i>	<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	
<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	<i>Butterly, Paula.</i>	
<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>	
<i>Cummins, Jen.</i>	<i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i>	
<i>Devine, Máire.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Donnelly, Paul.</i>	<i>Cahill, Michael.</i>	

<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	<i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	
<i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
<i>Gannon, Gary.</i>	<i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i>	
<i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i>	<i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i>	
<i>Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	
<i>Gould, Thomas.</i>	<i>Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.</i>	
<i>Graves, Ann.</i>	<i>Clendennen, John.</i>	
<i>Guirke, Johnny.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	
<i>Hearne, Rory.</i>	<i>Connolly, John.</i>	
<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	<i>Cooney, Joe.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i>	<i>Cummins, John.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	<i>Currie, Emer.</i>	
<i>Kerrane, Claire.</i>	<i>Daly, Martin.</i>	
<i>Lawless, Paul.</i>	<i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i>	
<i>Lawlor, George.</i>	<i>Devlin, Cormac.</i>	
<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>	<i>Dillon, Alan.</i>	
<i>McGettigan, Donna.</i>	<i>Dolan, Albert.</i>	
<i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	
<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	<i>Feighan, Frankie.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	<i>Fleming, Seán.</i>	
<i>Mythen, Johnny.</i>	<i>Foley, Norma.</i>	
<i>Nash, Ged.</i>	<i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i>	
<i>Newsome Drennan, Nata-sha.</i>	<i>Geoghegan, James.</i>	
<i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	
<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	<i>Harkin, Marian.</i>	
<i>O'Donoghue, Richard.</i>	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	
<i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>	
<i>O'Flynn, Ken.</i>	<i>Heneghan, Barry.</i>	
<i>O'Gorman, Roderic.</i>	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	
<i>O'Hara, Louis.</i>	<i>Higgins, Emer.</i>	
<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	<i>Keogh, Keira.</i>	
<i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i>	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	<i>Lawless, James.</i>	
<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i>	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>	
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	<i>Maxwell, David.</i>	
<i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i>	<i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i>	
<i>Quaide, Liam.</i>	<i>McCarthy, Noel.</i>	
<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	
<i>Rice, Pádraig.</i>	<i>McCormack, Tony.</i>	
<i>Sheehan, Conor.</i>	<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	

18 June 2025

<i>Sherlock, Marie.</i>	<i>McGrath, Séamus.</i>	
<i>Smith, Duncan.</i>	<i>McGreehan, Erin.</i>	
<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	
<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	
<i>Wall, Mark.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ward, Charles.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Shane.</i>	
<i>Ward, Mark.</i>	<i>Murphy, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Neville, Joe.</i>	
	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>	
	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	
	<i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i>	
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
	<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>	
	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
	<i>O'Meara, Ryan.</i>	
	<i>O'Shea, John Paul.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Christopher.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Pádraig.</i>	
	<i>Ó Cearúil, Naoise.</i>	
	<i>Ó Fearghail, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Ó Muirí, Naoise.</i>	
	<i>Richmond, Neale.</i>	
	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>	
	<i>Timmins, Edward.</i>	
	<i>Toole, Gillian.</i>	
	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>	
	<i>Ward, Barry.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Sorca Clarke and Ruairí Ó Murchú; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Amendment declared lost.

9 o'clock

Section 120 agreed to. Sections 121 to 126, inclusive, agreed to.

## SECTION 127

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Amendments Nos. 213 to 227, inclusive, are related and may be discussed together.

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** I move amendment No. 213:

In page 112, line 37, to delete “consultant psychiatrist” and substitute “qualified mental health professional”.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** Amendment No. 213 is fairly simple. It seeks to align the vision from previously published documents and promote distributed leadership across mental health services. Twice earlier this evening, I spoke on the wrong amendment at the wrong time, but this is the one I was speaking of.

Throughout the document, there are references to consultant psychiatrists, whether that be child or adult consultant psychiatrists. There is also a reference to, at the assessment stage, a multidisciplinary approach. At the review stage, there is a multidisciplinary approach, as there is at the discharge stage. However, this section does not recognise that multidisciplinary approach, which we know achieves the best outcomes in the vast majority of cases. It also recognises that the best person on the team is the right person who is there at the right time and can meet the right needs of the patient.

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** This is an important amendment. It acknowledges the value of all disciplines in mental health for their capacity to lead mental health services. Leadership roles should be competency based and discipline non-specific, focusing on relevant clinical and organisational expertise, rather than privileging a single profession. It is custom and practice, based on a medical model of mental health service provision we need to be moving away from, that psychiatrists have automatically been clinical directors, but it is not inevitably the case and the wording of the Bill suggests it is inevitable. We have seen increasing openness internationally in countries such as the UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand towards the distribution of leadership among other mental health professionals, rather than it automatically being psychiatrists. This is also, as Deputy Clarke mentioned, in line with the Sharing the Vision recommendations on shared governance. It is a progressive amendment and I urge the Minister of State to consider it.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** The expert group review of the Mental Health Act did not recommend that a professional other than a consultant psychiatrist could become the inspector of mental health services. In every registered acute mental health centre, the clinical director is a consultant psychiatrist. Furthermore, the only profession that can make an admission or renewal order is a consultant psychiatrist. As such, it would appear rational to continue to limit the role of chief inspector to the consultant psychiatrist profession.

However, I believe it is a matter worth considering in future reviews of this Act, in parallel with discussions on what professions can become clinical directors. At the moment, I am not minded to accept this amendment. The reason is that much of the Bill grew out of the expert group review recommendations and given that, currently, only a consultant psychiatrist can make an admission or a renewal order, it does not appear to be the right move at the moment. However, it is a matter worth considering in the future, in parallel with discussions on what professions can become clinical directors.

Amendment put:

<i>The Committee divided: Tá, 65; Níl, 86; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>

<i>Ahern, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Aird, William.</i>	
<i>Bacik, Ivana.</i>	<i>Ardagh, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Bennett, Cathy.</i>	<i>Boland, Grace.</i>	
<i>Brady, John.</i>	<i>Brabazon, Tom.</i>	
<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	<i>Brennan, Brian.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Joanna.</i>	<i>Brennan, Shay.</i>	
<i>Carthy, Matt.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	
<i>Clarke, Sorca.</i>	<i>Browne, James.</i>	
<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	<i>Burke, Colm.</i>	
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	
<i>Cronin, Réada.</i>	<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	
<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	<i>Butterly, Paula.</i>	
<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>	
<i>Cummins, Jen.</i>	<i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i>	
<i>Devine, Máire.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Donnelly, Paul.</i>	<i>Cahill, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	<i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	
<i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
<i>Gannon, Gary.</i>	<i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i>	
<i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i>	<i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i>	
<i>Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	
<i>Gould, Thomas.</i>	<i>Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.</i>	
<i>Graves, Ann.</i>	<i>Clendennen, John.</i>	
<i>Guirke, Johnny.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	
<i>Hearne, Rory.</i>	<i>Connolly, John.</i>	
<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	<i>Cooney, Joe.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i>	<i>Cummins, John.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	<i>Currie, Emer.</i>	
<i>Kerrane, Claire.</i>	<i>Daly, Martin.</i>	
<i>Lawless, Paul.</i>	<i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i>	
<i>Lawlor, George.</i>	<i>Devlin, Cormac.</i>	
<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>	<i>Dillon, Alan.</i>	
<i>McGettigan, Donna.</i>	<i>Dolan, Albert.</i>	
<i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	
<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	<i>Feighan, Frankie.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	<i>Fleming, Seán.</i>	
<i>Mythen, Johnny.</i>	<i>Foley, Norma.</i>	
<i>Nash, Ged.</i>	<i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i>	
<i>Newsome Drennan, Nata-sha.</i>	<i>Geoghegan, James.</i>	
<i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	
<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	<i>Harkin, Marian.</i>	



<i>O'Donoghue, Richard.</i>	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	
<i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>	
<i>O'Flynn, Ken.</i>	<i>Heneghan, Barry.</i>	
<i>O'Gorman, Roderic.</i>	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	
<i>O'Hara, Louis.</i>	<i>Higgins, Emer.</i>	
<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	<i>Keogh, Keira.</i>	
<i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i>	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	<i>Lawless, James.</i>	
<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i>	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>	
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	<i>Maxwell, David.</i>	
<i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i>	<i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i>	
<i>Quaide, Liam.</i>	<i>McCarthy, Noel.</i>	
<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	
<i>Rice, Pádraig.</i>	<i>McCormack, Tony.</i>	
<i>Sheehan, Conor.</i>	<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	
<i>Sherlock, Marie.</i>	<i>McGrath, Séamus.</i>	
<i>Smith, Duncan.</i>	<i>McGreehan, Erin.</i>	
<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	
<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	
<i>Wall, Mark.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ward, Charles.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Shane.</i>	
<i>Ward, Mark.</i>	<i>Murphy, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Neville, Joe.</i>	
	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>	
	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	
	<i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i>	
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
	<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>	
	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
	<i>O'Meara, Ryan.</i>	
	<i>O'Shea, John Paul.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Christopher.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Pádraig.</i>	
	<i>Ó Cearúil, Naoise.</i>	
	<i>Ó Fearghail, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Ó Muirí, Naoise.</i>	
	<i>Richmond, Neale.</i>	
	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>	
	<i>Timmins, Edward.</i>	
	<i>Toole, Gillian.</i>	
	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>	

	<b><i>Ward, Barry.</i></b>	
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Tellers: Tá, Deputies Liam Quaide and Sorca Clarke; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Amendment declared lost.

Section 127 agreed to.

#### SECTION 128

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 214:

In page 113, line 26, to delete “3 years,” and substitute “3 years, and”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 215:

In page 113, line 28, to delete “5 years, and” and substitute “5 years,”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 216:

In page 113, to delete lines 29 and 30.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 217:

In page 113, to delete lines 32 to 37.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 218:

In page 113, line 38, to delete “*section 135*,” and substitute “*section 135*, and”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 219:

In page 113, to delete line 39.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 220:

In page 114, between lines 2 and 3, to insert the following:

“(2) In relation to a registered community mental health service, the Chief Inspector shall visit and inspect a representative number of those services within the registration period, taking into account—

(a) a geographic area of registration ensuring a balanced representation of inspection across that area,

(b) the level of compliance with this Act or any regulations made thereunder of—

(i) a registered community mental health service, or

(ii) another registered community mental health service with the same registered proprietor or responsible person as subparagraph (i),

(c) whether a number of registered community mental health services have the same

registered proprietor or responsible person, and

(d) such other criteria as the Commission considers appropriate.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 128, as amended, agreed to.

Sections 129 to 131, inclusive, agreed to.

## SECTION 132

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 221:

In page 116, line 29, to delete “registered mental health service under section 128,” and substitute the following:

“registered acute mental health centre under *section 128(1)*,”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 222:

In page 116, line 34, to delete “*sections 25 and 73*” and substitute “*section 25, 73 or 74*”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 223:

In page 116, line 35, to delete “registered mental health service” and substitute “registered acute mental health centre”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 224.

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In page 116, lines 37 and 38, to delete “*section 128*” and substitute “*section 128(1)*”.  
Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 225:

In page 116, lines 39 and 40, to delete “he or she” and substitute “the inspector”.  
Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 226:

In page 116, after line 40, to insert the following:

“(3) When making an inspection of any registered community mental health centre under *section 128(1)* or any registered community mental health service under *section 128(2)*, the inspector shall inspect the service or centre, as the case may be, for compliance with the provisions of this Act or any regulations or codes of practice made thereunder.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 132, as amended, agreed to.

#### SECTION 133

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 227:

In page 117, line 4, to delete “*section 128(a)*” and substitute “*subsection (1)(a)* or (2) of *section 128*”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 133, as amended, agreed to.

Sections 134 to 137, inclusive, agreed to.

#### SECTION 138

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I move amendment No. 228:

In page 120, between lines 25 and 26, to insert the following:

“ “community mental health services” means a mental health service which provides either urgent or routine care and treatment in a place other than a registered acute mental health centre or registered community mental health centre, including such services as crisis intervention teams;”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 229:

In page 120, lines 26 and 27, to delete all words from and including “by” in line 26, down to and including line 27 and substitute “in *section 163*”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 138, as amended, agreed to.

## SECTION 139

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Amendments Nos. 230 to 241, inclusive, are related and may be discussed together.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 230:

In page 121, between lines 8 and 9, to insert the following:

“(f) the duration for which the registration of the centre has effect,”.

I spoke at some length on the previous grouping in relation to the chief inspector and set out some of the background to the existing regulatory regime under the Mental Health Act 2001, the development of the Bill, and the planned inspection of all community mental health services. This group of amendments complements those amendments to the role of the chief inspector and they ensure the following. Amendments Nos. 230 to 232, inclusive, insert new subsections to ensure that the duration of registration is included on the register of acute mental health centres, community mental health centres and community mental health services. We have approximately 1,200 people living in community homes throughout the country - typically of four or five people with enduring mental health conditions with wrap-around supports - but they are not regulated. This is a really important facet of the Bill and one of the first pieces I want to see enacted so we know those people are being well looked after and the premises are fit for purpose.

Amendment No. 233 is a technical amendment to a typographical error.

Amendment No. 234 replaces section 145 with a new section, providing for separate applications required for the operation of more than one registered acute mental health centre or registered community mental health centre by the same person; and where a person proposes to operate more than one registered community mental health service, they may, with the agreement of the commission, make one application for multiple services. This amendment will provide for a more straightforward approach to registering the larger number of services expected in the registered community mental health service category.

Amendments Nos. 235 and 236 insert new subsections to ensure that the Mental Health Commission must visit any acute mental health centre and community mental health centre applying for registration, before granting or refusing registration. They must visit in person. Amendment No. 237 inserts a new subsection 148(2) that provides that the Mental Health Commission may visit any community mental health service applying for registration, before granting or refusing registration. Amendment No. 238 inserts a new subsection that provides that the Mental Health Commission may visit any registered mental health service applying for renewal of registration. Amendment No. 239 ensures that registration of a registered acute mental service can be for no more than three years, rather than every registration period being for three years. This will give flexibility to the commission to register services for shorter periods of time if it has concerns regarding compliance with the provisions of this enactment or regulations made thereunder. That is for no more than three years, as opposed to a period of three years, so it could be a year and a half or two years.



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Amendments Nos. 240 and 241 ensure that registration of registered community mental services or registered community mental health services can be for no more than five years, rather than every registration period being for three years. This will give flexibility to the commission to register services for shorter periods of time if it has concerns regarding compliance with the provisions of this enactment or regulations made thereunder.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I want to speak to amendment No. 234 and in general to this area of regulation. I speak of this and while there is not a direct link, there is absolute correlation. I am going to mention the RTÉ Investigates programme and the HIQA report, HIQA having been in with the health committee this morning. The reason I bring it up is that I do not ever want to see this State being in a position where the abuses we saw of older people in that RTÉ Investigates programme are perpetrated on those who are suffering with their mental health. I am also very deeply concerned that any regulation around this specific area, should there be changes made to the regulations for HIQA that are transferable to the commission, that they need to be part and parcel of it. In terms of the adult safeguarding Bill, any regulation that is applicable here also needs to be put in very strongly. This is not just a HSE versus private provider issue. Of the 95 nursing homes, 52 of them are actually HSE and 40-odd of them are privately owned. In 2023, according to VHI, it paid out €83 million to its subscribers for private psychiatric hospitals. That was an annual increase from €74.5 million in 2022. Since 2019 there has been a 21% increase, so there is that balance there. There is the growing area of private mental health providers that need to be regulated as much as the public providers, but regulated strenuously. We need to take all possible availabilities both now and in the future. I know I am almost speaking as if I had a crystal ball about what may happen into the future in terms of adult safeguarding. We need a commitment that in the case of any moves there that relate to mental health, there will be an amendment brought back before the Dáil so that we can amend the legislation to update it in terms of any future policies or legislation that will be introduced.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I do not disagree with the Deputy. We have 67 approved centres within the HSE. The Deputy is right. The private providers are already regulated by the Mental Health Commission. They would not get their registration otherwise. I do agree with the Deputy on safeguarding, that there has to be that particular crossover. For example, Waterford Residential Care Centre in the city is a fantastic building with 100 rooms en suite. We have 20 beds in there which are psychiatry of later life. The Mental Health Commission regulates that part but the other 80 beds are regulated by HIQA. I just want to give them a shout out because recently they had a visit and their compliance was 100%. Seeing compliance in St. Aidan's of 100%, we have to congratulate good practice as well as calling out the ones that are not. The Mental Health Commission does work with HIQA because it is the regulator in the same facility at times. I take on board what the Deputy said and I agree with her.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 139, as amended, agreed to

#### SECTION 140

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 231:

In page 121, between lines 23 and 24, to insert the following:

“(f) the duration for which the registration of the centre has effect,”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 140, as amended, agreed to.

#### SECTION 141

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 232:

In page 122, between lines 1 and 2, to insert the following:

“(e) the duration for which the registration of the service has effect,”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 141, as amended, agreed to.

#### SECTION 142

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 233:

In page 122, line 16, to delete “community” and substitute “acute”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 142, as amended, agreed to.

Sections 143 and 144 agreed to.

#### NEW SECTION

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Acceptance of this amendment involves the deletion of section 145 of the Bill.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 234:

In page 123, between lines 11 and 12 to insert the following:

“**145.** (1) A person who proposes to operate more than one registered acute mental health centre or registered community mental health centre shall make a separate application to be registered for each of those centres.

(2) A person who proposes to operate more than one registered community mental health service shall make a separate application to be registered for each of those services, but may, with the agreement of the Commission, make one application for some or all of those services.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 145 deleted.

#### SECTION 146

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 235:

In page 123, between lines 22 and 23, to insert the following:

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“(2) The Commission shall visit a mental health service in respect of which a person has applied for registration as a registered acute mental health centre within a prescribed period and take any findings into consideration when assessing the application for registration.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 146, as amended, agreed to.

#### SECTION 147

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 236:

In page 124, between lines 24 and 25, to insert the following:

“(2) The Commission shall visit a mental health service in respect of which a person has applied for registration as a registered community mental health centre within a prescribed period and take any findings into consideration when assessing the application for registration.”

Amendment agreed to.

Section 147, as amended, agreed to.

#### SECTION 148

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 237:

In page 125, between lines 13 and 14, to insert the following:

“(2) The Commission may visit a mental health service in respect of which a person has applied for registration as a registered community mental health service within a prescribed period and take any findings into consideration when assessing the application for registration.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 148, as amended, agreed to.

#### SECTION 149

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 238:

In page 126, to delete lines 29 to 32 and substitute the following:

“(5) The Commission may visit a registered mental health service in respect of which a person has applied to renew its registration under this section and take any findings into consideration when assessing the application for renewal.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 149, as amended, agreed to.

Section 150 agreed to.

*Dáil Éireann*  
SECTION 151

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 239:

In page 128, line 21, to delete “period of 3” and substitute “period of no more than 3”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 240:

In page 128, lines 23 and 24, to delete “period of 5” and substitute “period of no more than 5”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 241:

In page 128, lines 25 and 26, to delete “period of 5” and substitute “period of no more than 5”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 151, as amended, agreed to.

Sections 152 to 160, inclusive, agreed to.

SECTION 161

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 242:

In page 133, line 31, to delete “*sections*” and substitute “*section*”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 161, as amended, agreed to.

Section 162 agreed to.

SECTION 163

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 243:

In page 134, line 17, to delete “*sections*” and substitute “*section*”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 163, as amended, agreed to.

SECTION 164

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Amendments Nos. 244 to 246, inclusive, are related and will be discussed together.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 244:

In page 134, line 37, to delete “and to the Commission”.

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These amendments remove the reference to the Mental Health Commission from the notification of day-to-day operations of the registered mental health service in section 164(3)(b). Compliance with the Act in this section has been moved to section 164(3)(d). It is not appropriate for the Mental Health Commission to be notified of the day-to-day operations of the service as it is the responsibility of the service provider and not the regulator to implement the services.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 245:

In page 134, line 39, to delete “, including in relation to any compliance with this Act”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 246:

In page 135, to delete lines 4 and 5 and substitute the following:

“(d) liaising with the Commission from time to time, including in relation to compliance with this Act and when requested to do so by the Commission.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 164, as amended, agreed to.

## SECTION 165

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Amendments Nos. 247 and 248 are related and will be discussed together.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I move amendment No. 247:

In page 135, line 30, to delete “consultant psychiatrist” and substitute “qualified mental health professional”.

These amendments seek in similar ways to the previous amendment I spoke on to align the language of the Bill with policies previously published and to promote distributed leadership across mental health services. I believe the role should be competency-based and discipline non-specific, focusing on the relevant clinical and organisational expertise. As I said earlier, there should be the right person at the right time to meet the needs of the patient.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** Unfortunately, I am not in a position to support this amendment. The expert review of the Mental Health Act did not recommend that a profession other than a consultant psychiatrist could become a clinical director of a service. Uniquely among health professionals, doctors have full clinical responsibility for people under their care and are similarly liable for a person’s care. It may be that a future review of this enactment will recommend widening the professionals who could become a clinical director, but for such a recommendation to be accepted at this stage, a whole-of-system change would need to occur. I cannot accept the amendment at this time, but I believe it is a matter worth considering in future reviews of this enactment.

Amendment put and declared lost.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I move amendment No. 248:



In page 135, line 35, to delete “consultant psychiatrist” and substitute “qualified mental health professional”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Section 165 agreed to.

## SECTION 166

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Amendments Nos. 249 and 250 are related and will be discussed together.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 249:

In page 136, line 5, after “may” to insert “, with the approval of the Commission,”.

These amendments provide for the approval of the Mental Health Commission to be given to inspectors in sections 166(1) and 166(3) in relation to compliance notices.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 250:

In page 136, line 17, after “may” to insert “, with the approval of the Commission”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 166, as amended, agreed to.

Sections 167 to 176, inclusive, agreed to.

## NEW SECTIONS

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Amendment No. 251 has been ruled out of order.

Amendment No. 251 not moved.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I move amendment No. 252:

In page 145, between lines 12 and 13, to insert the following:

### **“5-year sharing the vision funding and implementation strategy**

**177.** (1) The Minister shall, within 12 months of the passage of this Act, publish a five-year funding and implementation strategy for mental health services.

(2) The strategy referenced in *subsection (1)* shall be reviewed annually by the Mental Health Commission.

(3) The strategy shall place an emphasis on shifting care to community-based services as and where appropriate.”.

This amendment is very straightforward and clear in its request. We are seeking to ensure the Minister of the day “shall, within 12 months of the passage of this Act, publish a five-year funding and implementation strategy for mental health services”. As I said before, we need to

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have definitive timelines and future-proofing of mental health services. We also need to be able to forward plan and this is what this amendment seeks to allow us to be able to do.

We are also asking that the strategy previously referenced in the Bill “shall be reviewed annually by the Mental Health Commission” so any emerging issues and concerns can be addressed at the earliest possible time.

We are asking too that “The strategy shall place an emphasis on shifting care to community-based services as and where appropriate”. When the closures of several institutions happened - correctly - several years ago and the move to community care was the plan, what did not follow with this move of the patient and service user was an adequate level of funding to make it effective.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I am not going to support this amendment because I believe it is unnecessary. We are currently in the second year of a three-year implementation plan for Sharing the Vision. This is the second of three such implementation plans over the lifespan of this policy. Furthermore, it would be inappropriate for the Minister to be answerable to the Mental Health Commission because it is the regulator. Instead, an independent national implementation and monitoring committee, NIMC, oversees the progress of Sharing the Vision’s implementation plan. Arising from an independent review of the NIMC structures completed in 2023, the NIMC prepares and approves two status reports for publication on the Department’s website every year. The chair updates the Minister following approval of the report by the NIMC, so a status report already exists concerning the Sharing the Vision policy and timelines. For this reason, I am not in a position to accept this proposed amendment.

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** Amendment No. 251 passed me by without a chance to comment on it, so I wonder if I could comment briefly now.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I am afraid not, Deputy. It is out of order and you cannot comment at all.

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** Okay, fair enough.

Amendment put and declared lost.

## SECTION 177

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Amendments Nos. 253 to 255, inclusive, are related and will be discussed together.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 253:

In page 145, lines 14 and 15, to delete “may, and, at the request of the Minister, shall” and substitute “may, and at the request of the Minister shall,”.

These amendments concern typographical errors that need correcting. Amendment No. 255 removes the reference to section 76 in relation to absence with leave of a child. It is now included along with the reference to absence with leave of an adult in section 38. Both of these are technical changes.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 254:

In page 145, line 18, to delete “16 years and over” and substitute “16 years or older”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 255:

In page 145, line 25, after “*section 38*” to insert “or 76”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 177, as amended, agreed to.

#### SECTION 178

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 256:

In page 146, lines 33 and 34, to delete all words from and including “(1) For the” in line 33 down to and including line 34 and substitute the following:

“(1) An advanced electronic signature may be used for the purpose of any signature under this Act.”.

These are technical amendments to include the term “advanced” in this section on electronic signatures and their use. They update the section throughout to read “advanced electronic signature”.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank the Minister of State. That was regarding amendments Nos. 256 and 257, as they are related.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 257:

In page 146, line 35, after “of” to insert “advanced”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 178, as amended, agreed to.

#### SECTION 179

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Amendments Nos 258 to 265, inclusive, are related and may be discussed together.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 258:

In page 147, line 7, to delete “that assessment no later than 14 days after that person’s admission” and substitute the following:

“that assessment, no later than 14 days, or such shorter period as may be prescribed, after the date of that person’s admission”.

The following amendments have been grouped, as the Ceann Comhairle has said. Some stakeholders raised concerns that subparagraph (a) of section 181 represented political over-reach into clinical decisions regarding a person’s care and treatment. It was never the intention

that this provision would allow any Minister to dictate clinical decisions in a care plan. This subparagraph has been amended to provide absolute clarity.

Other amendments to these sections are mainly technical in nature. Amendment No. 265 has been prepared to amend subparagraph (a) of section 181 such that the reference from “content of the care plan” will read the “form of the care plan”. This amendment will ensure that the clinical content of any care plan remains, as rightfully it should, the responsibility of the person’s multidisciplinary team, as Deputy Clarke spoke to earlier. It is not and never was the intention of this section for the Minister to dictate clinical matters. The amendment to this section makes this policy clearer and should dispel any confusion. It does not allow for a standardised approach to be introduced to what the form of the care plan looks like, if this is deemed appropriate. This will ensure that the form that care plans take can be standardised, meaning a person in one registered acute mental health centre will have a care plan in the same form as someone receiving treatment in another centre. Furthermore, the text referencing the setting of goals has been removed. The purpose of this section, and other sections related to care plans, is to ensure that care plans are given the appropriate attention and that people, where appropriate, can be active participants in creating their care plans.

With regard to amendment No. 264, I do not intend to support this amendment. This amendment seeks to delete the existing section 181. Section 181 relates to the making of regulations regarding care plans by the Mental Health Commission. The purpose of this section is to ensure that there is a more standardised approach to care planning and that people have the opportunity to play an active role in the creation of their care plans. The purpose of this section is not and was never to infringe on clinical decisions. As such, it is important that section 181 remain in the Bill and that the commission be permitted to make regulations regarding care plans as necessary.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 259:

In page 147, to delete lines 17 to 22 and substitute the following:

“(3) A member of a person’s multidisciplinary team, after consultation with other members of that team, shall—

(a) review the care plan on a regular basis with the frequency of review based on the individual needs of the person concerned, and

(b) where necessary or relevant, revise the care plan after such consultation and, insofar as possible, in consultation with the person concerned.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 179, as amended, agreed to.

## SECTION 180

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 260:

In page 147, line 36, after “days” to insert “, or such shorter period as may be prescribed”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 261:

In page 148, line 10, after “regard” to insert “, in accordance with the guiding principles,”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 262:

In page 148, line 21, to delete “*sections*” and substitute “*section*”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 263:

In page 148, between lines 29 and 30, to insert the following:

“(5) A member of a child’s multidisciplinary team shall consult with other members of that multidisciplinary team when preparing or revising a care plan.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 180, as amended, agreed to.

#### NEW SECTION

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Acceptance of amendment No. 264, in the name of Deputies Cullinane and Clarke, involves the deletion of section 181. It will insert a new section and has been discussed with amendment No. 258.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** I move amendment No. 264:

In page 148, between lines 35 and 36, to insert the following:

#### **“Regulations concerning care plans**

**181.** (1) The Executive shall keep and maintain records for the purpose of—

- (a) identifying persons to whom mental health services are being provided,
- (b) identifying those services and the persons providing the services pursuant to this Part,
- (c) specifying the aggregate needs identified by the services,
- (d) specifying the number of persons to whom services are not being provided or to whom they are not being provided in full, and
- (e) planning the provision of such services to persons.

(2) The Executive shall, within 6 months after the end of each year, submit a report in writing to the Minister in relation to the aggregate needs identified by services on the basis of information collected in accordance with *subsection (1)* including an indication of the periods of time ideally required for the provision of the services, the sequence of such provision and an estimate of the cost of such provision.



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(3) A report under this section shall include such other information in such form and regarding such matters as the Minister may direct and shall be published by the Executive within one month of the date of its submission to the Minister.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

## SECTION 181

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 265:

In page 149, to delete lines 1 and 2 and substitute the following:

“(a) the form of a care plan;”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 181, as amended, agreed to.

Sections 182 to 184, inclusive, agreed to.

## SECTION 185

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Amendments Nos. 266 to 269, inclusive, are related and may be discussed together.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 266:

In page 150, line 32, to delete “a person” and substitute “an adult”.

Amendments Nos. 266 to 269, inclusive, have been grouped. These amendments relate to the section providing for nominated persons. When a person is in a registered acute mental health centre, they may nominate a person of their choosing to act as their nominated person. This is new and is something that we have been looking at for a long time. This person may be a family member, a friend, a representative of an advocacy service or anyone else they select. This nominated person, with the person’s consent, will be entitled to receive certain information on behalf of the person during their admission. The person concerned may consult them or ask them to attend certain meetings during their admission, such as meetings on discharge planning. I believe the introduction of nominated persons for adults and for children is a positive step and will encourage people to involve their family members and loved ones in their care and treatment.

Amendments Nos. 266 and 268 are technical amendments to replace the term “person” with “adult” in order to provide consistency throughout the Bill. Amendment No. 267 is a technical amendment that rewords the subsection to make it clearer that, along with the will and preferences of the person, the view of the nominated person in relation to the person’s will and preferences must be taken into account by the consultant psychiatrist ordering, initiating or applying a restrictive practice. Amendment No. 269 is a technical amendment to correct references to other sections.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 267:

In page 151, to delete lines 12 to 17 and substitute the following:

“(6) The responsible consultant psychiatrist or the relevant health professional who orders, initiates or applies a restrictive practice shall have due regard to—

(a) the will and preferences of the person regarding the application of a restrictive practice, and

(b) the view of any nominee in relation to such will and preferences,

and those views shall be recorded in writing in the person’s medical record and care plan.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 185, as amended, agreed to.

#### SECTION 186

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 268:

In page 151, line 26, to delete “any other person” and substitute “another adult”.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 269:

In page 151, line 28, to delete “*sections 60, 73, 83, 90 and 91*” and substitute “*sections 60, 69, 73, 74, 75, 90 and 91*”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 186, as amended, agreed to.

#### SECTION 187

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Amendments Nos. 270 and 271 are related and may be discussed together.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 270:

In page 152, line 23, to delete “Chief Inspector” and substitute “Chief Executive Officer”.

Amendments Nos. 270 and 271 have been grouped. These amendments were prepared following consultation with the Mental Health Commission. Further to my previous comments in relation to the grouping on the role of the chief inspector, these amendments provide for the authorisation to inspect records held by a service to be given by the chief executive officer rather than the chief inspector. Furthermore, the purpose of inspecting records is amended to relate to the “Commission of its duties” instead of the “‘Chief Inspector or the Assistant Inspectors of his or her duties’.

Amendment agreed to.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 271:

In page 152, lines 24 and 25, to delete “Chief Inspector or the Assistant Inspectors of his

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or her duties” and substitute “Commission of its duties”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 187, as amended, agreed to.

Sections 188 to 191, inclusive, agreed to.

## SECTION 192

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 272:

In page 154, line 10, to delete “that section” and substitute “any of those sections”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 192, as amended, agreed to.

Sections 193 to 196, inclusive, agreed to.

## SECTION 197

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I move amendment No. 273:

In page 157, between lines 10 and 11, to insert the following:

“(4) Where the Commission assigns a legal representative from a panel to an affected person under *subsection (3)*, the Commission shall assign the legal representative who was previously assigned by the Commission on behalf of the person in respect of a relevant matter specified in *paragraph (a)* of *section 195* unless—

(a) the legal representative previously assigned is unavailable, or

(b) the person wishes to be provided with the services of a legal representative on the panel other than the legal representative previously assigned.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 197, as amended, agreed to.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** At this point, we must adjourn.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** We were nearly there.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** We were nearly there.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** We were nearly there, unfortunately. We were very near. We adjourn now and move to the voting block.

Progress reported; Committee to sit again.

*10 o'clock*

**Criminal Law (Prohibition of the Disclosure of Counselling Records) Bill 2025: Second Stage (Resumed) [Private Members]**

The following motion was moved by Deputy Ruth Coppinger on Thursday, 12 June 2025: “That the Bill be now read a Second Time.”

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after “That” and substitute the following:

“Dáil Éireann resolves that the Criminal Law (Prohibition of the Disclosure of Counselling Records) Bill 2025, be deemed to be read a second time this day twelve months, to allow for consideration by the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration to consider and bring forward provisions relating to Counselling Records.”.

-(Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Deputy Christopher O’Sullivan)

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I must now deal with a deferred division relating to the ministerial amendment to the Second Reading motion on the Criminal Law (Prohibition of the Disclosure of Counselling Records) Bill 2025.

Amendment put:

<i>The Committee divided: Tá, 65; Níl, 82; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Ahern, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Aird, William.</i>	
<i>Bacik, Ivana.</i>	<i>Ardagh, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Bennett, Cathy.</i>	<i>Boland, Grace.</i>	
<i>Brady, John.</i>	<i>Brabazon, Tom.</i>	
<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	<i>Brennan, Brian.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Joanna.</i>	<i>Brennan, Shay.</i>	
<i>Carthy, Matt.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	
<i>Clarke, Sorca.</i>	<i>Browne, James.</i>	
<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	<i>Burke, Colm.</i>	
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	
<i>Cronin, Réada.</i>	<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	
<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	<i>Butterly, Paula.</i>	
<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>	
<i>Cummins, Jen.</i>	<i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i>	
<i>Devine, Máire.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Donnelly, Paul.</i>	<i>Cahill, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	<i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	
<i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
<i>Gannon, Gary.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	
<i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i>	<i>Cleere, Peter ‘Chap’.</i>	

<i>Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.</i>	<i>Clendennen, John.</i>	
<i>Gould, Thomas.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	
<i>Graves, Ann.</i>	<i>Connolly, John.</i>	
<i>Guirke, Johnny.</i>	<i>Cooney, Joe.</i>	
<i>Hearne, Rory.</i>	<i>Cummins, John.</i>	
<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	<i>Currie, Emer.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i>	<i>Daly, Martin.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	<i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i>	
<i>Kerrane, Claire.</i>	<i>Devlin, Cormac.</i>	
<i>Lawless, Paul.</i>	<i>Dillon, Alan.</i>	
<i>Lawlor, George.</i>	<i>Dolan, Albert.</i>	
<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	
<i>McGettigan, Donna.</i>	<i>Feighan, Frankie.</i>	
<i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i>	<i>Fleming, Seán.</i>	
<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	<i>Foley, Norma.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	<i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i>	
<i>Mythen, Johnny.</i>	<i>Geoghegan, James.</i>	
<i>Nash, Ged.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	
<i>Newsome Drennan, Natasha.</i>	<i>Harkin, Marian.</i>	
<i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i>	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	
<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>	
<i>O'Donoghue, Richard.</i>	<i>Heneghan, Barry.</i>	
<i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</i>	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	
<i>O'Flynn, Ken.</i>	<i>Higgins, Emer.</i>	
<i>O'Gorman, Roderic.</i>	<i>Keogh, Keira.</i>	
<i>O'Hara, Louis.</i>	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	<i>Lawless, James.</i>	
<i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i>	<i>Maxwell, David.</i>	
<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	<i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i>	
<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	<i>McCarthy, Noel.</i>	
<i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	<i>McCormack, Tony.</i>	
<i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i>	<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	
<i>Quaide, Liam.</i>	<i>McGrath, Séamus.</i>	
<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	<i>McGreehan, Erin.</i>	
<i>Rice, Pádraig.</i>	<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	
<i>Sheehan, Conor.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	
<i>Sherlock, Marie.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	
<i>Smith, Duncan.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Shane.</i>	
<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	<i>Murphy, Michael.</i>	
<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	<i>Neville, Joe.</i>	
<i>Wall, Mark.</i>	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>	



<i>Ward, Charles.</i>	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	
<i>Ward, Mark.</i>	<i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i>	
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
	<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>	
	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
	<i>O'Meara, Ryan.</i>	
	<i>O'Shea, John Paul.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Christopher.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Pádraig.</i>	
	<i>Ó Cearúil, Naoise.</i>	
	<i>Ó Fearghail, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Ó Muirí, Naoise.</i>	
	<i>Richmond, Neale.</i>	
	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>	
	<i>Timmins, Edward.</i>	
	<i>Toole, Gillian.</i>	
	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>	
	<i>Ward, Barry.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Paul Murphy and Ruth Coppinger.

Amendment declared carried.

Motion, as amended, put and agreed to.

### **Emergency Action on Housing and Homelessness: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]**

The following motion was moved by Deputy Eoin Ó Broin on Tuesday, 17 June 2025:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

- the housing and homelessness crisis is getting worse;
- house prices, rents, council waiting lists and homelessness are all rising;
- the Government continue to miss their social and affordable housing target, targets that are too low to begin with;

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- tens of thousands of homes are lying vacant and derelict in every city and county;
- the lack of affordable homes, particularly for essential workers and low paid workers, close to their workplaces, is impacting on the delivery of public services and undermining economic competitiveness;
- an entire generation of young people are locked out of affordable homes with the highest levels of emigration since 2015;
- growing numbers of people approaching pension age are living in expensive and insecure rental accommodation fearful of their future;
- the student housing crisis continues to deepen;
- the housing needs of Travellers, people with disabilities, older people and other marginalised communities continue to be ignored; and
- tens of thousands of homeowners and tenants continue to live in unsafe homes impacted by defective concrete block and Celtic Tiger era building defects;

further notes that:

- housing is a human right;
- the cost-of-living crisis is putting ever greater pressure on workers and families while access to key public services including healthcare, childcare, disability and special needs services places even greater financial burdens on communities;
- after 4 months in office it is clear that this do-nothing Government has abandoned communities;
- the Governments failure to invest in critical infrastructure such as water, electricity and under resourcing of the planning system is delaying the delivery of much needed homes;
- the chronic underfunding of our local authority housing and planning departments which must be reversed for councils to play their key role in meeting public housing needs; and
- instead of adopting a radical change of housing policy as recommended by the Housing Commission, they are threatening to remove protection for renters, proposing even more tax breaks to vulture funds, and further delaying the delivery of much needed social and affordable homes; and

calls on Government to agree that:

- emergency action must be taken to address the deepening housing and homeless crisis including;
  - a dramatic increase of investment in and delivery of public housing to meet social and affordable housing need;
  - stronger taxes on vacancy and dereliction and greater use of Compulsory Purchase Orders to bring empty homes back into use;

- real action to protect private renters through freezing and cutting rents and no changes to Rent Pressure Zones that would increase rents;
- an emergency response to rising homelessness, including reintroducing the ban on no fault evictions; and
- fully restore and increase funding for vital homeless prevention schemes including Tenant In Situ and Housing First.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after “Dáil Éireann” and substitute the following:

“recognises that:

- Housing for All, sets out an ambitious multi-annual programme that seeks to deliver more than 300,000 new homes by 2030;
- record levels of investment are being provided for the delivery of housing in 2025, with overall capital funding now available of almost €6.8 billion;
- this provision includes €450 million to support the delivery of 3,000 additional social, affordable and cost rental homes in the period 2025 – 2027; and €265 million to allow for a significant programme of acquisitions in 2025 for priority categories of need;
- the capital provision for 2025 is supplemented by a further €1.65 billion in current funding to address housing needs;
- over 36,700 social homes have been delivered under Housing for All to Quarter 4 2024; in 2023, nearly 12,000 social homes were delivered, including 8,110 new-build social homes, the highest level of delivery of new-build social housing since 1975, and in 2024, 10,595 social homes were delivered including 7,871 new builds, 1,501 acquisitions and 1,223 leasing units;
- nearly 13,000 affordable housing supports have been delivered since the launch of Housing for All to December 2024 by Approved Housing Bodies (AHB), local authorities and the Land Development Agency (LDA), alongside schemes such as the First Home Scheme (FHS) and the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant;
- over 7,100 affordable housing supports were delivered in 2024, the highest yearly delivery to date, exceeding the year’s target of 6,400;
- over €1.3 billion has been approved under the Cost Rental Equity Loan (CREL) since launch, to assist in the delivery of over 6,000 Cost Rental homes across 17 local authority areas, with over 2,000 homes delivered under CREL to end 2024; and
- on 13th May, Government approved an additional €30 million commitment to the FHS, bringing the total State commitment for the FHS to €370 million, more than 6,700 buyers have been approved to date under the FHS and more than 3,300 homes have been bought using the FHS to the end of Quarter 1 2025;

further recognises that:

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— while housing supply has increased significantly in recent years, much more needs to be achieved;

— the measures introduced under Housing for All have helped establish a solid platform to ‘scale-up’ delivery of housing in the short-term and secure a sustainable level of supply that will help us meet demand;

— the measures committed to in the Programme for Government, including a new housing plan building on the successes of Housing for All, will help us meet the enormous challenge of delivering more than 300,000 new homes by 2030;

— the Government’s new national housing plan will incorporate pragmatic actions to boost housing activity in the short-term coupled with strategic deliverables to drive comprehensive systemic change and subsequent increase in supply into the long-term;

— there has been record levels of investment in infrastructure under the current National Development Plan (NDP) for the period 2021 to 2030;

— new capital investments in infrastructure, particularly to support housing targets, are being considered in the context of the ongoing review of the NDP; and

— on 30th April, 2025, Dáil Éireann approved the Revised National Planning Framework (RNPF), which provides the basis for the review and updating of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and local authority development plans to reflect critical matters such as updated housing figures or projected jobs growth, including through the zoning of land for residential, employment and a range of other purposes;

acknowledges that:

— to see the revised NPF translated to a local basis as urgently as possible, local authorities have been advised to start the process of reviewing and updating their development plans to align with the revised NPF;

— the Planning and Development Act 2024, which is being commenced on a phased basis over the next 18 months, represents a radical reform of the planning system and will set, for example, new statutory timelines for decision-making and streamline judicial review processes, which will help to reduce the delays that may be constraining housing supply;

— the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2025, to be enacted before this summer recess, will ensure sufficient time is given to activate planning permissions for much needed housing;

— under the Planning and Development Act 2024, the new Urban Development Zones (UDZ) will enable further housing development and the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage has signed an order that will enable local authorities to identify suitable sites for UDZs, and for the LDA and Regional Assemblies to bring appropriate sites to the attention of local authorities and the Minister, with work to begin as soon as possible;

— a review of the Exempted Development provisions is underway that will provide further options for the provision of housing, with a public consultation commenced this month and updated regulations to come into force later this year;

— Part 17 of the Planning and Development Act 2024 will also be commenced shortly to enable the establishment of An Coimisiún Pleanála to replace An Bord Pleanála; and

— a series of reforms have been progressed to support a well-resourced planning system, including the implementation of the Ministerial Action Plan on Planning Resources, which will strengthen the planning system and support the timely delivery of critical infrastructure and housing;

further acknowledges that:

— Government continues to support local authorities in the delivery of housing programmes, with almost €4.8 billion provided to the authorities in 2024 and this will increase further in 2025;

— more than 250 additional capital posts in local authorities nationally are being funded by the Department to support social housing delivery; in addition, over 140 professional/technical and administrative posts dedicated to delivering affordable housing are being funded by the Department in local authorities to strengthen their capacity to initiate, design, plan, develop and manage housing projects;

— the Government is progressing a number of structured and coordinated initiatives to address vacancy and dereliction, including the review of the Derelict Sites Act 1990, the Town Centre First Policy Approach and the implementation of the Planning and Development Act 2024 and development of related secondary legislation, including the current review of exempted development provisions;

— the Planning and Development Regulations provide for an exemption from the need to obtain planning permission for the change of use of certain vacant commercial buildings, including vacant above ground floor premises, to residential use such as ‘above shop’ living for up to nine units, subject to conditions and limitations, the most recent figures show that since 2018, local authorities have received 1,457 notifications relating to the provision of 3,429 new homes nationwide through use of this specific exemption;

— a €150 million fund to end long-term vacancy and dereliction in towns and cities has been provided under the Urban Regeneration Development Fund (URDF);

— by the end of Quarter 1 2025, over 8,652 Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant approvals had issued already, and €112 million has been paid out to refurbish almost 2,100 homes;

— the Compulsory Purchase Order Activation Programme, launched in April 2023, requires a proactive and systematic approach by local authorities to bring vacant and derelict properties back into use, this includes the active use of compulsory purchase powers by local authorities, with URDF Call 3 and other funding supports available for such purchases; and

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— the vacancy rate of 3.5 per cent as reported by the Quarter 4 2024 Geo-Directory report is the lowest recorded vacancy rate since 2013;

affirms Government efforts to:

— support the housing needs of specific groups through a range of measures and supports, including a targeted second-hand social housing acquisitions programme, which responds to the needs of the most vulnerable, and which is supported by increasing the 2025 budget for the programme from the €60 million available under Housing for All to €325 million;

— address the housing options available for older people, as committed to in the Programme for Government, including by mandating local authorities to find suitable sites for housing specifically designed for older adults, ensuring accessible options within local communities; supporting AHBs in developing and managing senior housing with on-site support services; and reviewing and standardising the older persons housing financial contribution scheme;

— support older people and those with disabilities to continue living independently - Budget 2025 provided an Exchequer capital provision of €99.5 million for the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and Disabled People with every local authority receiving an increase in their capital allocation; on 9th June, €23 million funding was announced for local authorities to carry out adaptations, extensions and other improvements to their existing social housing stock;

— fund Traveller-specific accommodation which has been fully drawn-down by local authorities over the past five years from 2020 to 2024, resulting in investment of over €100 million capital investment in Traveller-specific accommodation;

— support Housing First which was expanded significantly under Housing for All; over 860 tenancies were created under the current plan up to the end of Quarter 1 2025 and 1,060 individuals were in a Housing First tenancy; and

— increase the availability of suitable, financially accessible student accommodation as a key policy priority in the new Student Accommodation Strategy, being developed by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, which places affordability and equity at its core;

further affirms Government efforts to:

— work with all stakeholders to continue accelerating housing supply across all tenures and to deliver social, affordable and cost rental homes at scale and improve the availability and affordability of homes;

— support individuals and families who may be struggling to purchase a home, through a range of schemes, including the Help to Buy, FHS, Local Authority Affordable Purchase Scheme and the Local Authority Home Loan;

— sustain tenant in-situ acquisitions into 2025 as a clear indication of Government's commitment to preventing homelessness for Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme tenants who have been served a 'no fault' Notice of Termination;



— support the rental sector through new policy measures approved by Government on 10th June that will modify rent controls with the aim of strengthening tenancy protections and security of tenure, while encouraging greater private investment in the rental market;

— provide stronger protections and greater certainty for the rental sector by extending rent controls nationally, to protect all tenants from high rent increases, rent increases will be linked to inflation, whilst retaining the cap on permissible rent inflation at two per cent with limited exceptions; and

— to provide greater security of tenure by introducing legislative changes to significantly restrict ‘no fault evictions’ for smaller landlords (three or fewer tenancies) and to prohibit them for larger landlords, these changes will further enhance the current provision of tenancies of unlimited duration with the introduction of rolling tenancies of a minimum duration of six years with smaller landlords; and

notes that:

— a Housing Activation Office in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage is being established to identify and seek to address barriers to the delivery of public infrastructure projects needed to enable housing development at local level, through the alignment of funding and coordination of infrastructure providers;

— an Infrastructure Division has been established in the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation, that will lead a process of infrastructure reform; and

— the Government is investing record levels of capital funding in critical infrastructure, including in the areas of water and energy, and will continue to do so under the NDP for the period 2025 to 2035, to be finalised by end of July.”.

- (Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage)

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the motion regarding Emergency Action on Housing and Homelessness. On Tuesday, 17 June 2025, on the question, “That the amendment to the motion be agreed to”, a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Amendment put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 83; Níl, 67; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Aird, William.</i>	<i>Ahern, Ciarán.</i>	
<i>Ardagh, Catherine.</i>	<i>Bacik, Ivana.</i>	
<i>Boland, Grace.</i>	<i>Bennett, Cathy.</i>	
<i>Brabazon, Tom.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>	
<i>Brennan, Brian.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	
<i>Brennan, Shay.</i>	<i>Byrne, Joanna.</i>	
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Carthy, Matt.</i>	

<i>Browne, James.</i>	<i>Clarke, Sorca.</i>	
<i>Burke, Colm.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>	
<i>Butterly, Paula.</i>	<i>Cronin, Réada.</i>	
<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	<i>Cummins, Jen.</i>	
<i>Cahill, Michael.</i>	<i>Devine, Máire.</i>	
<i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Paul.</i>	
<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	
<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	<i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i>	
<i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i>	<i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i>	
<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	
<i>Cleere, Peter ‘Chap’.</i>	<i>Gannon, Gary.</i>	
<i>Clendennen, John.</i>	<i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i>	
<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	<i>Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.</i>	
<i>Connolly, John.</i>	<i>Gould, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Cooney, Joe.</i>	<i>Graves, Ann.</i>	
<i>Cummins, John.</i>	<i>Guirke, Johnny.</i>	
<i>Currie, Emer.</i>	<i>Hearne, Rory.</i>	
<i>Daly, Martin.</i>	<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	
<i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i>	<i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i>	
<i>Devlin, Cormac.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	
<i>Dillon, Alan.</i>	<i>Kerrane, Claire.</i>	
<i>Dolan, Albert.</i>	<i>Lawless, Paul.</i>	
<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	<i>Lawlor, George.</i>	
<i>Feighan, Frankie.</i>	<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>	
<i>Fleming, Seán.</i>	<i>McGettigan, Donna.</i>	
<i>Foley, Norma.</i>	<i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i>	
<i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i>	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	
<i>Geoghegan, James.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	
<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	<i>Mythen, Johnny.</i>	
<i>Harkin, Marian.</i>	<i>Nash, Ged.</i>	
<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>	<i>Newsome Drennan, Nata-sha.</i>	
<i>Heneghan, Barry.</i>	<i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i>	
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	
<i>Higgins, Emer.</i>	<i>O’Donoghue, Richard.</i>	
<i>Keogh, Keira.</i>	<i>O’Donoghue, Robert.</i>	
<i>Lahart, John.</i>	<i>O’Flynn, Ken.</i>	
<i>Lawless, James.</i>	<i>O’Gorman, Roderic.</i>	
<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	<i>O’Hara, Louis.</i>	

<i>Maxwell, David.</i>	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	
<i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i>	<i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i>	
<i>McCarthy, Noel.</i>	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	
<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	
<i>McCormack, Tony.</i>	<i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i>	
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	
<i>McGrath, Séamus.</i>	<i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i>	
<i>McGreehan, Erin.</i>	<i>Quaide, Liam.</i>	
<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	<i>Rice, Pádraig.</i>	
<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	<i>Sheehan, Conor.</i>	
<i>Moynihan, Shane.</i>	<i>Sherlock, Marie.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Michael.</i>	<i>Smith, Duncan.</i>	
<i>Neville, Joe.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	
<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	<i>Wall, Mark.</i>	
<i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i>	<i>Ward, Charles.</i>	
<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	<i>Ward, Mark.</i>	
<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>		
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>		
<i>O'Meara, Ryan.</i>		
<i>O'Shea, John Paul.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Christopher.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Pádraig.</i>		
<i>Ó Cearúil, Naoise.</i>		
<i>Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.</i>		
<i>Ó Muirí, Naoise.</i>		
<i>Richmond, Neale.</i>		
<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>		
<i>Timmins, Edward.</i>		
<i>Toole, Gillian.</i>		
<i>Troy, Robert.</i>		
<i>Ward, Barry.</i>		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Denise Mitchell.

Amendment declared carried.

Amendment put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 83; Níl, 67; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Aird, William.</i>	<i>Ahern, Ciarán.</i>	
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<i>Butterly, Paula.</i>	<i>Cronin, Réada.</i>	
<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	
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<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	<i>Cummins, Jen.</i>	
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<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	
<i>Cleere, Peter ‘Chap’.</i>	<i>Gannon, Gary.</i>	
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<i>Daly, Martin.</i>	<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	
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<i>Devlin, Cormac.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	
<i>Dillon, Alan.</i>	<i>Kerrane, Claire.</i>	
<i>Dolan, Albert.</i>	<i>Lawless, Paul.</i>	
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<i>McCormack, Tony.</i>	<i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i>	
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<i>McGrath, Séamus.</i>	<i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i>	
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<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
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<i>Ó Cearúil, Naoise.</i>		
<i>Ó Fearghail, Seán.</i>		
<i>Ó Muirí, Naoise.</i>		
<i>Richmond, Neale.</i>		
<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>		
<i>Timmins, Edward.</i>		
<i>Toole, Gillian.</i>		

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<b><i>Troy, Robert.</i></b>		
<b><i>Ward, Barry.</i></b>		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Denise Mitchell.

Question declared carried.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar athló ar 10.28 p.m. go dtí 8.47 a.m., Déardaoin, an 19 Meitheamh 2025.

The Dáil adjourned at 10.28 p.m. until 8.47 a.m. on Thursday, 19 June 2025.