



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

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

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 9 Iúil 2025

Wednesday, 9 July 2025

Chuaigh an Ceann Comhairle i gceannas ar 9 a.m.

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

Ábhair Shaincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Matters

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aidan Farrelly): 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 Michael Cahill - To discuss a ban on pair trawling. Deputy Catherine Ardagh - To discuss the construction of a new school building in Ballyfermot.

Deputy William Aird - To discuss GP and primary care services in County Laois.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney - To discuss the granting of family reunification visas and visas for medical evacuees and their families from Gaza.

Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil - To discuss ongoing road safety issues on the Celbridge Road in Maynooth.

Deputy Séamus McGrath - To discuss the exclusion of some section 39 organisations from the public sector pay deal.

Deputy Brian Brennan - To discuss why certain genres or sectors of performing arts are not eligible for Arts Council funding.

Deputy Catherine Connolly - To discuss the need for a policy on trawling within Ireland's six-nautical mile limit.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire - To discuss an update on medevac assistance for ill and injured children from Gaza.

Deputy Malcolm Byrne - To discuss the levels of State support available to amateur drama and musical theatre.

Deputy Louis O'Hara - To discuss the need for updated wind energy development guide-

lines.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly - To discuss social welfare supports for separated parents who co-parent.

Deputy Colm Burke - To discuss the need for a national nursing home care policy. Deputy David Cullinane - To discuss funding for capital developments at ports and fishery harbours in Waterford. Deputy Alan Kelly - To discuss the regulations in place for the importation of firearms, ammunition and related materials by An Garda Síochána. Deputy Mattie McGrath - To discuss the role of whistleblowers making protected disclosures on health-related matters. Deputy Thomas Gould - To discuss funding for playgrounds that have been subject to antisocial behaviour and vandalism. Deputy John Connolly - To discuss the omission of a priority bus lane from development along the Western Distributor Road in Galway. Deputy Pa Daly - To discuss outpatient mental health services moving from Cahersiveen to Kilorglin. Deputy Danny Healy-Rae - To discuss issues around food security and production. Deputy Barry Ward - To discuss the treatment of thalidomide survivors. The matters raised by Deputies John Connolly, Catherine Connolly, Séamus McGrath, Pa Daly and William Aird have been selected for discussion.

Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate

Public Transport

Deputy John Connolly: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire Stáit as a bheith linn ar maidin chun an cheist seo a fhreagairt. The Galway transport strategy was launched with great expectation in 2016. It was heralded to develop an integrated transport system where infrastructural development and improved services would be integrated, giving commuters a greater option rather than simply relying on the car all the time. Regrettably, very few of the projects mentioned in this strategy have been completed. There have been some, such as a new pedestrian bridge across the River Corrib at Salmon Weir, while a small number of cycle routes and stage 1 and stage 2 of the Galway cycle network have been progressed and Ceannt station is under development. Some of the projects are going through the planning process at the moment. The N6 project, the Galway city ring road, is going through the planning process, as is the Dublin road bus corridor. Some have been granted planning but unfortunately have not progressed due to judicial reviews, most notably the cross-city link. In general, Galway citizens will say the strategy has had minimal impact. That is borne out by study after study on the impact of traffic on Galway. The most recent, a Department of Transport study, reckoned the cost of congestion to Galway city will reach €107 million in 2030, far more than other regional cities. Other aspects of the strategy included a park-and-ride strategy, which unfortunately has not progressed, and an enhanced new bus network, the implementation of which has regrettably been deferred to 2027.

Part of the city with the poorest public transport provision is the Knocknacarragh area. It is a heavily populated area. Many parts of it have no direct public transport option for the people living there. The Western Distributor Road runs right through the Knocknacarragh area into Ragoon. It is a spinal route with about 15,000 people living in spurs off the Western Distributor

Road. Of that new proposed bus network that I mentioned earlier, seven of the ten proposed new routes are expected to traverse the Western Distributor Road at some point. We are also led to believe by the National Transport Authority, NTA, that it is examining the development of a park-and-ride facility in Cappagh, which is right at the end of the Western Distributor Road.

Currently, the progression of the park and ride and the new bus network will bring buses to an area where there is no bus priority, where those buses will simply join the traffic. I can see the option not being as amenable as it should be were there bus priority measures in place. The Galway transport strategy in 2016 foresaw that the Western Distributor Road would evolve into a dedicated public transport spine including bus priority lanes and a core cycling corridor. In 2020, the NTA provided some funding to Galway City Council to advance a project for the development of bus lanes along as the Western Distributor Road. However, that did not amount to much. Last year, the NTA and Galway City Council proposed the development of segregated cycle lanes along the Western Distributor Road. I was on the council at the time and that was much welcomed. Part of my contribution at that time on the council was to urge the local authority officials to combine the development of the cycle lanes with enhanced bus infrastructure on the Western Distributor Road as this would give people a lead to the 2016 ambition for the road to develop into a public transport spine. Unfortunately, when the Part 8 for the cycle lanes was published, there was no reference to enhanced bus infrastructure on the road.

This is a serious missed opportunity. I believe that we will now develop the cycle infrastructure, and as I said it is very welcome, but we will end up shortly going back and taking out that infrastructure again and hopefully putting in the bus lanes, whereas we should combine the projects now.

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Jerry Buttimer): I thank Deputy Connolly for raising this very important matter. I am taking it on behalf of the Minister for Transport. The Department of Transport has responsibility for the provision of funding and setting of policy in relation to transport issues, including active travel. The NTA has responsibility for the allocation of funding to projects at local authority level and works with local authorities to ensure delivery of same.

I thank Deputy Connolly for his very insightful and in-depth diagnosis of the issues involved. The Deputy is right; congestion is choking up Galway. Recently, I was struck by the level of congestion as I approached Galway coming from the Cork side. As the Deputy knows, a significant increase in funding has been allocated by the Department of Transport to walking and cycling infrastructure projects in recent years, following a commitment of approximately €360 million per annum in the previous programme for Government across that Government's lifetime. The NTA's active travel programme receives most of this funding each year, with around €290 million allocated through that agency across all local authorities this year. Galway City Council has received a funding allocation of €8 million this year, of which €390,000 has been allocated to the Western Distributor Road active travel scheme. The Western Distributor Road cycle scheme is cognisant of the Galway bus network redesign implementation by providing new bus stops along the corridor. The new BusConnects network designed for Galway city envisages different levels of bus services running along the different sections of the Western Distributor Road. To the east of the Clybaun roundabout, a minimum of nine buses an hour will be operating on the road in each direction, namely, routes 3, 9A and 9B, and this increases to a minimum of 15 buses an hour operating on the road in each direction along the section from the retail park to the junction with Bishop O'Donnell Road, namely, routes 1, 9, 10B and 424.

The level of service along these sections of the Western Distributor Road from the junction with Clybaun Road to the junction with Bishop O'Donnell Road warrant and require continuous bus priority to be provided. This will be delivered under a separate future BusConnects project. Hence, along these sections only minimal cycling and wheeling interventions are proposed at this stage. Along the section of the Western Distributor Road between Cappagh roundabout and Clybaun Road roundabout, the new BusConnects network envisages only a single route, route 9A, operating along this section. This route is planned to operate at a 20-minute frequency, representing three buses in each direction per hour. This frequency level does not warrant the same level of continuous bus priority as the eastern sections. Accordingly, as further development of bus lanes is not proposed along this section west of Clybaun roundabout, it is intended to proceed with the provision of a high standard of pedestrian, cycling and wheeling facilities along the section of the route between Cappagh roundabout and Clybaun Road roundabout. The NTA has advised that rapid-build measures, namely, the installation of bollards along existing cycle lanes, would be preferred for the three easternmost road links of the route, between Clybaun Road roundabout and Deane roundabout. This is to cater for the future redesign of the bus network along the route where bus lanes are to be added, where required, at a later date. Therefore, active travel improvements for these road links are measures that are less permanent in nature and will be easier and more cost effective to upgrade at a future date.

Between the Cappagh roundabout and the Clybaun Road roundabout, the future redesigned BusConnects network does not include a frequency of bus service which warrants dedicated bus lanes. Accordingly, it is intended to proceed with the provision of a high standard of pedestrian, cycling and wheeling facilities along this section of the route. The design also entails the construction of safer segregated cycle, pedestrian and wheeling facilities at the Ballymoneen, Clybaun Road, Bóthar Stiofáin, An Logán Estate and Deane roundabouts.

I will take back the concerns the Deputy expressed. I very much hear his frustration and those of the residents of Galway, because it is a city that needs to be freed up, whether that is by more active travel, more buses or a different road network. It is congested. I fully understand the frustration and thank Deputy Connolly for raising the matter this morning.

Deputy John Connolly: I had a concern prior to the Minister of State's answer and, in fairness, the answer has gone some way to explaining the decision. There seemed to be a lack of co-ordination in the NTA between the public transport section, which might be responsible for public transport infrastructural development, and the active travel section. That needs to be looked at in future projects. I recognise fully that the existing demand for bus priority measures would be east of the Clybaun Road but it is worth bearing in mind that the NTA is pursuing the development of a park-and-ride facility on the Cappagh Road. I expect people to choose that option in the future as their preferred mode of transport for entering the city and that that will mean an increase in bus frequency between Cappagh and Clybaun Road. Perhaps we will have to look at the development of priority bus lanes along that stretch of the road. I welcome that there seems to be a commitment for it at a future point - I hope that is not long-fingered and that it will happen in the immediate future - to develop priority bus lanes between Clybaun Road and Bishop O'Donnell Road. At the moment there is heavy use of buses in that area. The 405 is one of the busiest bus routes in the city, with a frequency of every 20 minutes, and part of the reason it is not used by more people is that when it departs it immediately enters traffic, especially at peak times. If we can progress the development of bus lanes from Bishop O'Donnell Road to Clybaun Road at the earliest opportunity, we will see more patrons use the service.

One other thing that has to be borne in mind is that along the Western Distributor Road, at

the retail centre, there is a proposal from the NTA for an interchange facility where bus routes will terminate and new services will begin. For that too, we need to make sure that these bus priority measures are in place to ensure the service works in a seamless manner.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: I again thank Deputy John Connolly for his remarks and contribution. He is right that there is a need for co-ordination between all the different agencies and stakeholders to ensure we deliver for citizens and residents. I thank him for raising the matter, which is of huge importance to him, the people of Galway and the wider community. It has an impact on life and impinges on the quality of business and how people operate and on the quality of life. The Government is committed to active travel and putting in place a network under BusConnects to make it easier for people to get around and to meet our climate action and sustainability plan requirements.

Galway City Council's Western Distributor Road scheme, which is at planning stage, has a primary aim of allowing residents of the Knocknacarra area of Galway city to utilise more sustainable transport modes, such as walking, cycling and wheeling, which would provide safer and more sustainable options for children and vulnerable users to travel to school, nearby shops and community facilities. The active travel project is envisioned to provide these safer, segregated wheeling and cycling facilities in the short term, targeting construction completion by 2026 or early 2027.

I will take the points the Deputy made back to the Department and the NTA. He made valid points about the issue of the Western Distributor interchange as regards the retail park and about the use of bus lanes. It is about making sure people are able to commute and access different parts of Galway, rather than being stuck in gridlock. As I said - I am repeating myself - having experienced it at first hand a few weeks ago, I certainly have a better understanding this morning for having been there. I thank the Deputy for raising the matter and I will bring his concerns back to the Minister.

Fishing Industry

Deputy Catherine Connolly: I am glad in a sense that the Minister of State is responding to this because he took a hands-on approach to another matter and he might have some influence here.

I am standing here seven years after the Government introduced a wonderful policy. None of us had a problem with it. It was a policy to ensure the sustainability of fishing within the six-nautical mile zone by banning trawlers measuring more than 18 m. None of us had a problem with that. It was to be rolled out with a transition phase, which was practical and sensible, to give the bigger trawlers time to adjust to the new regime and move out over a period. Unfortunately, it has never become a reality. The problem is particularly acute given the biodiversity and climate emergency and it is equally important for sustainable jobs on the coast. What happened was that - the Minister of State can save me from repeating this if it is in his prepared contribution because it has been brought up many times - it was challenged by a number of boat owners. They were perfectly entitled to do that. It went to the High Court and the High Court found for them on one specific ground, namely, that the consultation was - this is my word - faulty. Nothing else. Indeed, the High Court set out that the Government is entitled to make policy and that the policy it had made was in keeping with Government objectives on sustainability and biodiversity. One tiny part was found not to be right and therefore the policy was

held at naught.

That was appealed by both sides to the Court of Appeal. I will fast-forward as that took a number of years. The Court of Appeal, interestingly, again held totally with the Government. It absolutely agreed that the Government was entitled to make the policy and that it was in keeping with all its aims and objectives, but on this occasion, it held on a narrow ground, not that the boat owners had not been consulted, but that Britain and the EU had not been consulted or put on notice that there would be this change. On that very narrow ground, it went back to scratch. It went back for consultation. On the first occasion, there were 900 submissions. On this occasion, I understand, there were more than 5,000 submissions. I have been at public meetings on this matter. I have been in Connemara at a public meeting on this matter and all I want is for the policy to be implemented.

I ask Minister of State to spare me a little bit. On 20 May, I got an answer to a parliamentary question which states “I would like to take this opportunity to emphasise that this matter is of the utmost importance” and assurances follow. Fast-forward two calendar months and I get another answer that is verbatim the same. There is not even an additional full stop or comma. Only the last line is different: “It is critical that all of the necessary procedural and legal steps are taken”. The consultation process closed last year. It has been more than a year since the consultation process closed. Bear in mind that the High Court and the Court of Appeal found no problem with the Government’s policy, none whatsoever, just with a tiny segment of the consultation. In fact, they said there was not even an obligation to consult, but that once the Government undertakes a consultation process, it must take all care to do so correctly. The Court of Appeal said England and the EU had to be consulted.

I am not sure where the problem is. I know it is urgent and the Dáil will be on leave from next week. In September, we will be looking at big trawlers going in unsustainably, taking out the sprat in large quantities in an unsustainable way with quite a lot of it going to feed fish farms. This is a golden opportunity for a win-win for the Government on every level, but particularly for local fishermen. I will stay within my time.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Kieran O'Donnell): I thank Deputy Connolly for raising this issue, which I am taking on behalf of the Minister of State, Deputy Dooley. I was speaking to him this morning in advance of the debate. He sends his apologies. He has to attend a meeting with the UK fisheries minister this morning. He will be in direct contact with the Deputy in the coming days on the matter. I hope that provides some level of reassurance. I will deal with the answer now, but at the top, it was important to make that point.

I stress that the Government is fully committed to maintaining support for our important inshore fishing sector and promoting the sustainability of fish stocks, as outlined in our programme for Government. The Deputy has already covered much of this background, but she will appreciate that I want to read it into the record.

In December 2018, the then Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine announced that vessels measuring more than 18 m would be excluded from trawling in inshore waters inside the six-nautical mile zone and the baselines from 1 January 2020. A transition period for vessels of more than 18 m targeting sprat was allowed to enable adjustment for these vessels, as the sprat fishery is concentrated inside the six-nautical mile zone. Policy directive No. 1 of 2019 was issued by the Minister to the independent licensing authority for sea fishing boats to give

effect to these measures. This decision to exclude vessels of more than 18 m from trawling inside the six nautical miles was the subject of extended legal proceedings further to a judicial review to the High Court taken by two applicant fishermen challenging the validity of the policy. Following the final judgment of the Court of Appeal in this matter in 2023, where the applicants succeeded on the narrowest of grounds, policy directive No. 1 of 2019 was quashed and no longer has legal effect.

On the basis of legal advice received in respect of next steps, the then Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine decided to proceed anew with a public consultation on a review of trawling activity inside the six-nautical mile zone and the baselines. The purpose of the consultation was to invite stakeholders and interested parties to advise of their views on any potential changes to policy within the scope of this review. Due to the lengthy legal proceedings, it had been more than five years since the original scientific and economic advice was compiled. Therefore, up-to-date scientific and economic advice was sought from the Marine Institute and Bord Iascaigh Mhara, respectively, on trawling in the waters inside six nautical miles and the baselines prior to public consultation. The consultation opened in February 2024 and took place over a period of eight weeks, closing in April 2024. The consultation took place without prejudice.

The Minister is conscious of the dependence of our onshore fleet, compared with larger vessels, on fishing resources within the six nautical mile zone. The policy context has changed since 2018. The Minister encouraged all interested parties to read the consultation documents and to reflect on them when making any submissions. The volume of submissions received during the new 2024 consultation was considerable, as the Deputy has already alluded to. Some 5,500 submissions were received, which was more than six times greater than the submissions received during the 2018 consultation, further highlighting the increased public interest in the matter. These submissions will be used to inform a review of trawling activity inside the six nautical mile zone and baselines. The sheer volume of detailed submissions takes time to collate and fully analyse. All relevant issues will be carefully considered before a decision can be made. Given the history of litigation in respect of this matter, it is critical that all of the necessary procedural and legal steps are taken before any final decision is made.

I reiterate that the Minister of State, Deputy Dooley, sends his apologies. He is in the UK to meet the fisheries minister. He would have liked to have taken this debate. He will make direct contact with the Deputy over the coming days.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: I have no problem with missing Ministers of State. I understand how busy they are. Personal contact never impresses me although I am delighted when Ministers of State make personal contact. What impresses me more are answers on paper. Where are we with the analysis of the 5,500 consultations? I heard in the Minister of State's answer that "the policy context has changed since 2018" and that the people making submissions were made aware of that. I appreciate that is the case. The policy context has become even more serious in terms of our obligations with respect to climate change and biodiversity, and a sustainable way of living for people in our coastal areas. This ties in with seaweed and the wool industry. As a country, we are utterly failing to encourage small native industries. Here is a golden opportunity.

I cannot accept the situation. The replies to the two questions I asked were exactly the same except for the last sentence. It is not the fault of the Minister of State, but there is absolutely no sense of urgency here. There is no sense that we have now lost seven years and fishing contin-

ues unsustainably. I want a breakdown. How many of the 5,500 submissions have been gone through? Are there enough staff to look at them? What is the breakdown in terms of supporting the policy and not supporting the policy? What are the vested interests? If anyone has an interest, that is okay but it needs to be dealt with quickly so we can put a policy in place. Is the Minister of State telling me that come September, I will be looking at the big trawlers in Galway Bay and elsewhere? When I visited Bantry, and I was also in Connemara, the point was made that people are now so upset that they want a complete ban, even within the six nautical mile area. That is what they have been driven to. What we need is a sustainable policy as quickly as we can.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I again thank the Deputy for raising this important matter. As I already stated, I am taking it on the behalf of the Minister of State, Deputy Dooley, who will be in direct contact with the Deputy in the coming days. He would like to have been here to take the debate in his capacity as the Minister of State with responsibility for this area but had a prior arrangement to meet the minister for fisheries in the UK.

This Government is fully committed to maintaining support for the important inshore fishing sector and promoting the sustainability of fishing stocks as outlined in the programme for Government. The review of trawling policy inside six nautical miles is ongoing. The 5,500 submissions received are being given due consideration. The updated scientific and economic analysis from the Marine Institute and Bord Iascaigh Mhara will be factored into any decision. It takes time to get it right. I must stress that given the history of litigation in respect of the previous policy directive, it is vital that all necessary procedural and legal steps are taken before any final decision is made. I take this opportunity to emphasise that this matter is of the utmost importance to this Government. I assure the Deputy that my Department is doing everything to progress this as expeditiously as possible.

Public Sector Pay

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I thank the Minister of State for being here to take this matter. I raise an issue in respect of certain organisations across the country and particularly their staff and workers, who have not benefited from the pay agreements of recent years. They are former section 39 organisations. I acknowledge that many of the section 39 organisations have benefited but there is a cohort out there which, because of a complicated and complex funding model, have not been brought in under the pay agreements. The Minister of State will agree it is deeply unfair on the staff of those organisations that they have not benefited from the well-deserved pay increases that were awarded in 2023 and 2025. A number of organisations, perhaps fewer than ten, have still not been brought in under the pay agreement.

I want to talk in particular about St. Luke's Home in my area of Mahon, Cork. There are other such organisations, including Cobh Community Hospital and Valentia hospital in Kerry, which Deputy Cahill has also been raising. St. Luke's Home is a voluntary not-for-profit organisation providing essential care to residents in Cork. It provides long-term care with a palliative approach and specialises in dementia. It has over 128 beds. It also provides short-term respite care and day services, as well as other services. It is a critical organisation and, as the Minister of State will appreciate, it has a waiting list because of the great service it provides. Unfortunately, its more than 200 staff members have not benefited from the Workplace Relations Commission, WRC, agreements in respect of pay and conditions. That is a significant issue for the

home. The board of directors has described it as an existential crisis. The home is potentially going to lose staff. The Minister of State will agree it is deeply unfair and inequitable for those staff members when they see colleagues in other organisations who have benefited from pay agreements when they have not.

I welcome the opportunity to raise this Topical Issue. I say to the Minister of State that we can try to resolve the issue. I imagine it will be resolved at some point but it needs to be resolved as urgently as possible.

I will refer to a clause in the agreement that should cater for organisations such as this. I will read it, if I may. Clause 4.1 states:

In recognising that some of the organisations in scope of this present agreement also receive additional public funding by way of other grant arrangements, organisations should use this agreement as a framework to obtain equivalent increases in funding from the relevant Departments and/or statutory agencies as appropriate. It is understood that, save in exceptional and unforeseen circumstances, the required funding will be made available upon application by the organisation.

In the case of St. Luke's Home in Cork, that has not happened. It is funded by the National Treatment Purchase Fund, NTPF, and the HSE. I think it is because of the complicated structure that it has not been brought under the WRC agreement. The NTPF states it is a matter for the HSE. The HSE states it is a matter for the NTPF. These staff are getting the run around on this issue. I was delighted to have the opportunity to meet them recently to discuss the issue. I obviously undertook to raise the matter with the Minister. I tabled this question to the Minister for public expenditure because it is ultimately a matter for that Department, given that the WRC agreement came under it.

The Minister of State will agree in respect of the staff of St. Luke's Home in Cork, who provide a critical service and are extremely dedicated and committed to their work, that it is only fair that they would benefit from the WRC agreement as it relates to pay increases. I ask the Minister of State to take up the matter with the relevant Departments to try to resolve the issue and bring those staff members under the WRC agreement as quickly as possible so the continuity of St. Luke's Home can be secured. This organisation celebrated 150 years in existence in 2022. It provides critical services in Cork. I want to support it in every way I can.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I thank the Deputy for raising this important matter. I am taking this Topical Issue on behalf of the Minister for public expenditure and reform, Jack Chambers TD.

The community and voluntary sector plays a vital role in delivering public services across Ireland. Various organisations in the community and voluntary sector are contracted to provide services on behalf of the State and are provided with funding for this purpose. These organisations are not public service bodies, nor are they employees of these organisation public servants. Accordingly, their terms and conditions, including remuneration, are a matter for the individual employers and employees as part of the employment relationship.

The number of staff employed in the community and voluntary sector as a whole is difficult to determine but it is estimated to be up to 100,000. The level of State funding received by these organisations, and the extent to which it is supplemented by other sources, such as philanthropy or fundraising, varies significantly from one organisation to another. For many organisations in

the sector, the majority of their funding ultimately comes from the State. They do great work.

Generally, this funding is used to service payroll and other organisational costs. These organisations include section 39 bodies, which receive grant funding from the HSE through the Departments of Health, and Children, Disability and Equality to provide health and disability services under section 39 of the Health Act 2004. Section 56 bodies receive funding from Tusla, through the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, for child and family services under section 56 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013. Section 10 bodies receive funding from local authorities for homeless accommodation and related services under section 10 of the Housing Act 1988.

In October 2023, unions representing workers employed by organisations grant funded in line with section 39 of the Health Act 2004, section 56 of the Children and Family Agency Act 2013 and section 10 of the Housing Act 1988 secured agreement at the WRC for an increase in funding for these organisations, which would allow them to provide for an 8% increase in pay to their employees. The last increase under this agreement was 3% paid on 1 March 2024. The agreement reached provided for further engagement that would have regard to building momentum and other public service pay agreements.

This year, agreement was reached on 10 March at the WRC following talks led by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality on the management side with unions representing sections 39, 56 and 10 workers. This agreement set out that funding would be made available to provide for an increase of 9.25% on a phased basis between 1 October 2024 and 1 October 2026. This agreement was accepted in a ballot of union members. The agreement addresses the funding required to move the pay of such workers in line with current and future public service pay agreements, while respecting the fact that such workers are not public service employees.

The agreement provides for an increase in funding of 9.25% on a phased basis and runs to 31 October 2026. This is in line with the general round increases provided for in the Public Service Agreement 2024-2026. The agreement provides that funding will be adjusted to allow for the application of equivalent general round pay adjustments as provided for in any successor agreement to the Public Service Agreement 2024-2026. In addition, the adjustment will be in line with the phasing of any future public service pay agreements.

The agreement reached was accepted by union members in these organisations. It also provides for a data gathering exercise to allow for the application of the low pay provisions in future public service pay agreements for the funding of these organisations.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I thank the Minister of State. I appreciate his response. Unfortunately, it has not addressed the core issue I raised regarding the handful of organisations that have not been brought into the tent in respect of the pay agreements. To elaborate further, prior to 2010, a section 39 block grant funded St. Luke's Home in Cork. Since then, it has had a number of different sources of funding, including the National Treatment Purchase Fund. The HSE provides funding in respect of respite and day services. It is a complicated model in terms of funding sources. That explains why staff have not been addressed as of yet in terms of the pay agreements.

Staff are being pushed from pillar to post. Given the spirit of the agreement and the fact that other voluntary organisations have been brought in, it is critically important that we find a solution to this matter as soon as possible. As I said, this is putting St. Luke's Home, a tremendous

organisation in Cork, under severe financial pressure. In terms of management and the running of the organisation, the morale of staff and so on, it is an important and significant issue. The board does not use the phrase “existential crisis” too easily, but it has done in this particular case. It is a matter that has not been resolved to date and has been going on for some time.

I acknowledge the response the Minister of State has provided, but it did not address the core of the issue or unravel what needs to be dealt with in terms of St. Luke’s Home in Cork. I ask him to take the matter up with the Department so that some solution can be found. It is only right and proper that the staff of St. Luke’s Home would receive the same pay increases as other staff across the country. It is vitally important for the organisation that this happens. Will the Minister of State take the matter up after this debate so that we can find a solution? My sole purpose in raising this matter is to find a solution for the staff and management of the organisation.

Deputy Kieran O’Donnell: I again thank the Deputy for raising this important matter. As I have stated, I am taking this matter on behalf of the Minister for public expenditure and reform, Deputy Chambers. Given how diligent Deputy McGrath is, I have no doubt he has already taken the matter up with the Minister. I ask him to outline the specific circumstances to the Minister directly following the debate.

As I mentioned, the community and voluntary sector plays a vital role in delivering essential public services across Ireland. These organisations, while funded by the State, are not public service bodies and their staff are not public servants. Their pay and conditions are set by their employers and not through public service agreements. I acknowledge these organisations do great work.

This year, agreement was reached following discussions led by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality at the WRC. This agreement addressed the funding required to move the pay of such workers in line with current and future public service pay agreements while responding to the fact that such workers are not public servants or employees. This agreement provides for an increase in funding of 9.25% on a phased basis and runs until 31 October 2026. This is in line with the general round increases provided for in the Public Service Agreement 2024-2026. The agreement provides that funding will be adjusted to allow for the application of the equivalent general round pay adjustments as provided for in any successor agreement. Adjustment will be in line with the phasing of any future public service sector pay agreement. The agreement also allows for future adjustments in line with any successor public service pay deals.

There will be a data gathering exercise to support the application of low pay provisions in the future. The data gathering exercise will provide a basis for examining the application of the low pay provisions in future public service pay agreements to the funding for non-public service organisations. The public service agreement provides that minimum increases are attached to four of the seven general round increases provided over the two and a half year period covered by the agreement. This is a significant step in recognising the contribution of workers in the sector, ensuring the sustainability of the services they provide.

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Mental Health Services

Deputy Pa Daly: Gabhaim buíochas le hOifig an Chinn Comhairle as an deis a thabhairt dom an cheist seo a ardú. I thank the Office of the Ceann Comhairle for allowing me the time to raise a matter, which is of deep concern to people in south Kerry.

The Minister of State is probably aware of this issue and I hope he will have a positive answer for the people who are waiting for one. As the Minister of State will be aware, a hub for outpatient psychiatric services in St. Anne's Hospital, Cahersiveen holds a fortnightly clinic for outpatient psychiatric services. It deals with psychiatric services, psychology, cognitive behaviour therapy, teen psychology, occupational health, social workers, elder care and community nurses. The service helps the most vulnerable people in south Kerry. One of the people I spoke to last Friday told me they have worked there at least 30 years, if not since 1991. We all know how important such services are, not just in rural parts but the entire county of Kerry.

The service deals with people from all over south Kerry, including Valencia, Castlecove, Dromad and Caherdaniel. We met people from the Iveragh Mental Health Association last Friday, including retired staff, who came to us to express their deep concern at the proposal to move the services to Killorglin. There is deep frustration. The ambulance service is seeking a permanent stand-alone space. From what I was told, there is a proposal on an interim basis, which means three to five years, to move services to Killorglin. People, quite rightly and understandably, have deep concerns about services being moved on an interim basis because they know what that will mean, namely, that they might never come back.

There is no primary health care centre in Cahersiveen. There is a massive shortage of GPs. It is unbelievable that services that were due to be expanded will instead be moved. No other site has been proposed. If the service is closed, inevitably people will miss appointments. People who depend on the services are reliant on public transport. Although that has improved, it is inevitable that a change in location will result in people missing appointments or will not turn up for them. That will increase the burden on the already overstretched GP service. People may have to go up to the accident and emergency department in University Hospital Kerry, which is about 42 miles away and under pressure. This will all lead to an increased risk of mental health crisis in the area. The team there was hoping to develop and expand services. Not only will that aspiration be knocked back, but these services will be put back even further.

We did contact the HSE, but I am hoping the Minister of State will have a positive answer for me. I am asking that psychiatric services be retained in south Kerry. If there is a proposal to move them, then the HSE will have to justify it. I cannot see how it can do that and neither can the people down there see how it is going to do it. I am hoping, though, that the Minister of State will say this is not going to happen.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): I thank the Cathaoirleach Gníomhach, Deputy Farrelly, for being in the Chair again. He is a regular on a Wednesday morning and it is much appreciated. I am surprised Deputy Daly is here because I thought he would be on his way to the High Court.

Deputy Pa Daly: I am, but this matter is so important. I am going down straight after it.

Deputy Mary Butler: It is not a question-and-answer session. While I was walking across to the Chamber, I was struck by how ironic it is that I am the first ever Minister of State with

special responsibility for mental health at Cabinet, and the Deputy is trying to remove me, while here he is today asking me to come forward and find a solution for him. I was just struck by how ironic it is.

Deputy Pa Daly: It is not about the Minister of State.

Deputy Mary Butler: I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. As he will be aware, operational responsibility for the delivery of mental health services at local level is devolved directly to the relevant HSE regional health area, RHA, which in this case is the HSE South West RHA, and across all areas. I am aware, of course, that the HSE always aims to work in partnership with all relevant stakeholders in the community in the design and delivery of mental health services to achieve positive outcomes for all.

In relation to the issue highlighted by the Deputy, the HSE has provided an update that there was a requirement to identify a more suitable location for the National Ambulance Service in the region - and we all understand how important the National Ambulance Service is, especially in remote and rural areas - to better support its operational needs and enhance service delivery for people in the region. A potential space has been identified by the HSE alongside the mental health services in Cahersiveen. We must again go back to the point that it is extremely important that we can provide the whole continuum of health supports as close to home for people as possible.

The HSE has informed my Department that there are no plans to relocate the mental health services at Cahersiveen to Killorglin. I am a little confused, though. Is the Deputy telling me he only represents the people of Cahersiveen and not the people of Killorglin? It is important to have mental health supports everywhere. I understand clarity on this matter is currently being addressed, with a senior HSE manager actively engaging with all relevant stakeholders to facilitate accommodation that meets the needs of both services. It is important we deliver both services.

As the Deputy can appreciate, having a suitable location for the National Ambulance Service to be able to serve the people of Cahersiveen and the surrounding area is incredibly important, and it is my understanding this is being achieved without any changes to the location of community mental health services. From what I am hearing, though, I am also conscious that the services are in Cahersiveen and Killorglin is not served by this service. Perhaps this is something I need to look at. I want to deliver mental health services for all people regardless of what area of County Kerry they live in. The Deputy seems to be focused on just one area.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aidan Farrelly): I thank the Minister of State. Respectfully, I remind Members not to discuss live court cases here and to stick to the topic.

Deputy Pa Daly: I thank the Cathaoirleach Gníomhach. If we got some proper answers, rather than smart answers, from the Minister of State, then we would not have to go down that road. From the Minister of State's answer, I understand there is a requirement to find a more suitable location for the National Ambulance Service, but this does not have to be at the expense of the good services carried out in the Cahersiveen area. If the Minister of State would only focus on the issue at hand, we are not talking about Killorglin. There are already services in Killorglin. The suggestion has been from the HSE to amalgamate the Cahersiveen services into Killorglin. The Minister of State's divide-and-conquer attitude is severely misplaced. I am asking her for a guarantee that the services currently in Cahersiveen will stay there.

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This is the concern of the people in the south Kerry area from Mountain Stage, beyond Glenbeigh, and all the way down to Dromad, Castlecove and Caherdaniel. That is the area currently serviced by this team in south Kerry. Killorglin and other parts of the county have their own services. The proposal is to close the centre in Cahersiveen and move the patients to Killorglin. This is not understandable and not acceptable. It has to be the case that services in the most peripheral areas of the State are maintained in those areas. I note what the Minister of State said in the reply regarding active engagement taking place. If the level of the reply the Minister of State has received is that there are no services in Killorglin and some sort of a civil war is taking place, then this is not what is happening and the Minister of State has picked it up the wrong way, whether deliberately or otherwise. I ask her, therefore, to re-engage with the HSE down there and ensure the services currently there remain in south Kerry.

Deputy Mary Butler: I am glad there are services in Killorglin because I would be disappointed if there were not. My understanding is that the HSE manager is actively engaging with all relevant stakeholders to facilitate accommodation that meets the needs of both services, the National Ambulance Service and, of course, the mental health supports, including the out-patient psychiatric facilities that support very vulnerable people. It is my understanding that while there are plans to locate a facility for the National Ambulance Service in Cahersiveen, that is not expected to result in community mental health services in the area having to move. I understand these services are well embedded in the community and I will continue to engage with the HSE in the Cork-Kerry HSE area. As the Deputy will understand, the HSE is working in partnership with all relevant stakeholders in the community in the design and delivery of mental health services to achieve positive outcomes for all and it would not be positive to close this service or to move it.

Health Services

Deputy William Aird: I draw the Minister of State's attention to an escalating crisis in rural County Laois in the form of the chronic shortage of GPs and the lack of fully developed primary care services. We all accept that primary care is the front line of the health service. It is where early diagnoses happen, chronic conditions are managed and preventative care should take place, easing pressure on our overstretched hospitals. Across rural County Laois, the front line is weakening in communities such as Rathdowney, Mountrath, Ballyroan, Clonaslee, Balinakill, Stradbally, Graiguecullen and Camross.

The numbers are not good. The Irish Medical Organisation reports that 30% of GPs in County Laois are over aged 60. Many are due to retire within three to five years, but we have no real plan for succession. Nationally, we are facing a shortfall of more than 1,300 GPs by 2027, with rural counties like Laois hit hardest. In towns like Borris-in-Ossory, patients are now told to travel 20 km to 30 km just to see a doctor. This is not sustainable. The crisis impacts many, including older people, families with sick children and people managing long-term conditions such as heart disease and diabetes. The inducement scheme intended to attract GPs to rural areas has clearly failed to fill the gaps. It is not working and we must accept this fact.

The impact of this situation is real and it is impacting real people. I will give the Minister of State a few examples. A rural GP practice in County Laois recently lost its second doctor to retirement. The HSE could not find a permanent replacement. Since then, there has been a reliance on rotating locums, with no continuity of care. I spoke recently with a mother in Durrow.

Her son, who has asthma, waited 12 days for an appointment. An elderly woman in Rosenallis, living alone, missed a medication review because she simply could not be seen. These are not isolated incidents. They are daily challenges faced by thousands across rural County Laois. We were told that Sláintecare would bring care into the community, but that is not happening in County Laois. We have only one operational primary care centre in Portlaoise. In Mountrath, a new centre is supposed to have been finally allocated. I have been trying to establish timelines, but they are vague. Progress is very slow. A location has not been finalised in Rathdowney, despite the clear clinical need, community readiness and commitments given to me in correspondence with the Minister that it would have been done months ago. Meanwhile in Stradbally, services remain minimal and overstretched. Other key services such as physiotherapy, speech and language therapy and mental health services have wait times of more than 12 months. The Minister of State will be aware of that.

I call on her to launch a targeted GP recruitment and retention plan for Laois, including proper relocation supports, administrative assistance and access to the rural pool locally; fast-track the development of the Mountrath primary care centre and immediately finalise, once and for all, a site in Rathdowney where the community has waited long enough; strengthen the roll-out of advanced nurse practitioners to ensure consistent care where GPs hours are limited; improve communication and transparency; and work with local communities and practitioners to develop clear local solutions.

Deputy Mary Butler: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta. I thank the Deputy for his question about primary care provision for Rathdowney and Mountrath. I am taking this question on behalf of the Minister for Health, Deputy Carroll MacNeill. He raised a couple of matters: plans for succession in GP practices, challenges in rural Laois and the primary care centres in Mountrath and Rathdowney. I will do my best to address all of those issues.

As the Deputy will be aware, timely access to GP and primary care services is vital for the successful delivery of our healthcare service. They are our first port of call.

In regard to general practice, as he will also be aware, GPs are private practitioners, most of whom hold contracts with the HSE for the provision of public health services. Currently, almost 3,200 GPs hold at least one HSE contract, including roughly 2,600 GPs who hold a general medical services, GMS, contract for the provision of care.

As private practitioners, GPs themselves determine the location they practice from, which can be difficult. However, in addition to undertaking to increase the overall number of GPs practising in the State, the Government is committed to ensuring that services are available throughout the country on an equitable basis, and in particular to supporting GP practices in rural and underserved areas.

Significantly increased investment in general practice has been provided for under the 2019 and 2023 GP agreements. The agreements provide, among other things, for increased GP fees and practice supports, including a 10% increase to rural practice supports and increases to supports for staff capacity. We are conscious of the challenges in rural areas.

The number of new entrant GP training places has been increased by 80% from 2019 to 2024, with 350 new entrant places available since last year. I accept they take time to come through the system, but there is a huge improvement. Furthermore, recruitment of GPs from abroad continues under the international medical graduates, IMG, programme, whose place-

ment is targeted to underserved areas.

Just recently, a new locum support initiative commenced, providing GPs in receipt of rural practice supports with access to a streamlined locum recruitment service. The initiative is initially focusing on supporting the more than 130 single-handed GPs working in isolated areas. That has just commenced.

At present there are no GMS GP vacancies in County Laois. Where a vacancy arises, the HSE actively recruits for a replacement GP while providing for the continuity of services.

Regarding the provision of primary care services, we are making steady progress on the development of primary care infrastructure in County Laois, which is currently served by primary care centres, PCCs, in Mountmellick and Portarlinton with two further PCCs under development in Portlaoise and Rathdowney. I know the Deputy is particularly concerned with service provision in Mountrath and Rathdowney and I am happy to advise the following in their regard. It is intended that the PCC in Rathdowney will be delivered via the operational lease mechanism. In 2024, the HSE sought expressions of interest for this development and several valid tender submissions were received. The HSE is currently working through the tender assessments and internal approvals processes. Once this process is complete and all approvals are received, the successful tenderer will be notified which will allow for progression through the design and planning stages in 2025.

The HSE Capital Plan 2025 includes funding to progress designs for the provision of primary care services in Mountrath. The HSE has advised that the current plans for Mountrath include the redevelopment of the existing Mountrath Health Centre site, including an extension and refurbishment of the existing building. This follows a reassessment of service needs, which indicated that the existing HSE-owned site could accommodate the service needs of the area. I expect the extension will be delivered much quicker than a primary care centre.

Deputy William Aird: I thank the Minister of State for her response. However, it is important that I stress again that I am not asking for extras for County Laois. I am asking for the basics, that is, access to a doctor, reasonable wait times, and care delivered in our towns and villages. Rural Laois deserves the same healthcare rights as any other part of this country. People have paid into the system for their entire lives and they deserve more than just a waiting list and closed doors. To be fair to the Minister of State, I know she agrees with me.

Time is not on our side. GPs are retiring now, not in five years. Locum cover is inconsistent. Rural patients are falling through the cracks in County Laois. The Minister of State referred to the situation in Rathdowney. I heard her say 2025, but I got the same answer in 2024. I am sorry to have to say that. It is in no way a criticism of the Minister of State for the response she has given me, because the Minister is not present, but I have heard all this before.

No site has yet been confirmed in Rathdowney. That is evident in the Minister of State's response to me. The HSE's silence on progress is adding to the frustration of the community in Rathdowney. Mountrath has been allocated a primary care centre but, without a clear timeline for delivery or a staffing plan what is proposed is just a promise. I tried to find out if it was true or false that a site has been allocated but I could not get a definite answer, which means we are also left in limbo.

I am not asking for County Laois to jump the queue but I cannot accept that rural communities in the county are being left behind. We need a clear roadmap with deadlines and funding

commitments. We need boots on the ground: doctors, nurses and therapists who can deliver care now. This is about dignity. It is not about access or equity. I do not want the people of Laois to wait any longer for those services.

Deputy Mary Butler: I thank the Deputy very much for raising the issue of rural GP practices in County Laois. He said a site has not been identified for a primary care centre in Rathdowney. That is normal. It is because it is commercially sensitive. If the HSE has not purchased a site, it could drive up prices. I have seen the exact same situation in Lismore in County Waterford, where a site was not identified in advance of the agreement being made on the operation of the lease mechanism. People on the ground probably know where the site is located.

Deputy William Aird: We do not.

Deputy Mary Butler: But that is the reason that is the case. If the HSE does not own the site and it talks about where it is, straightaway, in the main, prices can go up, so there is a commercial sensitivity around it.

Deputy William Aird: That is what was said 12 months ago.

Deputy Mary Butler: The HSE also tells me that there are no general medical services GP vacancies in County Louth. As we know, when a vacancy arises, the HSE actively recruits.

I have a couple of positives for the Deputy. The new locum support initiative has commenced, which provides GPs in receipt of rural practice supports with access to a streamlined local recruitment service. This initiative is initially focusing on supporting the more than 130 single-handed GPs working in isolated areas.

I will bring his concerns back to the Minister and he will probably discuss with her the primary care centre in Rathdowney. It is positive that we are going to see an extension of the service in the existing primary care centre. The site is big enough for that to happen and the extension of services can happen much quicker. I know that from my own experience.

The development of primary care infrastructure in County Laois is progressing. The Deputy Aird is correct that we want to bring the right care at the right time as close to home as possible. I will pass on his concerns to the Minister.

Transparency for Supermarket Profits: Motion [Private Members]

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: I move:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

— households across the country are struggling to make ends meet as the cost of living soars;

— more than 70 per cent of people in Ireland are either, “extremely” or “very” concerned about the cost of groceries, according to the recent PwC’s Voice of the

Consumer Survey 2025;

— many families are now spending €3,000 more a year on groceries than they were in 2021;

— grocery prices have increased by nearly 40 per cent in the past four years, while the increase in the Consumer Price Index, over the same period, is 21 per cent;

— grocery prices have increased at three times the rate of general inflation over the past year alone;

— sky-rocketing grocery prices have been coupled with huge increases in other household costs, like energy and rent, and are putting a huge strain on low- and middle-income families;

— according to a recent Credit Union Consumer Sentiment survey, 15 per cent of Irish consumers would be unable to cope with a financial emergency costing €1,000;

— the number of children living in consistent poverty nearly doubled, to more than 100,000, in 2024; and

— the Children’s Rights Alliance Chief Executive Officer, Tanya Ward, has described the cumulative impact of continued rising costs as “a landslide effect” for low-income families, meaning that basic necessities, such as nutritious food or a warm home have become increasingly difficult;

further notes that:

— on 10th May, 2023, then Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Neale Richmond T.D. convened a supermarket summit, an emergency meeting of the retail forum;

— Minister of State Richmond gave supermarkets six weeks to bring down the cost of groceries, but failed to ask them to reveal their profits;

— the meeting was a failure and in the more than two years since that meeting, prices have continued to soar; and

— there is a commitment in the Programme for Government to “strengthen competition by promoting price transparency in all sectors”;

believes that:

— there is a lack of transparency around supermarket profits that is not acceptable given sustained and soaring prices;

— it is also unclear how much profit goes to producers, processors, and retailers in the chain;

— consumers have a right to know whether surging grocery prices reflect genuine input cost increases or price gouging; and

— accounting transparency by large grocery retailers is essential to protect household budgets, restore consumer trust, and ensure fairness in one of the most critical

markets for Irish consumers; and

calls on the Government to:

- introduce legislation requiring all grocery retailers operating in Ireland with annual turnover above €10 million to publish full audited annual financial accounts;

- ensure that this requirement applies to all operators, whether Irish-incorporated or foreign branches, ensuring no retailer can claim foreign registration to evade transparency obligations;

- monitor and publish regular reports on the impact of this transparency initiative on grocery price inflation and competition in the retail sector;

- grant the Agri-Food Regulator the powers it needs to “compel the provision of necessary price and market information from relevant businesses in the agri-food supply chain, in order to fulfil its price and market data analysis function”, as requested of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine by the Chairperson of the Regulator’s Board in September 2024; and

- amend the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014 to grant the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission statutory authority to compel the disclosure of information when carrying out market studies in line with powers already available in the United Kingdom and other jurisdictions.

The cost of living is out of control and this is nowhere more evident than on supermarket shelves. The scale and the speed at which prices are increasing is astronomical and there is no sign of it slowing down. In a few short years, the costs for families has increased by €3,000 per year. Grocery costs are now skyrocketing at three times the rate of inflation. Anyone doing their shopping will have noticed it; I am sure the Minister of State has noticed it. Trips to the shop to pick up a few items are increasingly costly. A person can now spend €50 on groceries and carry them out in their hands. This is an indication of how few items one can now buy with €50. These soaring prices are particularly difficult for parents trying to feed children or for pensioners on fixed incomes, who are now cutting back on groceries just to make ends meet.

This should not be coming as news to the Government. We are not relying on anecdotal evidence when we say prices are skyrocketing; we now have a mountain of data to back this up. As recently as yesterday, Barnardos published a shocking report which found that four in ten parents are skipping meals so their children have enough to eat. Last Friday, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul revealed that nearly half of its calls this year were about the single issue of grocery prices. Earlier this year, an ESRI study found that more than 60% of people had cut back on groceries to save money.

This is not a niche issue or one that is only impacting on a small number of people. The scale of these increases means that huge numbers of lower- and middle-class families are finding things increasingly difficult. The fact is that Ireland is a wealthy country and people should not have to struggle just to survive but this is what we are talking about here, the cost of simply existing in this country, putting a roof over one’s head, keeping the lights on and keeping food on the table. More and more people are finding this completely unaffordable. They spend all of their time desperately trying to keep their heads above water and every waking minute worrying about how they are going to pay the bills. They are scrimping and saving, not for a family

holiday or a treat for their children, but simply for basic food.

The negative impact this is having on people's well-being is enormous. The Minister of State will understand that constantly treading water and trying to keep one's head above is exhausting and draining. Any unforeseen expense, such as a washing machine breaking or a car needing repair, can throw family budgets into chaos. According to a recent credit union consumer sentiment survey, 15% of Irish consumers would be unable to cope with an unforeseen expense of €1,000. To put it in context, that is exactly how much the Government will be looking for from parents for college fees this October.

I do not know whether the Government is out of touch, simply does not care or is just not bothered. I hope that is not the case but I really cannot understand why the Government has not tried to tackle this issue. Maybe the Minister of State can explain that, if not to me, then to anyone watching this who is struggling to feed their family. The last time the Government said it would do anything was in 2023. Back then, the Minister of State with responsibility for retail, Deputy Neale Richmond, convened a supermarket summit - an emergency meeting of the retail forum. This sounded really good; it sounded strong and very positive. He talked tough at the time and said he was giving supermarkets six weeks to bring down the cost of groceries, but the reality was somewhat different. He turned up, wagged his finger and everyone went home. The supermarket summit was a complete capitulation by the Government. It was a talking shop and, unfortunately, appeared to be convened only for optics that everybody quickly forgot about. Not only was this an abject failure, it just seemed like the Government could not be bothered to put pressure on the supermarkets.

There are solutions. There are things that can be done. At the time, the Social Democrats asked the Government to compel supermarket chains to reveal their profits but it did not do so. That is why we are back again today, calling on it to do so. The grocery market in Ireland is worth at least €8 billion per year, so why is there so little transparency about profits? Does the Minister of State not find that odd or a little bit worrying? Many of us have long suspected that consumers in Ireland are being gouged by large supermarket chains that use their operations as a cash cow. However, without full transparency on profit levels, it is very difficult to prove this. It is also very difficult for the consumer regulator, the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, to do anything other than issue bland statements because, in reality, it has no teeth. It has no powers to properly investigate this issue and get to the bottom of it. That is why the news that it is to reopen its probe into the Irish grocery retail sector is so underwhelming. The last time it looked at this issue, in 2023, when prices were rising by double-digit figures, it said, "There is nothing to see here." It found nothing. Since then, prices have continued to rise but the Government has refused to give the regulator more powers. What makes anyone think that this latest probe will be any different? After all, it is hard to do an investigation like this when the Government has tied the regulator's hands behind its back. That is why our motion makes an important demand. It seeks to amend the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014 to grant the regulator the statutory authority to compel the disclosure of information when carrying out market studies. This is what happens in other countries like the UK, so why is it not happening here?

We also want the Government to act on another area. Not only is there a complete lack of transparency about supermarket profits, it is also completely unclear how much profit goes to producers, processors and retailers in that food chain. We urgently need clarity on the way in which margins are spread out. As it stands, it appears that the lion's share of the profits often go to processors or big retailers. To achieve clarity on this, we want the Government to grant the

Agri-Food Regulator the powers it needs to compel the provision of necessary price and market information from relevant businesses in the agrifood supply chain. This is not just something the Social Democrats want; the Agri-Food Regulator also wants it. Its chairperson, Joe Healy, wrote to the Minister in September 2024, asking for these powers. He did so when its investigation of the egg supply chain had to be scrapped when businesses in the sector refused to co-operate. Nearly a year later, the Agri-Food Regulator is still waiting for these powers but the Government has not provided them.

When the Government talks about the crisis in grocery prices it tends to do so in the past tense. It talks about rapid price increases when Russia invaded Ukraine, as if the crisis ended there. However, what is not acknowledged is that those prices never came down and now grocery costs are skyrocketing again while the Government sits idly by and watches it happen.

Has the Minister of State paid her electricity bill? Will I just continue?

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach Deputy Catherine Connolly: The sound is more important than the vision, I think, on this occasion.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: Part of the privilege of being in government is that the Minister of State can intervene. She can change the law, empower regulators and force supermarkets to publish their profits. The big question the Minister of State needs to answer today is why the Government has done none of these things. Why is the Cabinet acting like bystanders, narrating a problem instead of doing anything? I implore the Government to get its act together, support our motion and take immediate action.

Deputy Liam Quaide: The cost-of-living crisis in Ireland can no longer be considered a transient hardship. For much of our population, it has become an entrenched form of social injustice with a vast array of adverse outcomes, both short-term and potentially far-reaching for the many people caught up in it. Nowhere is this crisis more obvious for hard-pressed families than in the weekly grocery shop, which has become a morbid ritual in witnessing ever-more stratospheric figures tot up at the counter for what is often a modest range of items.

Over the past two years, grocery prices have soared by more than 20%, hitting lower- and middle-income households hardest. The basics of everyday meals - bread, milk, pasta and fruit - have become symbols of economic strain. Tanya Ward of the Children's Rights Alliance has referred to the landslide effect of escalating costs on low-income families. Parents are skipping meals so their children can have enough of the basics. Pensioners are foregoing heating their homes. Students are choosing between food and rent. When this is contrasted with our economic prosperity, it is clear we are living in an upside-down world, politically speaking.

Meanwhile, the response from the Government has been repeated references to the Covid pandemic and the war in Ukraine and vague reassurances that competition will sort itself out. Across Europe, regulators have expressed concern that major supermarket chains are not just passing on costs, but also padding their margins. In Ireland, we are left in the dark as to how much supermarkets are making up for their own rising energy and supply costs and how much of those sums may represent an increasing profit margin. Why is this? The reason is there is a lack of transparency on supermarket profits and pricing strategies. Aldi and Lidl, two of the biggest players, do not publish profit figures in Ireland. Dunnes Stores, which holds the largest market share, does not release any accounts. Tesco Ireland is obscured inside the wider UK group. This opacity undermines public trust. We cannot ask families to tighten their belts while

billion euro retailers refuse to open their accounts. This is why the Social Democrats are calling for immediate measures to address this lack of transparency. We need the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission to be given stronger powers and the resources to conduct a full investigation into supermarket pricing and profit margins across the supply chain. The UK and France have done this and we must not be laggards.

We propose mandatory financial reporting for all major grocery retailers operating in the State, both Irish-owned and international companies, with an annual turnover in excess of €10 million. This should include country-specific profit disclosures and margin breakdowns. We urge the Government to monitor and publish regular reports on the impact of the transparency initiative on grocery price inflation and competition in the retail sector. The agrifood regulator needs to be empowered to compel the provision of necessary price and market information from agrifood businesses.

Basic grocery items are not luxuries. Ensuring transparency around pricing is a small test of whether we are serious about economic justice and addressing the cost-of-living crisis. Grocery giants cannot conduct their accounting in the shadows while families fall deeper into stress in a cost-of-living crisis that is being allowed to continue unchecked by this Government.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I thank the Minister of State for being here today, although I must call out that it is a shame that more members of her Government do not choose to be here to discuss this very important topic because I, as a member of the Social Democrats, am very proud to bring forward this motion which really speaks to some of the challenges faced by the poorest in our society in simply making ends meet. I will make four points: the inaction we see from the Government on price gouging; the scale of this issue; the lived experience; and specifically those on the margins.

First, on the shocking inaction on price gouging by the Government, two years ago the Minister of State, Deputy Neale Richmond, gave the supermarkets six weeks to bring prices down. Six weeks passed without incident or reduction, as has been the case every week since, while supermarkets have continued to operate business as usual. Without this information, we cannot address the potential price gouging we suspect may be happening in this sector. We know from the supermarket profits that are published that their profits are growing, we know that no action has been taken by the Government to stop profiteering in its tracks and we know from farmers and producers that while prices spiral that they are not getting a cut.

When the Government gives an ultimatum and then does nothing, it sends a message that it will not level anything but strong words at big businesses. Let us look at the scale of the issue. We have the third-highest grocery prices in Europe. They have risen 36% in the last four years, adding €3,000 to the annual grocery cost of the average family in Ireland. One in four parents said they went hungry in the past year to feed their children; 15% of people in Ireland are living in forced deprivation and for renters that number is doubled. As we see the cost-of-living supports disappear for these families the cost-of-living crisis is going nowhere.

What about that lived experience? We can quote statistics all day long but we must address the human impact of these numbers. I have spoken to parents who are struggling to put food on the table for their children. It is not just stress but also the shame associated with that. It is hard to fathom for those of us fortunate enough to never experience it. Grocery items are not luxury goods or optional extras. Charities and community organisations in my constituency, Dublin Rathdown, have said the number of people asking for help with food has risen drasti-

cally. People are choosing between heating and eating not because they have done anything wrong but because they have not been protected as consumers and as citizens.

As my colleagues have pointed out, everyone is feeling the impact of these skyrocketing prices but those on the margins are being pushed ever closer to a cliff edge. Lone parents, pensioners, people with disabilities, those already in poverty are examples of people who are already vulnerable to those extra costs. They are the hardest hit in this crisis and we cannot let the issue go unaddressed while they continue to suffer and, in some cases, starve. Ireland is a wealthy country but too often our people do not see that wealth in their lives. I say again that food is not an optional extra. It is not a luxury. In one of the world's wealthiest countries we cannot tolerate price gouging being shrouded in secrecy and lack of proof. We must address it and do something about it.

When it comes to issues that affect their lives so much, people ask me if the Government is incompetent or negligent? Is it that it does not know how to do anything about it or does it choose not to? In the sector I come from, rights and equality, we have a phrase: what we cannot measure we cannot change. So when the Government chooses to not measure the problem all I can conclude is that it is doing that on purpose so that it does not have to address it. Once again, as in so many areas in the short life of this Government so far, we see the interests of business put ahead of those struggling most in our society. I ask it to please make supermarkets share their profits so that we can identify this problem fully and address it fully.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: I will build on my colleagues' comments by setting out some brief context. My office recently engaged with the Competition and Consumer Protection Authority on price setting and loyalty schemes operated by some of the larger supermarket companies. While I acknowledge the safeguards that the CCPC provides to customers, it has been calling for more substantial penalties for breaches of consumer protection law for some time. Will the Minister of State respond to some of that in her response to us this morning? What feedback is she getting from the CCPC in this regard since one of its roles is to make recommendations to Government?

In this jurisdiction, when businesses break competition rules, they can be fined by the CCPC but they do not face the same fines for breaking consumer protection laws as they do in other European countries. The CCPC has been calling for, and needs, legislative changes to give it power to impose larger fines for serious offences, for example, allowing the CCPC to issue fines that are a percentage of the business's turnover. This would improve compliance with consumer protection laws almost immediately. In 2024, the CCPC took legal proceedings against Tesco for failing to include unit pricing on club card promotional shelf-edge labels. A company which posted sales of €3.4 billion in 2024 in Ireland had to make a donation of €1,000 to a charity as a consequence of breaking consumer law. The Minister of State will have to agree that there is something legislatively wrong when that is the consequence of such a significant breach. Can she tell me the CCPC is wrong when it says we need more substantial penalties for breaching consumer protection law?

Concerns have been raised with my office almost weekly since the election in relation to so-called loyalty schemes. These are schemes where it appears prices are lowered for loyalty card members on items such as dishwasher tablets, nappies and other regular household items but when one looks at the price per unit, per litre or per kilo it shows the standard price has been raised and the loyalty scheme price is just par to the usual price. There are no laws in place to restrict different pricing structures for loyalty customers. This is an area that merits significant

legislative scrutiny.

As my colleagues have said, successive governments have not done enough. This motion offers the Government the opportunity to do more - to listen to the CCPC and the people who are struggling so much. We can do more and empowering the CCPC would be a really welcome first step.

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (Deputy Niamh Smyth): I move amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after “Dáil Éireann” and substitute the following:

“notes that the Government;

— recognises concerns with regards to the rising cost of groceries and the financial pressure on households;

— shares the commitment to ensuring fairness, transparency, and competition in the retail sector; and

— are actively progressing a range of targeted measures to support consumers and strengthen regulatory oversight;

in this context, notes that the Government proposes the following targeted actions, to strengthen transparency and protect consumers:

— with regards to strengthening the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC’s) powers, and in line with the Programme for Government, progress legislative reforms to enhance the CCPC’s enforcement powers, including the ability to impose stronger sanctions for breaches of consumer protection law, and this will ensure that anti-consumer or exploitative practices can be tackled more effectively;

— with regards to leveraging the CCPC’s State of Competition Analysis, the CCPC’s ongoing State of Competition work provides a robust evidence base to assess market dynamics in all sectors and identify where policy interventions may be required, and the Government will continue to engage with the CCPC on the potential for further analysis of pricing and margin trends, where appropriate;

— with regards to the CCPC’s 2023 High-Level Analysis of the Irish Grocery Retail Sector, has sought an update to the findings, which found no evidence of market failure or excessive pricing, and highlighted that food inflation in Ireland has been among the lowest in the European Union, and this is expected in the coming weeks; and

— with regards to Consumer Empowerment Measures, will continue to support public awareness campaigns and digital tools to help consumers compare prices and make informed choices.”.

I thank our colleagues in the Social Democrats for their motion. Before I go to my notes, I could not disagree with what Deputy Whitmore said in her opening remarks. You walk into a supermarket, come out with a handful of items and will have spent €50 or more. I appreciate that is a huge challenge for parents. In today’s world, to have parents going without feeding

themselves to ensure their children are fed is very difficult.

The Government acknowledges the concerns raised in the Private Members' motion tabled by colleagues in the Social Democrats regarding the rising cost of groceries and the increasing financial pressure experienced by households across the country. We recognise that food inflation, while moderating in recent months, has had a tangible impact on the cost of living for many families, particularly those on fixed and lower incomes. Ensuring that consumers are treated fairly, pricing is transparent and competition in the retail sector remains robust are all priorities that we share with the proposers of this motion. We are committed to taking meaningful action to support consumers and to ensure the regulatory framework governing the grocery sector is fit for purpose. To that end, the Government is actively progressing a range of targeted measures designed to enhance transparency, strengthen enforcement and promote fair competition. These measures are being developed in close consultation with regulatory bodies and stakeholders and are grounded in evidence-based policy analysis.

However, while we acknowledge the underlying objectives of the motion, we are unable to support it in its current form. We are opposing the motion for several substantive reasons which I will outline in detail. First, a number of the proposals contained in the motion duplicate or overlap with initiatives that are already in place or are currently being developed across Government. These include actions being undertaken by the CCPC, the Agri-Food Regulator and the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment. Each of these bodies plays a distinct and complementary role in monitoring price practices, promoting transparency and enforcing consumer protection legislation. The CCPC, for example, has a statutory mandate to investigate anti-competitive behaviour, assess market dynamics and ensure that consumers are not misled or exploited. It is active in this space, including through recent enforcement actions and market studies.

The Agri-Food Regulator, established under the Agricultural and Food Supply Chain Act 2023, has been granted significant statutory powers to collect, analyse and publish data on prices and market conditions across the agrifood supply chain. These include the ability to identify and address unfair trading practices and imbalances in bargaining power, particularly in business-to-business relationships between producers, processors and retailers. The Government is fully committed to supporting the regulator to exercise its mandate.

Second, the motion proposes mandatory publication of full audited financial accounts for grocery retailers with annual turnover exceeding €10 million. While we understand the intention behind the proposal to increase transparency and accountability, it is important to note the proposed threshold does not align with the EU-mandated company size classifications. Under EU law, company size categories are harmonised to ensure consistency across member states. The €10 million turnover threshold proposed in the motion would capture a significant number of companies that are currently classified as small enterprises under EU definitions. Imposing full audit and disclosure requirements on these businesses would represent a disproportionate regulatory burden, particularly for family-owned and regionally based retailers that operate on relatively narrow margins.

The motion's reference to foreign operators raises additional legal and enforcement challenges. Many of the grocery retailers operating in Ireland are subsidiaries or branches of companies based in other EU member states. These companies are subject to the same harmonised thresholds and reporting obligations under their respective national laws. Attempting to impose additional or divergent requirements on them would create conflict within the EU internal mar-

ket rules and expose the State to legal challenges.

Third, the enforcement mechanisms proposed in the motion, such as compulsory information requests and expanded investigative powers, could place a significant administrative burden on retailers, particularly small- and medium-sized enterprises. As currently drafted, the motion does not differentiate between large multinational chains and smaller independent retailers. The lack of proportionality risks diverting resources away from core business activities and increasing compliance costs across the board. The Department of Enterprise, and in particular the Minister, Deputy Burke, have carried out significant reforms with regard to reducing bureaucracy and red tape. The proposals in the motion would add an additional layer to independent businesses that already have significant concerns about the time and resources needed to run a small business in this country. These increased costs may ultimately be passed onto the consumer in the form of higher prices, therefore undermining the main objective of the motion, which is to reduce financial pressures on households. It is essential that the new regulatory measures strike the right balance between effective oversight and the need to maintain a competitive and effective retail sector.

Finally, the CCPC has advised my officials that its existing powers under the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014 are sufficient to analyse markets, request information for undertakings and take enforcement action where necessary. These powers have been actively used in recent years, including in high-profile investigations and prosecutions. In 2024 and 2025, for example, the CCPC successfully prosecuted several retailers for breaches of price indication and sale pricing regulations. In these cases, the courts ordered the offending retailers to pay legal costs and make charitable donations as part of the settlement.

As part of the Government's broader action plan on competitiveness and productivity, we have committed to strengthening competition and consumer protection enforcement. The Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment is currently developing legislative provisions that will enhance the CCPC's capacity to respond to evolving market challenges. It is intended to introduce turnover-based fines for serious breaches of consumer law, ensuring that penalties are proportionate to the scale of the offending business. These reforms are designed to ensure that the CCPC is equipped with the tools it needs to protect consumers without imposing unnecessary burdens on compliant businesses.

In light of the existing regulatory framework, the active enforcement of consumer protection law and the significant reforms already under way, the Government does not believe that the additional power proposed in the Private Members' motion are necessary or proportionate. We therefore oppose the motion in its current form and recommend a more targeted, evidence-based approach to strengthening transparency and competition in the grocery sector.

To that end, I propose the following targeted actions to further support consumers and enhance oversight. In line with the programme for Government, we are progressing legislative reforms to enhance the CCPC's enforcement powers, including the ability to impose stronger sanctions for breaches of consumer protection law. This will ensure that anti-consumer or exploitative practices can be tackled more effectively and with greater deterrent effect. The CCPC's ongoing work on the state of competition in Ireland provides a robust evidence base to assess market dynamics across all sectors of the economy. We will continue to engage with the CCPC on the potential for further analysis of pricing and margin trends where appropriate. We will continue to support public awareness campaigns and the development of digital tools to ensure consumers can compare prices, understand their rights and make informed purchases.

ing decisions. Empowering consumers with information is one of the most effective ways to promote competition and drive down prices.

In conclusion, the Government shares the concerns and motivation of the Private Members' motion and we believe the most effective way to address these concerns is through targeted, proportionate and evidence-based interventions. We are already taking significant steps to strengthen consumer protection, enhance regulatory oversight and ensure that the grocery sector operates in a fair and competitive manner. We remain open to constructive dialogue with all Members of the House on how best to support consumers and promote transparency in the retail sector. However, we do not believe that the measures proposed in this motion, as currently drafted, represent the most effective or proportionate way forward. For these reasons, we will be opposing the motion and instead committing to a more balanced and strategic approach to reform.

Deputy Gary Gannon: I thank the Minister of State for her contribution. There were certainly some standout parts in her speech and I will pick out a few of them, if I may. To provide the context in which a motion such as this is brought to the Chamber, and I appreciate the Government understands the motivation of the Social Democrats for doing so, we should reiterate that throughout Ireland parents are skipping meals so their children do not go hungry. That is not a trend that started this year; it has been ongoing and captured by a number of agencies, including One Parent Family, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and a multitude of agencies working in the area of poverty. They have highlighted that parents are literally skipping meals. They choose between heating and eating during the colder months of the year. They are worried about buying shoes. We should also recognise that a measurement of poverty in the State is the absence of a second pair of shoes and a warm coat. Yesterday my party's leader, Deputy O'Callaghan, spoke about people not being able to afford a birthday present and, therefore, children not going to parties. Children and their parents in this country are not taking on recreational activities precisely because they live in poverty. This poverty is insidious throughout the fibre of Irish society.

Not only does poverty cost and erode the very condition of a person, but it also costs the State more than €4 billion a year. Yesterday, Barnardos told us that 40% of parents have borrowed money just to cover essentials and one third have fallen into arrears on their energy bills. We know all of this but, at the same time, people now pay more than €3,000 a year for the exact same weekly shop they got last year. There is no transparency in how the prices are set and who is making the profits. When the Minister of State and the Government tell us that the €10 million turnover threshold proposed in the motion would capture a significant number of companies classified as small enterprises under an EU definition, and that imposing a full audit and disclosure requirement on these businesses would represent a disproportionate regulatory burden, particularly for family-owned regionally based retailers that operate on relatively narrow margins, I cannot help but think of the average family in this country, whether they may be in rural areas or in Dublin. They have seen the price of their grocery shop increase by €3,000 in a short space of time. Can we imagine the burden this places on their family budget? Can we imagine the choice they have to determine between what they have for dinner today and what they may go without so the children do not have to? This is the type of burden at the heart of this.

We can measure poverty and I have just spoken about the indicators. The indicators are precisely what people go without. We cannot measure abundance, however, if we do not have data and evidence to understand who is making what profits and where. All we are asking for

in the motion is precisely this. We are asking the companies to tell us what they make so we understand whether profiteering is happening. When the Minister of State, Deputy Richmond, brought in the retailers for the photo opportunity in 2023, he assured us he would get tough on these retailers. I would argue that the evidence is in the cupboards of people the length and breadth of this country. All the Social Democrats are asking for in the motion is transparency for companies earning more than €10 million. I do not think too many companies that have an income of €10 million would self-identify as small local shops-----

Deputy Niamh Smyth: It is not profit, it is turnover. There is a big difference.

Deputy Gary Gannon: Yes, I appreciate that but the point remains. I appreciate a local shop does not have a €10 million turnover but it comes to the same thing. We are not asking for this burden to be placed on the local shop in any town; we are asking for it to be placed on the big retailers that we know have profiteered on the very basics that people need in their presses.

I do not accept the justifications given in the contribution of the Minister of State. I appreciate that her motivation is not in any way to undermine, but this contribution from the Government is an insult to people who are simply asking to be shown the abundance the supermarkets are taking from people in genuine need. That is all we are asking for and I do not think it is too harsh.

Deputy Jen Cummins: In recent days, the Chamber has spoken about the cost of living and how it affects education. To provide the bigger picture of what the cost of living for families is at present, if we look at it through the lens of education, which in my opinion is the foundation for our society, we have voluntary contributions for schools because schools cannot afford to keep the heating on. Parents are not fundraisers, they are taxpayers. We have hot school meals in our schools. I worked in education disadvantage for a very long time. Hot meals in schools came about because children go to school hungry. Yesterday, we heard that families do not have enough food in their homes so parents are reducing their own meal sizes or cutting them out altogether so they can feed their children.

When schoolbook schemes and other such schemes are rolled out, they are very welcome. I want to put on the record that we are constantly told by the Government that we want everything for everyone. We want targeted measures. The roll-out of schoolbooks is universal, whether or not someone is a millionaire. When a scheme is rolled out for everyone, then everyone is included. This includes all parts of education. Unfortunately, the students who were here until very late last night are wondering whether their fees will increase. It is an omnishambles. If families already pay €3,000 more for food than they did last year and now there will be another €1,000 for third level fees, I cannot compute how the Government does not see there is a cost-of-living crisis or how increasing the fees will put pressure on families. I said last night in the Chamber that John Dewey said, "Education is a social process; education is growth; education is not preparation for life but is life itself." It is a failure if families cannot afford to send their children to university. Education at third level, and not only at primary and secondary levels, is a human right.

I will reiterate some of the debate that happened last night because the Minister of State could not be there because of time pressures. The cost of accommodation for students in Ireland is approximately €1,200 per month. In Germany, in a big city such as Berlin, it is €300 to €500. The cost of transport is very high for students here in comparison with other European countries. The cost of the groceries that students also have to buy is at an all-time high.

Students are being prevented from accessing their human right to education. Last night, the Minister of State, Deputy Harkin, said there are other education pathways and this is true. As she said, students can do apprenticeships and earn as they learn. However, students should be able to go to college here at whatever level they want and not be prevented because of financial reasons. The cost of groceries is really not helping the situation for families.

Deputy Rory Hearne: CSO figures published today show Ireland's national income rose by 4.8% last year and GDP rose by 7.4%. According to these fiscal indicators, Ireland is doing well, but in reality there are two Irelands. There are those who are doing okay, a minority, and there is the majority, who at some level are struggling in one way or another to cover the basic costs of living. In fact, even the concept of the cost of living is deeply disturbing. The basic costs to survive are now unaffordable for most people in this country. One third of parents have gone into arrears on energy bills and 28% state they do not have enough food to feed their children. A total of 12% use a food bank. Last week, I visited a food bank in Finglas run by Feed our Homeless. The group stated that the biggest growth in those who need its food is among working families. Working families are relying on food banks to survive to get through the week.

I went outside SuperValu in Finglas this week and spoke to people about the cost of their grocery shop and the Social Democrats tabling the motion. One man told me he saw the price of a pack of six rashers increase by 75 cent in one jump. That is a 37.5% increase. The number of rashers per packet has also been reduced to five, so it is actually a 66% increase on a per rasher basis. This is shrinkflation, which is covering up the gougeflation done by supermarkets. Another woman advised me that she has seen the price of her shop increase weekly and that she is nervous going to the till, wondering whether she will be able to cover it. Another woman told me how she now splits her shop now across multiple supermarkets to find the cheapest possible product. When I spoke to her, she was at her third supermarket of the day, spending hours going from shop to shop to feed her family. This is unsustainable. The price gouging should not be tolerated when people are suffering and struggling to get by.

I do my shop each week for three young kids and I see the large increase in the cost of trying to feed a family in this country. This is even more expensive for parents of children with disabilities, carers, lone parents and those in homelessness. It reveals the Government's lack of priority for working people and for most people. It is not willing to stand up to the supermarkets. It gives nice words and states it is taking action but we need to see real action for the people struggling, and for middle Ireland and working-class people, who are being absolutely gouged by these supermarkets and the big retail companies. I encourage the Minister of State to support our motion and take some real action on this.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Cuirim fáilte roimh an rún seo ó na Social Democrats. Sinn Féin will be supporting this motion. By any measure the Government has failed to get to grips with the cost-of-living crisis. It is either doing nothing or making things worse. If we name any of the issues, we can see that we are paying more. The price of everything has gone absolutely through the roof, from energy bills to rent, insurance and childcare. It is all going one way and that is up. The cost of the weekly shop is now €3,000 more per annum for many families. People are working harder and harder but they cannot keep up. Fine Gael's Minister of State, Deputy Richmond, gave supermarkets six weeks to cut prices. That was over a year ago. It was just an embarrassing PR stunt by the Government. Since then, food prices have gone up faster and faster. There have been 50,000 phone calls to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul by families who cannot afford food, and the Government has just sat back and done nothing. It

has ignored people's reality. People are getting fleeced and the reality is that the Government still has no idea of what is going on. It has no oversight of the profits or pricing of the large retailers and supermarkets. Farmers have been getting squeezed for years but now consumers are being ripped off and someone in the middle is profiting off all of this suffering. Do not try to spin the yarn that there is nothing to see here. The stock prices of supermarkets and the large retailers and food companies have been going through the roof. They have been skyrocketing in recent times. Tesco's stock is up 30% in the last year. United value foods, the owners of SuperValu, saw its stock price rise by 60% in the last year. It is time that the Minister of State took action. The Taoiseach said that he has the guts to take on price gouging, so he should show it because we need to make food affordable. We have seen action taken in other jurisdictions by other governments right across Europe, but here in this country and here with this do-nothing Government, people are being ripped off and the Government is sitting on its hands. It is not acceptable any more.

Deputy Johnny Guirke: The rising cost of food has been a worry for many families. Food inflation is now running at double the rate of general inflation, with many families being forced to fork out an additional €3,000 per year just to keep food on the table. The prices of the likes of meat, cheese bread and beef have skyrocketed. The cost of a pound of butter has increased by more than €1 in the last year alone. The economist Oliver Browne has calculated that grocery prices have increased by 36% over the past four years. Meanwhile, more than 103,000 calls for help have been made to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul this year, with nearly half of those requests related to food support. We see it everywhere, from the cost of baby food putting enormous strain on families to students facing soaring fees and no meaningful support in the upcoming budget. I do not blame small retail shops in villages right across Ireland. They are struggling to keep the lights on and the doors open. What needs urgent attention are the wholesalers and the larger supermarkets, which are driving these price hikes with price gouging.

Workers in this country have never worked so hard, yet they have very little to show for it. Approximately 70% of people said that they were concerned about the cost of living. Almost 20% of families have had to cut back on heating costs in the past six months, according to research from Barnardos on the impact of the rising cost of living. Two in five people say that they are going without other essentials, including food and medical appointments. The Government has ruled out any meaningful cost-of-living support but there is no surprise there given that there is no election this year. Families and workers cannot afford to wait on political games; they need action. Profiteering is no doubt part of the cause of many families struggling. This Government needs to examine the root of those making millions. It is time for the Government to recognise this crisis and take concrete steps to support families, workers and small retailers and shops. At the end of the day, no one should have to choose between feeding their family and paying their bills.

Deputy Máire Devine: The cost of every single aspect of life in Ireland has been on a constant upward trajectory since Covid arrived in 2020. Yes, we can point to Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a cause for the increase in energy costs, which in turn caused food prices to increase around the world, but when energy costs eventually decreased, our food and goods prices did not follow. Supply costs are impacted by the global climate emergency, yet Ireland is not making the efforts necessary to meet its climate goals.

A family in my constituency recently talked to me. They are choosing between insuring their home or their health or putting food on the table. The price of everything have gone up, in particular milk, butter and other dairy products. Prices overall have increased by over 30%. If

a typical family of four were paying €120 per week on groceries before Covid, then the annual price increase is now crippling and hard-earned money does not go far. Where exactly does the increase go? We have seen Tesco's stock prices increase by 30% and SuperValu's stock by nearly 61%, well outpacing prospective market index increase rates, while farmers are getting squeezed. We need transparency. The Social Democrats are calling for this. We need accountability.

Food banks are experiencing a massive increase in demand and more children are living in poverty and homelessness than ever before. It is shameful. What we see around our city is shameful. The Minister of State's avoidant response reminds one of the sarcastic expression that has been around since the 1920s, "What's that got to do with the price of bread?" A cost-of-living package is essential. Please provide one.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I thank the Social Democrats for putting forward this timely and worthwhile motion. This is an important issue that affects everyone in the State at this time. Everyone knows that Ireland is one of the most expensive states in Europe for groceries. The gap between us and our European neighbours looks to be growing year on year. Some prices could be understandable but when we look at the EU Commission website and see that non-alcoholic beverages are the most expensive in Ireland, at 40% above the EU average, it makes no sense. It is the epitome of the rip-off Ireland that faces us today. We all see it. Grocery prices have increased at three times the rate of general inflation over the past year alone. If that were a cost to the great and the good, as the Government sees them, then the Government would act. Because it is the general public, however, that is affected most by the huge increase in grocery prices, the Government is taking its usual hands-off approach, citing some obscure report that backs its reasons for sitting on its hands and ignoring the facts that shoppers see weekly in their grocery bills. The Government has abandoned households as prices continue to soar. One hundred and 12 weeks ago, the Minister of State, Deputy Richmond, gave the major supermarket groups a six-week ultimatum to bring down the cost of groceries. We are still waiting and the consequences of that are stark.

The damning Barnardos cost-of-living 2025 report released yesterday shows that Government policies are failing families and, worse still, are failing children. The report highlighted how families are scrambling to gather an additional €3,000 per year just to put food on the table. It highlighted that 40% of parents are skipping meals, that 12% of parents are using food banks, that 40% of parents are borrowing money and that 19% of families cut back or go without food. Let that sink in for a minute. This is the reality of where we are in 2025. The Government's response to this motion is not reality. Stop sitting on your hands and get up and make the changes that are needed now. Childhood is the first thing poverty steals from any child, and this is rampant in our society. Unfortunately, it is under the Government's watch.

Deputy Louis O'Hara: The cost-of-living is too high but the Government is in complete denial about this reality. It seems to believe that the cost-of-living crisis is over and it is ruling out a cost-of-living package while households struggle. It is clear the Government is totally out of touch. Every week in my clinics, I have people coming in to me who are struggling to make ends meet, with high energy costs, rent and childcare and fuel costs, not to mention the student fees that the Government is now determined to increase. People just cannot take it any more. They need support from the Government.

The weekly shop in particular is going up. Between 2020 and 2025, the cost of a pound of butter has increased by 58%, the cost of a litre of milk has risen by 38% and the cost of a

loaf of bread has risen by 29%. I have not seen any data to suggest that wages have gone up by the same amount. These are all basics. Families with young growing children face the choice to provide food or to manage other bills. The scale of the suffering is clear. We have seen tens of thousands of calls to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul from people seeking help to pay for food. Having access to food is a basic in a functioning society, not a luxury, yet too many families across the State are experiencing food poverty. How is this acceptable to the Government? At the same time, we see supermarkets operating in Ireland making eye-watering profits. It is certainly not the primary producers like farmers who are benefiting from this. For example, Tesco announced in April that it had generated an operating profit of over €3 billion between its Irish and British stores. While this is just one example, it is plain to see that profiteering is ongoing across the sector. There is a lack of transparency around supermarket profits, specifically through their stores based in Ireland. The Government needs to hold these companies accountable and all options have to be on the table, including direct intervention to stop supermarkets from hiking prices without justification. The Government must introduce a cost-of-living package without delay. Families across the State are depending on it and it needs to step up to the plate.

Deputy Paul Donnelly: The fact of the matter is that normal working families are being affected by a cost-of-living crisis. This Government has lost control of it. Week on week, families see their shopping bills rise and rise, and the Government is burying its head in the sand, ignoring people's hardships and refusing to bring forward a cost-of-living package. Even the conscious shopper using the so-called low-cost supermarkets and purchasing own brand is finding that these brands are rising faster than the traditional brands. I know families where parents are going without food to make sure that children can eat and have essentials such as nappies and baby formula, which are often the most expensive in the trolley. Elderly people have to make a choice between eating or heating. Renters have to balance between buying essential food supplies and making sure that they can meet their rent at the end of the month.

Everyone understands that businesses have costs, that they have to be viable and they have to make profits, but the profits are eye-watering. Tesco made a €120 million profit in Ireland. United value foods, owners of SuperValu, reported a turnover exceeding €5 billion for the first time, with profits of €104 million. We only have the figures for the North for Dunnes Stores; we do not have them for the Twenty-six Counties. Its £3.8 million in profits soared last year to £12.7 million. All these super profits are being made while people are unable to afford their weekly bills.

This Government is complicit in the hardships inflicted on hardworking families, including education costs, food prices, rent prices and lack of housing. It goes on and on. It is time to stand up for ordinary families and ordinary workers and ensure that they can make ends meet at the end of the week.

Deputy Thomas Gould: The price of butter has risen, according to the CSO, by 58% in 12 months. A staple in every house in the country has risen by nearly 60%. The CSO consumer price index shows that the prices of the most basic items have increased and the Government is doing nothing about it. For pensioners, those with disabilities, people with low incomes and families, this makes a difference between whether people go hungry or not. It is not just the most vulnerable in society. It is now hitting middle-class families and forcing people to make choices who never thought they were going to have to make choices, but now they do. Does the Minister of State know what is happening now? People are not shopping to put food on the table which is good for them or their kids, but they are shopping to buy the cheapest, whether

it is the right food or not. How is that a right way for parents to have to react to look after their families? They have no choice. Christy Moore's song "Ordinary Man" has a line:

Well it seems to me such a cruel irony

He's richer now than ever he was before

The captains of industry are richer now than ever before, while ordinary people are forced to penny-pinch and cut back on luxuries to afford the most basic necessities. Christy Moore wrote that song years ago. It was as true then as it is now. The captains of industry and these big companies are making obscene profits and the Government is standing idly by like the Government stands idly by on so many things, because this Government of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael is more interested in protecting big business, speculators and profiteers than it is in looking after the ordinary man and woman in the street, the ordinary person who needs protection. It is time that the Minister of State acts.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Catherine Connolly): I call an Teachta David Cullinane. Two speakers are listed but there is just the Teachta here at the moment.

Deputy David Cullinane: I will take all the time. That is great. I commend the Labour Party on tabling this motion.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: The Social Democrats.

Deputy David Cullinane: Sorry, the Social Democrats. They have given us an opportunity to have this discussion. If you talk to anybody in the real world, the cost of living is one of the biggest issues impacting workers and families. People are paying huge amounts of money on mortgages, rents, childcare and insurance costs. Almost everything is going up. That includes the price of groceries and food. It seems everybody is aware of this with the exception of the Government. It is unbelievable to people that while prices are going up, the Government is setting its face against any cost-of-living package in the upcoming budget. It seems to be saying that it knows prices are going up but people are on their own and there is nothing it is going to do about it. That is outrageous. The Government is abandoning people who are hard pressed and cannot afford to pay basic bills.

As previous speakers have said, far too many families are unfortunately sitting around the table in their homes, making decisions about what bill to pay or not to pay. As Deputy Gould said, in some circumstances, they may be purchasing food that is not the best food for their children but it is the cheapest food and they have no other option. I have lost count of the number of people who have raised this with me. We all see it. None of us is immune to it but we are well paid in this House. There are people who are on much less than us and are trying to make ends meet and pay all of the bills, and they are finding it impossible. While they are finding it impossible, they have a Government which is telling them there is nothing it will do.

A Minister had a high-profile meeting with the main retailers about the price of groceries and food before the last election. He talked tough, stuck his chest out and said we are going to deal with this, then nothing happened. We have to look at what legal levers are there and what we can do. If those legal levers are not there, then we have to create them. If that means new legislation, that is what we have to do. Some of the profits have been outlined for some of these big multiples. They make billions of euro every year in profits. Prices go up which are unjustified in most circumstances and really hit hard-pressed families. As a State, Parliament

and legislators, us throwing our hands up in the air and saying there is nothing we can do about it will not be and is not being accepted by people.

I obviously support the asks in the motion. We have to look at mandatory price arrangements and transparency. We have to make sure there is absolute transparency when it comes to pricing of food right across the board. That is obvious, but it is not happening. We also have to look at how we force these multiples to reduce the cost of food and how we stop them from jacking up prices, which they are doing out of pure greed and pure profiteering. I simply do not accept that that is beyond the Government or beyond Parliament. I suspect the Government simply does not have the stomach for this. It does not have the political will to deal with it, and that is worse. Saying that, at the moment, it has very limited powers, that it is doing everything it can but it is not really making any difference is one thing, to which I would argue that we should get more powers and change the law, but it is entirely different if the Government is indifferent. People feel that the Government is indifferent to their needs and indifferent to the rising costs of insurance. Deputy Pearse Doherty had a Bill passed in this House which has still not been enacted by Government to deal with the rising cost of insurance.

It seems to be the case in every area. When it comes to rents, the Opposition has put forward practical measures on how we can control rents, stop rent increases, and make sure the tax credit is much more generous than what the Government is doing. In almost all of these areas, the Opposition is putting forward proposals and solutions, yet the Government is ignoring them. We do not have affordable homes. We have mortgages and affordable houses in the region of €400,000, €500,000 or even more. It is unbelievable that, in a country that is very wealthy, we have so many people who are very poor and so many working people who cannot afford to pay for basic services. That is on the Government. There is no doubt about it. We can control rent prices. We can provide affordable homes. We could deal with the insurance industry if we wanted to. In my view, we can deal with the rising cost of food, but we have a Government that is indifferent. We have a Government which seems to think with regard to all of these areas that people should plough on, with all of the stress and mental health difficulties that go with it, and that mothers, fathers and working families across the State should just be let get on with it.

I do not believe that is acceptable. An awful lot more needs to be done. I am not satisfied at all with the contribution from the Minister and the response from Government so a lot more needs to be done. I thank the Social Democrats for bringing forward this very worthwhile motion and giving us the opportunity to discuss it.

Deputy Ged Nash: I move amendment No. 1 to amendment No. 1:

After “compare prices and make informed choices” to insert:

“calls on the Government to:

— commit to passing the Competition and Consumer Protection (Unfair Prices) Bill 2023; and

— instead of using over €700 million to cut the rate of Value Added Tax on hospitality in Budget 2026, to use these hundreds of millions to reduce child poverty with a targeted second tier of child benefit, and other measures to provide income supports to households.”.

I thank the Social Democrats for moving this motion. My amendment is designed to do two things. First, Government ought to allow for Labour’s Competition and Consumer Protection

(Unfair Prices) Bill 2023 to pass. That Bill was published in 2023 and debated on Second Stage in the House in late May. Frankly, there were fewer Members in attendance at the debate than there are here this morning. Second, the amendment proposes that instead of using over €700 million to cut the rate of VAT on hospitality in budget 2026, the Government should use these hundreds of millions of euro to reduce child poverty with a targeted second tier of child benefit and other measures to provide income supports to households. There are the choices this House will have to make over the next couple of months - a hand up to children to give them every chance of a good life or a handout to Supermac's and McDonald's.

I will not rehearse the figures on how the price of basic staples we all need have risen week on week over the past three years. They are on the record. The early price rises of groceries on the shelves at the start of this cost-of-living crisis were quite easily explained by post-Covid demand followed by war in Europe. We all understood and continue to understand that. However, what is not sufficiently clear is why the price of products we need and take for granted are still rising endlessly while input costs are under control. Some of them have plateaued and come down but big businesses in the supermarket sector continue to post exceptional profits. This is the point. If it walks, talks and acts like price gouging at the check out, it may very well be.

The question is: what does the Legislature do about it? I provided one solution. It is contained in the Bill I referred to. We should make the huge multinational supermarkets operating here publish their profits. The Bill was published in May 2023 and debated on Second Stage in late May of this year. Its core idea and some of the text are essentially referenced in this very welcome motion from the Social Democrats but the Government has delayed its advancement to Committee Stage by a year. The question is why the Government decided to do that when in May 2023, in response to Labour's campaigning on high grocery prices, the then Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Simon Coveney, said he would do just that. He is on record as saying that this is a good idea but the Government has done nothing since. He said that if price rises continued, he would haul the supermarkets in, bring them to heel and enact his own legislation to make them publish their profits in Ireland and give the CCPC more market surveillance and enforcement powers.

I heard the Minister of State, Deputy Dillon, on the "News at One" on RTÉ Radio last Friday. He said all the right things. He is well briefed. He also said that what we need now is the evidence to take the appropriate action and that process is under way. What process is under way? None, I would venture. Like Ministers, I like to make my decisions based on evidence. The Minister of State said that he would ask the CCPC to do a rerun of the analysis it did on grocery prices in mid-2023 - the one that managed to conclude somehow that there was no evidence of price gouging and excessive pricing in Ireland even though it could not possibly make a conclusive determination on that because it had no information of any quality on the very profits the companies it was supposed to be examining were making. Riddle me that. This is the "Father Ted" approach to the cost-of-living crisis in Ireland. It is the equivalent of "Can anything be said for another mass? Let's do another report." It is a fool's errand. Without clear information and without compelling the supermarkets to publish their profits, we will have no reliable data. Because we do not know their margins, we will not know how they price products and hard-pressed punters will continue to be kept in the dark - just how the big chains want it and all sustained by a Government that will not rock the boat in a situation where there is also a real risk that the very limited competition in the supermarket sector in Ireland could lead to abuses of dominant positions with both the business environment and consumers ending up

paying the price.

The proposals I made in our Bill are modest. The proposals in the Social Democrats' motion are modest. They are realistic, reasonable and pragmatic. I would not for a minute overstate what its provisions would achieve but it would bring greater transparency. It would help us to stand up for the customer once and for all and help make major businesses in this country more accountable. It baffles me why any Government is hostile to that.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I have the humble Snack bar in my hand. Its price has doubled. People used to be able to get 12 of them for €1 a decade ago. The price is now €5. It is not the farmers in Africa who grow the cocoa who are benefiting from this. Supermarkets should have to tell people if they are paying more for less. Supermarkets are gouging people. They must be forced to publish their profit margins. I second the amendment tabled by Deputy Nash.

Tesco and its Clubcard prices constitute a scam while Dunnes Stores and its vouchers constitute another scam. What I would say to these supermarkets is forget about these vouchers and drop their prices. People are going around supermarkets around this country like eejits trying to buy "X" amount of products to get a fiver or a tenner off the shopping or buying particular products and scanning the app so the price will drop. Research in 2022 found that Irish shoppers are spending €500 annually chasing voucher deals. I bet that figure has doubled since then. They are causing people to waste money. In Germany, Aldi was found to have breached EU consumer law by claiming fake discounts on bananas. This is insane. Supermarkets here are charging double UK prices. It costs €6 for a jar of mayonnaise here when it costs £4 in the North. Tesco made a profit of €3 billion with sales of €3.4 billion. Dunnes Stores have a market share of 25% while SuperValu has a 20% market share and Tesco has a 24% market share. It is about time Government implemented our Bill and reined these cowboys in.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: This motion is necessary, urgent and overdue and I thank the Social Democrats for bringing it forward. People are carrying the cost of a crisis they have nothing to do with. We can continuously talk about taking measures to deal with rising costs, and the Social Democrats outlined actions relating to it. Change the legislation and take action to bring about the necessary structural changes or we can go on forever every single year talking about the marginalised and refusing to address the question that the economic model has marginalised people and not the other way around. Everybody from Barnardos to Social Justice Ireland to the CSO have given us figures and they can all be quoted here today but it is those on the lowest incomes who are always most affected by the inequality in society, not us standing in our feet here with good salaries and not anybody else on a good salary. It affects those whom the system has disempowered and disabled and who are not allowed to participate because they are struggling on a daily basis to pay for bread, milk or butter; to pay rent that keeps rising; and wondering where their mortgage repayments are going to come from. We continuously go on with the same economic model. I am not here to preach. I am here as a practical woman. I am here as someone who has the privilege of living and working in different backgrounds. I am sick, sore and tired of talking about the marginalised as if they are inevitable when they are a direct consequence of the economic model we have as is our housing crisis.

We have here a very practical motion that asks us to do a number of things to bring transparency and accountability. It proposes changing legislation. What sticks out in the motion is the reference to a letter sent by the Agri-Food Regulator to the Minister stating what it needed. The reply from the Minister of State has utterly ignored that. There are practical steps that can be taken and absolutely nothing has been given in relation to them. The regulator sent a letter

saying there was a gap on the ground and it could not function effectively. It wrote months ago and nothing has happened.

We can look at the figures. Low-income households are disproportionately affected because, quite clearly, they use a greater amount of their income on necessities. I think I have gone over time so I will finish.

Deputy Charles Ward: I thank the Social Democrats for bringing forward this very important motion, which I fully support. There is no doubt skyrocketing grocery prices coupled with huge increases in other household costs, like energy and rent, are putting huge strain on families across the country.

Right now families in Donegal find themselves caught in a pincer movement between the cost-of-living crisis and the defective concrete scandal. This is on top of long-standing geographic and infrastructural neglect. This is not anecdotal. The figures speak to structural disadvantage in Donegal. According to the CSO figures for 2021 Donegal had the lowest disposable income in Ireland at more than 20% below the national average. The county is severely disadvantaged in terms of workforce distribution. The clusters of high-income sectors are in urban areas. We have no rail network, poor broadband and little access to employment outside tourism or seasonal work. The exclusion limits access to high-paying jobs and remote opportunities. This inequality significantly worsens the cost-of-living strain on people in my county. Rent is astronomical and supply minimal. The Taoiseach, in response to my question yesterday, pointed out there were 2,000 families at some stage in the defective concrete scheme, but as it is in progress where are these people to go? Where are they to rent? There is absolutely nowhere. Delays in payments means builders are taking longer than expected. Auxiliary grants that were granted may have been paid to homeowners who did not breach the cap but have long since run out, leaving homeowners to try to pay for a mortgage and pay rent. How can families be expected to manage this while they have the lowest disposable income in the State?

Defective concrete adds an unbearable cost to an already desperate cost-of-living crisis. Families are facing the impossible decision between sending their children to college or allocating the funds to rebuilding a structurally failing home. Should they choose to pay rent for an indefinite period or halt their education, healthcare and essential living costs? Should they face bankruptcy or remain stuck in an unsafe house? In Donegal we have more than a cost-of-living crisis. We have rising grocery prices and the significant injustice of neglect worsening an already ill-conceived scheme. Families in Donegal should not have to decide between their children's education and a safe home. They should not have to be charged VAT twice on levies in a broken system and they should not face predatory contract practices while being abandoned by infrastructure and economic investment. They face all this while experiencing a 40% increase in weekly grocery prices alongside families across the country. This is about restoring dignity, opportunities and fairness. We need to fix the scheme, fix rents, fix rebuilds and fix Donegal's future.

Deputy Seamus Healy: I welcome the motion from the Social Democrats. It is very important and opportune. Families across the country are struggling to make ends meet. The cost-of-living crisis is an ongoing crisis that is no longer temporary or once-off. Everything is going in one direction, which is up. This includes food prices, energy prices, rents, mortgages and transport. Energy prices, for instance, have increased significantly over the years and never come down. Our energy prices are one of the highest, if not the highest, in Europe. The Barnardos cost-of-living impact report yesterday confirmed a third of Irish families are in arrears

with the their energy bills.

Grocery prices have similarly increased by a significant figure of over 36% in the last few years. That represents an increase in grocery bills for the average family of about €3,000 per year. Grocery prices are currently running at at least three times the rate of inflation. Prices of items like bread, milk, pasta and butter have skyrocketed. Supermarkets are gouging consumers and making huge profits, which are increasing annually. Unfortunately, we do not know the exact level of these profits because we have no evidence. These supermarkets either do not publish their annual audited figures or they effectively hide their profits, so we need an evidence-based system and information by law where these companies are forced to produce annual audited accounts.

Yesterday's Barnardos report on the impact of the cost-of-living on families is hugely concerning and shameful. It states 12% of families now use a food bank, that 40% of them either skipped or reduced meal portions to ensure their children have enough to eat and that a third of families are in arrears with their energy bills. These are frightening statistics showing families are under huge pressure. It indicates the Minister of State's Government is completely out of touch with a population that is under severe pressure in this area. To suggest there would be no cost-of-living package in the forthcoming budget is difficult to believe. That a government, in the face of all the evidence available, would claim there is no need for such a package is equally so.

I absolutely support the call by the Social Democrats for all retailers with a turnover of over €10 million to publish full, audited annual accounts and that the Consumer Protection Act be amended to compel disclosure of information. That is very important.

I strongly support Deputy Nash's amendment to the motion. We have 250,000 children living in poverty in this State. The figure has not reduced in five years and it is shameful. A second tier of child benefit should target this issue in the upcoming budget.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Ireland is the second-most expensive country in Europe. It is quite incredible we have a situation where parents are lying awake at night not knowing how they are going to pay certain bills. I know parents who, as soon as their monthly wages drop in, go into another overdraft to keep them going until the wages next come in. The Barnardos report yesterday was absolutely shocking. For some reason we have considered this to be an extremely wealthy country, but so many families here are living just on the margins when it comes to being able to cover their costs. That there are 250,000 children in poverty is an indictment of this Government and its policies.

One of the biggest creators of inflation and cost in the country is the Government. It took in €4.1 billion in energy taxes last year. It is incredible. It took in more in energy taxes last year in the jaws of a cost-of-living crisis than has ever been collected before. Carbon taxes topped €1 billion last year and it is hardwired in that they are going to continue to rise for the next five years.

Another problem in this State is the supermarket sector and the food processing sector are both oligopolies. They have been allowed develop into oligopolies and they have oligopoly power. Their strong buyer power means can force down the prices coming from farmers, whether they are in arable or meat. A small number of these sectors with enormous power are pushing down the prices for the people who are providing the food and, at the other end, they

are actually pushing up the prices of products going to the families. They have been allowed to operate in this regard by the Government for many years.

I met staff from the food regulator's office recently. They told me about an investigation they did into the price of eggs. They said they went into a number of different supermarkets, including Aldi, Lidl, Dunnes Stores, and asked for the price of eggs in those locations. They were told, "No, tough, you are not getting the information." The Government was so brave. It gave the power to the food regulator to ask the companies for information, but those companies can still give the two fingers to the food regulator and say, "Absolutely not." The Government needs to give the power to compel that information to the food regulator so we can understand exactly what is happening in these companies as to how they are gouging the customer.

I welcome this motion by the Social Democrats. I am worried that the Government will sit on its hands as usual and families will be assaulted over and over again by these costs.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: As others have said, people are suffering from massive price inflation across a range of areas, including in supermarkets, the subject of this debate. The causes are varied, including wars, energy price hikes, supply shortages, Brexit and so on, but the suspicion remains that the supermarket chains are making excessive profits. As Ireland is the second most expensive country in Europe, scrutiny is required. Even when margins are found to be tight, families need to be given the tools to find the best value in a given week. Measures can be taken. Large retailers could be required to publish their profit margins for specific products or product categories, especially those in areas of high inflation. Information, as others have said, is needed all the way up the supply chain. Profit controls should be looked at where necessary and enforceable, and we need better standardised unit pricing in order that the unit pricing can be applied across all supermarkets. At the moment, as a shopper, as others have said, it is quite confusing when trying to compare the weight and the volume. Retailers do not make it easy.

We need enhanced powers for the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission. The CCPC should be empowered to actively monitor and investigate pricing practices in the grocery sector. This includes the ability to analyse market data and profit margins and intervene when unfair or excessive pricing is identified. The Competition and Consumer Protection (Unfair Prices) Bill, which has reached Second Stage, would be a good place to start as an existing framework that could be built on. Some of us will remember the TV series "Rip Off Republic" in the noughties, which could be added to that. Consumer experts regularly appear on radio shows and podcasts, not to mention regular columns in newspapers, like Conor Pope's "Pricewatch". We do not just need to have the CCPC looking at stuff; we also need to give that information in a credible way to people. Why does the Government not fund the CCPC to do a regular price watch podcast or video blog and employ someone as a good-value independent influencer to give that information? That is something the Government could do.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: The Irish people are resilient, but resilience should not be mistaken for indifference, nor should the quiet dignity of the Irish people and their endurance be used as an excuse for Government inaction. We are over three years into the cost-of-living crisis and it has touched every home, every dinner table and every shopping list. I speak regularly to parents who are cutting corners and going to bed hungry themselves so their children can eat. I see older people counting coins at tills. I see working families doing everything right yet falling short, living paycheque to paycheque, only a few paycheques away from financial ruin.

The price of butter is up 58%. Milk has increased by 25%. Cheese prices have soared by 38%. A basic basket now costs over €3,000 more than it did in 2022. That is not just inflation; that is an erosion of dignity, financial stability and a fundamental social contract that says that if you work hard, you should be able to live in security. Yet this Government has chosen not to deliver a cost-of-living package, with no meaningful reliefs and no comprehensive plan.

As regards the response from the Taoiseach yesterday to a question from my colleague to the effect that there is a regulator, I have no faith in this Government, nor do I have faith in the man who was part of a Government that left a financial regulator ruin this country in 2008. That is the faith we have here. While I agree with and am open to free enterprise, there is price gouging going on here and it is unacceptable.

I commend this motion and thank the Social Democrats for it.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: Any price gouging by any major supermarket holder should be transparent. All their profits should be shown. Some people look at the smaller outlets whose turnover is up but whose profits are down. It is some of the major ones we need to look at to see why this is.

We also have to look at the part the Government has played in this. It introduced wage increases, which we welcomed, but where does it come back to? To the people who are going in buying the food. It is being added on. When you look at the tax regime the Government has on energy costs, there has been a 78% increase in eight months for energy costs to run these supermarkets. The Government is taking 23% VAT on top of that. It is therefore also responsible for the prices going up in our shops. When we look at the major supermarkets and they are taking over-the-top profits, yes, 100%, we should pull them in, but we should also look at our smaller stores that are not doing that to understand how we can help them. The Government has at its fingertips the ability to help them. There is no point in giving a wage increase if people do not see it in their pockets and it does not go further. The Government is giving wage increases but is driving the price of everything else up, which means workers do not get a wage increase in the first place, so it all comes back to the taxpayers again.

Deputy Michael Collins: I thank the Social Democrats and will support this very important motion.

Since 2021, grocery costs have surged nearly 40%, adding €3,000 to annual family expenses and pushing more than 100,000 children into consistent poverty. These are some examples. Brennan's white bread, 800 g, increased from €1.87 in 2022 to €1.99 in 2025. Avonmore milk, 2 l, rose from €1.99 to €2.69. Denny sausages, 454 g, went from €2.69 to €3.89. Cadbury Dairy Milk chocolate, 110 g, increased from €1.49 to €2.50. A bottle of Coca-Cola rose from €2.65 to €4. A four-pack tin of beans jumped from €3.50 to €5.50. The price for 1 kg of chicken breast surged from €4.99 to €10.99. Rooster potatoes, 1 kg, increased from 99 cent to €1.90. Kerrygold butter, 454 g, went from €3.74 to €4.95.

Independent Ireland stands firm on reducing the cost of living, supporting rural, urban and agricultural communities and promoting transparency and fairness in the economic system. However, the Minister of State knows well the figures I have read out. The mother and the father who go into the shop daily and try to pay for their groceries are coming to the point that they cannot. They are walking out trying to see if there is a bargain in the next shop or the previous shop or up and down the street. It is a terrible situation. This Government has provided

no supports this year, but last year, before the election, there were supports.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: That is true.

Deputy Gillian Toole: I thank the Social Democrats for bringing forward this important subject for discussion. At the risk of being pedantic, I have said it before but I will say it again and continue to say it: there is a very important saying, let food be your medicine. It is the foundation of health. The health basis and the knock-on health effects of this issue are yet to play out. I totally understand the role of the competition authority and the need for the role of the Agri-Food Regulator to be strengthened. That is an area where, as it stands, interference is limited. However, it should not limit us in our suggestions. I will make two suggestions this morning.

We absolutely have to look at a list of essential nourishing foodstuffs for price consideration and perhaps look at establishing, with an independent dietician, that essential list of dietary staples. The reasons for that are twofold: the health benefits but also to ensure a fair price for the farmer or the grower. The knock-on benefit of that will be national resilience. It will also help to secure local rural economies and to ensure the quality and the health benefits of the food product.

I will give the House an example from the Irish Grain Growers group. Imagine this: the price of grain today, be it wheat, barley or oats, is no more than the price 40 years ago. Yet, all the contributions in this Chamber relate to the current cost to the consumer. The gap in the middle is a serious issue and one that must be dealt with in terms of our sustainability going forward and the viability of farming but also, ultimately, the delivery of a quality, fair-priced product to the consumer.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I thank the Social Democrats for bringing this topic before us today. This topic is in everyone's mouth, that the cost of everything has gone up. There is a major difference between one supermarket and another. There are different prices in different towns. No one can understand who the regulator is, what he is doing or where he is because he is not visible to any of us. The regulator does not seem to be playing an effective role. We see that oil prices fluctuate; they go up and down. We hear the oil price goes down but it takes two or three weeks for fuel prices to go down. If the oil price goes up, fuel prices seem to go up the following morning. They are the things people are talking about. There are monopolies, where certain companies distributing or selling different things seem to have a monopoly and can charge what they like.

People are being advised by several parties and different politicians in this Chamber to go electric. Yet, since Bord na Móna closed down in 2020 the price of electricity has gone up daily. I do not know where the regulator is or who is in charge of that. He does not seem to be there at all. Electricity prices are going up and at the same time people are advised to put in heat pumps and to go electric. They are coming to me with bills of €400, €500 or €600 for whatever the period is and they cannot understand it. Of course, there is a heat pump going and twisting the meter around all day every day, sunny or cold. This is what they were advised to do and it is what they did.

Farmers are not being paid a realistic price. For example, it would not make sense for farmers here in Ireland to sell potatoes to the supermarket because the supermarkets are selling them for less, wherever they are getting them, than they could pay the farmers. Deputy Toole talked

about the price of grain, which is at an all-time low. It is grand to come up from Kerry and move into good land along the way and see all the fields of grain and corn turning yellow and gold. However, it is sorrowful to hear that farmers are not being paid properly for that. Where are the regulators? What is happening? Are we importing grain at a cheaper price? We are hurt when we hear that good land is being planted with solar panels - another idea by some geniuses. Food security is important to us. We need to understand that and keep it in mind all the time. We are a small nation and if we have to import a lot of our food, it will become far more expensive.

On the cost of insurance, we hear of all the different things that have been said and done to the insurance companies. Notwithstanding that, insurance goes up every year. Everyone inside here knows it and the people who are paying through the nose every day know it, and there is no regulation. Whatever these regulators are being paid, many of them are not worth their pay because they are not transparent and they do not seem to be acting. We need to see and hear more regulation from them because they do not seem to be visible to me or anyone else at present.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I compliment the Social Democrats on this very important motion. I do not know whether it will fall on deaf ears but I fear it will, like so many other motions that have gone before. I remember when Deputy Danny Healy-Rae's brother, now Minister of State, Deputy Michael Healy-Rae, and I, along with a small number of IFA activists, worried vegetable and fruit producers, went to some supermarkets here in Dublin. Three trolleys filled up to water level cost less than €12 each. That was unsustainable then and it is more unsustainable now to have food priced at that level. I come from a mixed farm that grew everything. I still grow everything and my brother grows a lot of potatoes. We have every kind of vegetable. Deputy Danny Healy-Rae said it is lovely to see the colour of the corn. The combines have been working since last Thursday in south Tipperary. I visited some of them. It is wonderful to see the harvest. Thanks be to God the weather is so wonderful. However, farmers are being intimidated. They are being killed every which way between the costs of everything for inputs and the price going down. In fairness, cattle, sheep and pigmeat are doing very well this year but that is going to have its own implications. Food security is much threatened going forward. Solar farms are taking over the best of the land in south Tipperary.

As regards the regulators, when I came in here 18 years ago we had a limited number of regulators but now they are like mushrooms in a field of a soft wet morning. There are mushrooms everywhere. There is a regulator for everything and the vast majority of them are useless, toothless and fruitless. They have their office, their title and the plaque on the wall. They have the fancy office desk and a team of employees paid for by the taxpayers. It is the same with the NGOs, hundreds and hundreds of them. The public, and in this case the farmers, are being milked high and dry, pardon the expression. As I said, the regulators are useless, toothless and fruitless. It is so sad. We have the regulators and they have powers but they are totally ineffective. Governments are feeble and inept at insisting and instructing regulators to do their jobs, to do what hard-earned taxpayers' money is paying for them to do. Across all the areas, they are not doing it. The cost of insurance is again an issue at the moment. Various moves were made to bring down the price of insurance but to no avail.

In the food sector, it is so important for families to have good and proper fresh food. It is important for nutrition, as Deputy Toole said. There is nothing like carrots, potatoes, turnips or cabbage fresh out of the fields, with clay on them. Now they are imported from all over the world. There are concerns at the moment about some fruits being imported from Israel. We should support our farmers but, above all, insist that the regulators employed to do a job, do the job. Last night, I talked about the Custom House. What has gone wrong with us here in this

Republic that people are paid handsomely to do a job but they are not doing it? We are all in hock to the big conglomerates. Governments are in fear of them, probably in hock to them, and everybody else is as well. Big is wonderful. We will know the cost when all the small producers are gone. They are going. Like snow on a ditch they are disappearing because farming is not viable and they cannot survive. I support the motion and I appeal to the Ministers of State present to ask the regulators to do their jobs.

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Jerry Buttimer): I am responding on the motion on behalf of the Minister of State, Deputy Dillon. I thank the members of the Social Democrats for their contributions this morning and thank all Members of the House for their varied and interesting comments.

I begin by reiterating that the Government fully acknowledges the concerns raised in this Private Members' motion regarding the rising cost of groceries and the financial strain and burden it places on households, families and people throughout the country. We understand the pressures that families, people and vulnerable groups are facing and we are committed to addressing these challenges in a meaningful and effective way. It is important to emphasise that the Government is not standing still on the issue. We are actively progressing a comprehensive suite of targeted measures designed to support consumers, enhance market transparency and strengthen regulatory oversight in the grocery sector. These actions are grounded in evidence, informed by expert analysis and aligned with our broader commitment to fairness and competition in the marketplace.

We recognise that food inflation has been a persistent concern. While recent trends show some easing, we remain vigilant. I have heard the concerns of Members this morning. I myself shop, despite some of the comments earlier, and there is a genuine concern among everybody about the cost of shopping and the grocery bill and other issues as well. The Government has already taken significant steps to monitor and respond to developments in the grocery sector. This includes leveraging the expertise of the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, which plays a central role in safeguarding consumer interests and ensuring markets operate fairly and efficiently. In light of the existing regulatory framework, the active enforcement of consumer protection law and the significant reforms already under way, the Government does not believe the additional powers proposed in the Private Members' motion are necessary or proportionate at this time. While we share the objective of protecting consumers and ensuring fair pricing, we must also ensure that any new measures are evidence-based, targeted and capable of delivering real impact without any unintended consequences.

Rather than adopting broad or duplicate powers, the Government recommends a more focused and data-driven approach to strengthening transparency and competition in our grocery sector. This approach is not only more sustainable, it is also more likely to yield tangible benefits for consumers in the short and long term. To that end, the Government is advancing a number of targeted actions, including strengthening the powers of the CCPC; ensuring it has the necessary tools and resources to be able to investigate and address anti-competitive practices effectively; leveraging the CCPC state of competition analysis, which provides a robust evidence base for identifying market trends, potential distortions and areas requiring intervention; updating the CCPC's 2023 high-level analysis of the Irish grocery retail sector to reflect current market dynamics and inform future policy decisions; supporting consumer empowerment measures, including initiatives to improve price transparency, promote informed purchasing decisions and enhance public awareness of consumer rights. These actions reflect a balanced and proactive strategy which addresses the root causes of concern while preserving the integrity

and independence of our regulatory institutions. They also demonstrate the Government's commitment to continuous improvement, accountability and responsiveness to the evolving needs of the Irish consumer.

While we appreciate the intent behind the Private Members' motion and genuinely understand and hear the frustration of people - despite some of the commentary, we are not living in ivory towers and are not aloof; we live among and in our communities - we believe the Government's current and planned measures represent a more effective and proportionate response. We are committed to working collaboratively with all stakeholders, including Members of the House, to ensure our grocery sector remains competitive, transparent and fair for all. The Government will continue to monitor developments closely, adapt our approach as needed and ensure that the interests of consumers remain at the heart of our economic and social policy.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: With respect, we do not need the Government to continue to monitor events closely. We need it to act and we have needed it to act for a long time.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul has told us that almost 50% of the people who ring them do so about groceries - almost 50%. The Barnardos report published yesterday showed that almost one fifth of children are missing out on school trips and activities because of household costs. Their families cannot afford for them to go on a school trip or take part in an activity. It is heartbreaking for a child if their friends are able to go to an activity or on a school trip and they cannot afford to do so. There is social exclusion and it is difficult for the parent to explain to the child why it is the case. How do parents tell children who only want to be able to participate in the same way as their classmates that their families cannot do that? What does that convey? Parents who are put in that situation love their children just as much as any other parent and want to provide for them just as much as any other parent, but they are not able to do so because of grocery prices and other cost-of-living prices that have gone through the roof. It is a horrible situation for any child, parent or family to be put in. The report published yesterday told us about children not being able to go to friends' birthday parties because there is no money to buy a present to enable the child to attend. That is a horrible situation for any child to be put in, to be excluded in that way. It is because these issues are not being tackled. We need more than the Government simply monitoring it closely. We need it to act.

I cannot for the life of me understand why on earth the Government will not support the Social Democrats' proposal for transparency in supermarket profits. What does it have against that measure? The Government talks about the need for evidence. The Ministers of State, Deputies Buttimer and Dillon, have talked about it and the Taoiseach talked about it yesterday. This is the evidence we need to have full transparency of what is going on with supermarket profits. It is the beginning of the evidence we need. Why on earth is the Government opposed to that? I cannot see any reason not to have full transparency of what is going on with the profits of supermarkets.

The Minister of State told the Dáil earlier that the CCPC is not looking for additional powers. In fact, the CCPC has been calling for more substantial penalties for breaches of consumer protection law. It has been calling for that for some time. It needs changes to the law so that it can impose large fines for serious offences. For example, it could be a percentage of a business's turnover. It has been crying out for that additional power but the Government has, yet again, failed to act on this.

The Minister of State told us that markets operate efficiently and fairly. How does he know

that when he does not know what the profits of all the supermarkets and large retailers are? The Government is refusing to take action to ensure it would know about those profits. It is laughable to hear Government representatives say they need evidence and then to oppose these measures.

The Minister of State, Deputy Dillon, has requested that the CCPC reopen its analysis of grocery price inflation. This was done a few years ago and it did not result in any action being taken or in any lowering of grocery prices. It did not work that time and it will not work this time, as the CCPC has not been given any additional powers. This is just a distraction to make it look as though something is happening and something is being done, while prices continue to increase, we have no transparency of profits and individual families and households continue to struggle. Given that that action was taken before and resulted in nothing whatsoever, it is nothing more than a sham.

We need to have full transparency of profits, but we also need the powers the Agri-Food Regulator has been calling for. It has been writing to the Government to say it urgently needs those. We need them to be done now. There should be no more delays. Why has the Government been sitting on those extra powers the Agri-Food Regulator has been saying it urgently needs to do its job? It is fine to talk about the need for transparency and evidence, but if the Government does not give the Agri-Food Regulator the full powers it needs, we do not have full transparency of supermarket profits and it does not give the CCPC the extra powers it has been asking for, how will the Government have the evidence and transparency to be able to do something on grocery prices so people can live dignified lives?

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: Here are the pure, basic facts. Grocery prices have gone up 36% since 2021. That is an additional €3,000 on an average family grocery shop. It is an incredible increase and it is putting huge pressure on families. Some 71% of Irish families say they are very concerned about food prices and we have seen that four in ten parents skip meals so their children can eat. That is a national statistic - four in ten parents. This is a major problem.

I will give another fact as well. It is a clear and unfortunate fact that the Government simply does not care. The facts are there and, despite those facts and the pressures being put on people, it is refusing to do even the basics to try to stop it. The Social Democrats have put forward simple asks today. They will not cost the Government any money. We are just asking it to regulate the big profit makers a little more. That is all. We want transparency in profits. We need to know who is making these profits and on whose backs they are making them.

There are five supermarket giants in Ireland. We are not talking about small corner shops or other small retailers. We are talking about the large supermarket giants, namely, Dunnes Stores, Tesco, Aldi, Lidl and SuperValu. The grocery sector in Ireland is worth €15 billion. It is an incredibly profitable industry yet this Government refuses even to ask those supermarkets to comply with the basics by publishing their profits. Do not tell me that it is a huge administrative process for them to come up with their profits because I bet they are boasting about those profits to their shareholders every single quarter. They have that information. It is not going to take any more from them to publish it. The Government is simply refusing even to ask that of them. The Minister of State should not tell me that the Government understands, is listening, hears people's concerns and is doing everything possible. It clearly is not. We are not asking the Government to move heaven and earth to do this. We are looking for transparency and information on the supermarkets' profits.

This has been an ongoing issue for many years. All the families watching today know that because they feel those pressures in their pockets. They know what they have to sacrifice from their family budgets to put food on the table for their children. They know the difficulties it is causing for them. In 2023, the Government stated it would deal with the issue. The Minister of State at the time, Deputy Richmond, talked very tough. He brought in representatives of the supermarkets and told them to make changes. He said: “We can get prices down, particularly on the staple necessary goods. The private sector has to step up to the plate on this.” That has not happened. The supermarkets are clearly ignoring the Government. We do not need the private sector to voluntarily step up to the plate. It is not going to do that. The supermarkets are making enormous profits. Why would they do anything that the Government is not asking them to do? We need the Government to step up to the plate. We need it to put in place the actions that will ensure the data is available and there is transparency so we know who is making a profit and we know exactly why prices are going up for so many families across the country. It is time for the Government to do that. Rather than coming into the Chamber and talking nicely about understanding and feeling everybody’s pain, it should just do something. We are asking for simple actions and want to see movement on it.

Amendment to amendment put.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach Deputy Micheál Carrigy: In accordance with Standing Order 85(2), the division is postponed until the weekly division time this evening.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 11.53 a.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 12.01 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 11.53 a.m. and resumed at 12.01 p.m.

Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders’ Questions

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: There is an immediate need for the Government to intervene to end the delay in evacuating very sick and injured children from Gaza to Ireland for urgent medical treatment. Last year, as the Taoiseach knows, the Government agreed to evacuate 30 of these children. There were two successful evacuations of 12 children in December and May. However, the vital evacuation of the remaining 18 children has been stopped due to bureaucratic wrangling within Government Departments over visas. At least eight children were identified by the World Health Organization and the HSE for urgent medical evacuation in early June. A month on, they are still waiting. Their medical assessments are complete, the doctors are ready, the hospitals are ready to receive and treat these children, but the Government is stalling.

Time is of the essence here. It is a matter of life and death for these children. They survived a genocide being carried out before the eyes of the world. I have corresponded with both the Tánaiste and the Minister for Health to advocate for their immediate evacuation. The Minister, Deputy Carroll MacNeill, tells me she is bringing a memo to Cabinet to seek Government approval for what she calls a more humanitarian approach to the evacuations and that she fully expects, in her words, to welcome the next group of children in the autumn. That is months away. That is an eternity away. The only humanitarian approach is to get these children out now. It is important the Government memo does not solely identify Egypt as the evacuation

route for these children. The Rafah crossing is closed and there is no direct route from Gaza to Cairo. Countries such as Jordan must be included. As the Taoiseach knows, Jordan is already facilitating evacuations and has offered to help.

Every week, every day and every hour their evacuation out of Gaza is delayed puts these children's lives at increased risk. There is every chance that these children will be killed as they wait, while Government Departments push paper around, tick boxes and argue among themselves. That threat and likelihood is very real, very present and very immediate for these children. We know that children from an earlier group previously identified for medical evacuation from Gaza to Ireland have died while waiting to come here in the horror of Israel's genocide. Doctors in Ireland who are standing by to treat these children and are ready to save their lives are very worried for them. Dr. Morgan McMonagle, a trauma surgeon who has worked on humanitarian missions in Gaza, puts the reality for these children in very stark terms. He said that by autumn, there is a very good chance that Gaza simply will not exist at the rate things are going.

It is unacceptable that the Government puts bureaucratic wrangling over the lives of very sick, injured children. Tá mé ag fiafraí den Taoiseach a ladar a chur sa scéal agus a chinntiú go mbeidh na leanaí seo, atá tinn agus gortaithe, slánaithe ar an bpointe boise ó Gaza go hÉirinn don chúram leighis atá de dhíth orthu. The Government's proposed timeframe of autumn will be too late for some, or perhaps even all, of these children. This is a matter of life and death. They have been waiting since early June. It is vital that the Taoiseach, as Head of Government, intervene and expedite their arrival in Ireland with no further delay. I ask him to do this with urgency.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this important issue. One of the appalling features of the war on Gaza has been the indiscriminate slaughter of innocent children. The serial killing of children as a result of indiscriminate bombing, attacks and shootings has shocked the world. The scale of injuries suffered by so many children is truly appalling.

As a country, we have a strong tradition of providing humanitarian assistance. In September last year, following an appeal from the World Health Organization, the Government approved our participation in an initiative to evacuate a number of sick children from Gaza for treatment and care in Ireland. Four flights were agreed. Two have been successfully carried out. Approximately 12 children in total have arrived safely so far to receive medical treatment facilitated through those two evacuations, one in December last year and another in May this year. The children were accompanied by 12 mother-carers and 21 accompanying family members, so approximately 45 people, between adults and children, were facilitated. Ensuring the appropriate supports are in place to facilitate paediatric patients and their families is obviously key to the success of the overall operation. Planning is ongoing for the next medical evacuation operation.

There is no delay. Nothing has been stopped. There is no bureaucratic wrangling. This is not subject to any Government memo. A Government memo will emerge that will, in many respects, adopt an even more generous response in terms of the number of family members, or siblings of an injured child, who can come. The presentation of a memo is not material to the next flight. It will regularise what has been happening already. The original Government decision allowed for one child and one person but, in practice, we have actually been doing much more than that. The amendment in the next memo the Minister will bring will regularise all that. It is as simple as that. It is not stopping anything. No one is saying the next flight cannot happen. There are obviously huge logistical issues in getting children out of Gaza. The WHO,

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medevac and others are working with us in co-ordinating that. There have been no delays in the processing of Irish-entry visas in this regard. No current applications under this scheme are awaiting processing. The Minister is here and can confirm all of that.

I would respectfully say that before making allegations and assertions, we should get the facts right. As far as I am concerned, we will do everything we can to honour and fulfil what we have committed to, and do what we can to help children who desperately need treatment, care and wider supports because of the extraordinary trauma that has been visited on so many of them as a result of a horrific war that has no moral justification whatsoever any more in its assault on children. We want all the hostages released and an end to the war in Gaza. As a country, we will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to Gaza, the West Bank and the various agencies that support Palestinians in Jordan and Lebanon. We work with Jordan on a continuing basis wherever the children are. There is no issue for us in terms of the particular border crossing, the mechanism or the route out of Gaza. That is not an issue for us at all.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: No child is safe in Gaza. The Israeli genocide has mercilessly slaughtered children with abandon and the international community has watched on. The commitment made by this State and Government is a very modest one to take 30 children. They should be evacuated with all due haste. According to the medics who will treat these children, not alone have eight children been identified by the World Health Organization and the HSE as needing urgent care, but the assessments are complete, the doctors are ready and the hospitals are ready. If as the Taoiseach says, there is no bureaucratic wrangling and no blockage, why are they not here? That is my question. My challenge to the Taoiseach is that he must quickly ensure that the evacuations of the remaining children - eight of whom are ready to travel with full medical assessments complete, along with a further ten - happen without any further delay.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: By the way, I have been in contact with the Tánaiste and he informed me that there was in fact a necessity-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Time is up.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: -----for a memo to Cabinet. I do not know what the communications are like within government; I am not really interested in that. I am interested in the children-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy's time is up.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: -----and the need to evacuate them now for the treatment they need.

The Taoiseach: Is oth liom a rá nach bhfuil an Teachta McDonald cruinn leis an eolas atá aici agus leis an méid a dúirt sí ar maidin faoin gceist seo. Táim dearfach go mbeidh an Rialtas ag déanamh gach aon iarracht na leanaí seo a thabhairt isteach chomh tapa agus is féidir linn. Tá-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Anois.

The Taoiseach: ----- roinnt déanta againn ach tá níos mó le déanamh againn.

In respect of the Deputy's case, she has moved on now because the earlier assertions were

wrong.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: They are not wrong.

An Ceann Comhairle: Sorry, Deputy, allow the answer.

The Taoiseach: They were fundamentally wrong. While there is no issue with raising questions and so on, the absolute motivation on the Deputy's side all the time seems to be to seek to sow doubt over the bona fides of-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: This is not about me; it is about the children in Gaza.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, Deputy McDonald-----

The Taoiseach: -----Government on a fundamental humanitarian question. That is not acceptable. From the very beginning of this war we did everything to get Irish citizens out of Gaza. Our embassies and our diplomats did everything possible to do it. Why does the Deputy think we would try to delay children coming out of Gaza? How dare you make that assertion.

(Interruptions).

The Taoiseach: That is not on my agenda and it is not on the Government's agenda. A Government memo is immaterial. We discussed this on Monday evening - the Tánaiste, the Taoiseach with the Minister for justice. There is no delay in this respect.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: I begin by welcoming an important young visitor Minnie McDermott to the Visitors Gallery.

I again welcome yesterday's announcement about the establishment of a commission of investigation into sexual abuse in schools. I pay tribute, as I know we all do, to the Ryan brothers, David and the late Mark, for their bravery in stepping forward and speaking out about their experiences of abuse. We owe an immense debt to them and to all those survivors who have spoken out and shone a light into the dark and shameful past of abuse in schools. Their courage provided the impetus for Mary O'Toole's scoping inquiry which has now led to this commission.

However, we must learn lessons from past investigations and inquiries, some of which we know failed to deliver truth, justice, accountability and indeed healing for victims and survivors. As a barrister, I represented survivors of abuse in court and before the Residential Institutions Redress Board in the past. There I witnessed the deeply traumatic impact that flawed procedures can have for survivors in bringing complaints of childhood abuse. Many survivors described to me their experience of being retraumatised by flawed and unduly complex and cumbersome processes, for example, before the redress board in the 1990s.

More recently we know the terms of reference of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes excluded a great many people who had suffered immensely. In addition, when the work of the commission was completed, its findings found their way to survivors through a leak to the press, which was unacceptable. Even now it is really unfortunate that victims have been left waiting years for appropriate redress. We must ensure this new and welcome commission avoids the mistakes of the past.

I welcome that the Taoiseach has spoken of an inclusive and survivor-led approach, which

is vital. However, we also need to ensure that religious orders that were complicit in the sexual abuse of children should be required to provide appropriate redress to survivors. One survivor Louise O’Keeffe told “Morning Ireland” today that the framework is there. We must also ensure access to redress for survivors on a timely basis. I raised this with the Taoiseach during the Taoiseach’s Questions session yesterday. I raised the question of a parallel redress process. I think he might have misunderstood me because in his reply he said it would not be possible to set up a redress scheme in advance of an inquiry; I accept that. However, we asked that a redress scheme might run in parallel with the commission. We are conscious the commission will run for at least five years and we do not believe survivors should be forced to wait a further five years for the outcome of the process.

Returning to the question of redress, survivors need assurance that organisations, religious bodies, religious orders and the church that were accountable and responsible for abuse should be made to pay. Church and State and also religious orders played a shameful role as we know. In particular within religious orders, clerics were allowed in some cases to perpetrate appalling crimes against children with impunity. We need to go further than condemnation; we need to remove legal obstacles to pursuing religious orders. Labour produced a Bill to do that. Will the Government accept that Bill and move forward? Will the Taoiseach ensure redress is available to survivors within five years?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising what is a very serious issue. I agree with her about the work of the Ryan brothers, in particular, as a catalyst for the decision by the Minister, Deputy Norma Foley, to set up the scoping inquiry which led to the Minister, Deputy Helen McEntee, yesterday bringing to Government proposals for the establishment of a commission of investigation into the handling of historical child sexual abuse in schools. Yesterday the Government agreed to the appointment of Mr. Justice Michael McGrath, a judge at the Court of Appeal, as chair of the commission. The principal recommendation of the scoping inquiry was to establish such a commission. There will be a period of consultation prior to formal commencement. When the commission is ready to hear from those who wish to contribute to its work, it will be widely advertised.

We have also accepted further recommendations of the scoping inquiry with regard to the remit of the commission, child protection issues, the legal system and memorialisation. It is clear from the scoping inquiry that many survivors view financial redress as an important measure of accountability for those who ran schools where sexual abuse happened. The Government is pursuing a very detailed examination to ensure that those responsible, including religious orders, are held accountable and make redress. The Office of the Attorney General with the Department of education and other relevant bodies is examining legal options that may be available to the State. We are examining changes to the Statute of Limitations on civil claims and changes to the status of unincorporated associations, as well as looking at the assets that religious orders have. An examination of how to ensure compensation from religious orders will run in parallel with the commission of investigation. It is complex work, will require detailed consideration and may take some time to complete. We will be open to engaging with the Deputy on any constructive proposals she has on this.

Back in the late 1990s we amended the Statute of Limitations but it is acknowledged that more is needed. Some of the survivors’ accounts in the scoping inquiry were quite horrific. Many of them were very clear that they want those who were responsible to be accountable and to contribute - more than contribute.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: We all want to see those accountable to be made to contribute. I welcome that the Government is exploring and examining legal options. However, this is not a new phenomenon; we have known about this issue for years. The Labour Party produced a Bill to ensure that we can pursue religious orders and unincorporated associations. I have sent the Taoiseach a copy I will send him another copy. We need this urgently. As we know, for years religious orders have been carrying out a perfectly legal practice of transferring their assets and their properties to associated lay-run trusts. I have described this as the developer's wife syndrome. In some cases it puts assets out of the reach of State authorities and it is not acceptable. As of September 2024, religious orders have paid just 16% of institutional redress costs that were owed but we know the money is there. Religious orders involved in historic abuse have sold more than 75 properties worth a total of over €90 million since 2016. We know these orders and their associated trusts own vast quantities of property and assets around the State. We are simply asking, as are survivors, that they be made to pay the redress they so clearly owe to survivors who were denied justice for so long.

The Taoiseach: That is the Government's intention, commitment and determination to do. The specific issues the Deputy has raised are being examined in considerable detail with a view to enabling Government to have the powers, ultimately, to deal with those particular mechanisms that have been used. We want to make sure that the financial capacity is retained in the country and made available to provide compensation.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: What is the Government at when it comes to personal injury awards? For weeks now we have been hearing about a memo that the Minister for justice is bringing to Cabinet. It concerns a review of awards by the Judicial Council which recommended a 17% increase. Initially it was reported that the Minister was going to rubberstamp that increase. This memo was due to go to Cabinet last week. Then it was reported that it was going to go to Cabinet yesterday. Now we hear that it might be next week after it first goes to a Cabinet subcommittee today. Can the Taoiseach tell us what is going on?

I should not need to tell the Taoiseach that a 17% increase in awards would be absolutely disastrous and the fact that the Government is even considering this is reckless. Personal injury awards in Ireland are already much higher than in other countries. Awards here can be more than four times higher than in the UK and still we are hearing that the Government is contemplating jacking them up even further by increasing awards by nearly one fifth. This will have an immediate knock-on effect on insurance premiums, not just for every household but for community groups, sports clubs and small businesses too.

Prices are soaring across the country. Grocery prices, rents, energy and transport costs are all sky rocketing and this is putting a huge strain on households. Wherever possible the Government should be doing everything it can to reduce costs, not further inflate them. A 17% increase in personal injury awards would do just that. It would drive insurance costs even higher at a time when so many people are struggling to get by.

Insurance costs in Ireland are already far too high and are often the reason community events end up getting cancelled. Sports clubs run by volunteers are under huge stress trying to meet constantly rising costs. Costs are an extra burden on households. Motor insurance premiums are now shooting up month after month. Increasing personal injury awards will add further fuel to this inflationary fire. Why is the Government even considering increasing them? Its sole focus should be on getting insurance costs down. Government dithering on this issue is causing huge concern. There are now fears it is delaying a decision until the Dail goes into recess, to

try to avoid Dáil scrutiny and questioning on it. Can the Taoiseach level with us and give us a straight answer? Is the Government going to increase personal injury awards by 17%? Will the Taoiseach give a commitment that the Government will not go ahead with this increase?

The Taoiseach: It is intriguing how the Deputy presents the case. In one sentence he says that the Government is going to jack up insurance awards and in another sentence he says that we are dithering. He is apparently urging us to bring clarity but I do not think he is urging us to bring clarity. I think he is urging us to fulfil maybe entirely the implications of the Act so that he can then start attacking the Government for political reasons. The reality is that the Oireachtas has created this situation. The Oireachtas provided the Judicial Council with the powers to propose amendments to the personal injuries guidelines in 2019. Those provisions were introduced by the then Minister for Justice, Charlie Flanagan, and were supported by all parties at the time, including Sinn Féin, the Deputy's party and the Labour Party. It had a torturous progression and then, as the Deputy may recall, the Supreme Court became involved through the *Delaney v. The Personal Injuries Board and Ors* case. The court essentially said, in the context of the separation of powers, that it had to come back to the Oireachtas. If the guidelines recommended by the Judicial Council were to have effect, they would have to be affirmatively passed by the Dáil.

Again, for the interests of the public watching in, this is not something that the Government is bringing to the Dáil to jack up prices. It is unusual to frame it that way, to say it lightly, because the Supreme Court took a decision. It was a four to three majority ruling, which was tight, by the Supreme Court. I observe the separation of powers absolutely and believe in it.

Let us have a bit of realism and clarity about the debate. For me, there is a need for a review of the Judicial Council Act 2019 and the Minister for justice has committed to reviewing that Act. The Minister will also bring a memo to Government which will lay the guidelines before the Houses but he will not be bringing a resolution seeking their approval. The Deputy should not believe everything he reads in the newspapers.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: The Taoiseach has clarified that there will not be an increase of 17%. He is giving that commitment to the Dáil now that the Government will not be putting forward an increase of 17%. I welcome that if that is the case. Awards here are four times higher than in the UK, so it would be a regressive move. If the Government is not doing that, that is welcome. The Taoiseach gave a history lesson on the legislation relating to this but the Judicial Council committee itself said that it could not carry out any meaningful analysis on the quantum of awards given under the guidelines to date that might inform this review. The committee itself was saying that it did not sufficient data to be able to make an informed, good decision. I welcome the Taoiseach's confirmation that he is giving a commitment that there will be no increase brought to the Oireachtas by the Government on insurance awards. The Taoiseach is giving that commitment.

The Taoiseach: I have just said it to the Deputy. It will be laid before the House but there will be no accompanying motion to the House to approve. However, this is something that the Oireachtas in its entirety has to reflect on. There will be implications in that decision for the Personal Injuries Assessment Board because essentially now we have a vacuum here in terms of personal injury awards. There is a legislative framework there which had to be amended because of a Supreme Court decision. This has led to a situation where the Dáil has to approve whatever the Judicial Council recommendations are if they are to take effect. If the Dáil does not do the approval, they do not take effect but that could lead to consequences within the courts

and within cases. It could ultimately have the impact of undermining the Personal Injuries Assessment Board. We need to reflect on this.

I get the short-term politics. The Deputy would probably have loved it if we came in and had an approval motion. Then he would have, from the comfort of Opposition, attacked us day in, day out for, as he put it, jacking up insurance premiums.

Deputy Ged Nash: Do not be so cynical.

The Taoiseach: That was the agenda. I know it.

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

The Taoiseach: We need, as an Oireachtas, to deal with this more soberly.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Where one lives in Ireland is a significant determinant of whether one will survive cancer or die from it. In Ireland today counties and postcodes should have Government health warnings. When a cancer diagnosis happens in a family, a dark cloud descends. While there obviously is hope in terms of treatment, there is no doubt that for serious cancers, every moment of the day is consumed with whether or not one is going to make it. Today the Irish Cancer Society released damning information which shows significant variations with regard to access to cancer diagnostics and treatments. Life-saving chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatments are being denied to patients because of where they live.

On Monday I met with doctors in Letterkenny and they told me that just 12% of cancer patients in that hospital receive treatment within the recommended 15 working day timeframe. Patients are waiting seven to eight weeks for treatment in Galway at the moment. The National Cancer Control Programme has written to Aontú to say the HSE is failing to meet its own radiation treatment targets. In the year to August 2024, treatment targets were met only once in Galway and only once in Cork. Cancer services in the north west are being shut down and cancer services in Galway, Waterford and Limerick do not have the necessary PET scanners. We have antique radiotherapy equipment breaking down. Treatment is regularly being cancelled because certain scanners are breaking down over and over again.

I have had cancer. I know what it is like to have cancer growing inside you. I know the stress it creates. I know the first thing you want to do is to get it cut out and to get chemo to zap it if you can. I also know that delayed treatments mean radically worse outcomes for people. Delayed treatments mean cancer can spread throughout your body. People are dying in this country for the want of treatment. The Irish Cancer Society has said that the Government has met only one of the six targets it set itself.

Aontú has also discovered that there is a 12% differential in breast cancer survival rates in public and private hospitals in this country. A woman who is diagnosed with breast cancer in a designated centre has an 85% chance of survival. If she is diagnosed in another public hospital, she has an 81% chance of surviving but if she is diagnosed in a private hospital, she has a 93% chance of survival. If you diagnosed with breast cancer in Sweden, you are 7% more likely to survive than if you had been diagnosed in this State. If you are diagnosed with breast cancer in England, you are 5% more likely to survive than in this country. It is an incredible situation. When is the system going to stop dividing patients by postcode and income? When is the HSE going to deliver cancer treatments on an equal basis throughout the country?

The Taoiseach: Balance and perspective are required in discussing this issue, which is very serious. The Government is very committed to continuing investment in cancer care. It has invested very hugely in cancer care in recent years. It invested up to €645 million between 2021 and 2024 alone. New treatments such as CAR T-cell therapy, radio-labelled therapy and specialised radiotherapy are now available in Ireland for the first time. We now have top-class radiation and oncology equipment that we did not have five, six, seven or eight years ago. Let us not brand the entire cancer treatment system as antique. That is not fair.

Cancer survival rates are improving. More people are living after cancer than ever before. Today more than 220,000 people in Ireland who are living with cancer or after cancer. I appreciate the Deputy's own personal experiences and how he has properly articulated them to highlight issues because cancer diagnoses put enormous pressure on individuals and families. However, that 220,000 is 50% higher than the equivalent figure a decade ago. That is a huge transformation. Survival rates have increased progressively over recent years because of the development of national cancer strategies, which have improved screening services. Over the past two decades, our screening has expanded enormously. I refer particularly to BreastCheck, cervical screening and bowel screening. We have hugely increased staffing and there is greater access to diagnostics and survivorship programmes.

The funding will continue. I will not go through all the figures in terms of those who have been recruited. On capital funding, approximately €140 million has been used over the past eight years. We now have state-of-the-art radio-oncology facilities in Galway and Cork. They are not antique but state of the art. We have a new national cervical screening laboratories and various cancer infrastructure, including chemotherapy wards and lab facilities, across the country. That will continue this year with the oncology units at Cavan General Hospital, Tallaght, Kerry University Hospital and the Midland Regional Hospital in Tullamore. There is further chemotherapy infrastructure in Kerry, Cork University Hospital, Letterkenny University Hospital and so on. We will continue to invest.

On the county-by-county breakdown, one of the better developments of the past two decades was the development of proper cancer centres in the major tertiary hospitals, where the bulk of treatment should occur. I am again concerned about the proliferation of treatment in private hospitals-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: -----because all the experts told us that centres of excellence were the way to go. I would appreciate greater clarity from the Deputy in respect of his assertion that 93% of patients attending private hospitals had a better outcome as against those attending public hospitals-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Tóibín.

The Taoiseach: ----because the view was - and we have done this at St. James's Hospital, the Mater and Cork University Hospital-----

An Ceann Comhairle: You are 30 seconds over, Taoiseach. You can come back in.

The Taoiseach: We have put centres of excellence there. That is where people should go.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: We do not have centres of excellence in many places; we have

centres of waiting lists. Today, the Irish Cancer Society said that we have centres of bare adequacy. Those are the words it used. The Taoiseach mentioned extra resources but these do not keep up with inflation, with population increases or with the ageing population of the country and, in many areas of the HSE, they are not getting to the front line. They are getting caught up. We also do not have the necessary staff. We in Aontú found out that 13,000 nurses have left this country in the past five years. That is an incredible figure. In some years, the majority of graduating doctors leave the country. Thankfully, cancer survival rates are increasing but that is in large part because there are better medicines, better technology and improved treatments and not necessarily because of the extra services the Government is providing throughout the country. Will the Taoiseach deal with the facts? The facts are stark. The Irish Cancer Society said today that there is a geographic determinant in relation to whether people get the treatment they need on time. Waiting lists in certain counties are five or six times the targets.

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

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: People are dying as a result of that geographic difference.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, your time is up.

The Taoiseach: We have more work to do. That is acknowledged. In his commentary, the Deputy has acknowledged that there have been improvements but he gives no credence to the fact that there has been very significant investment in cancer services. The number of staff in our health service has expanded dramatically.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: So has the number of patients.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy has just created an image of thousands fleeing the country.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Some 13,000 nurses have left.

The Taoiseach: He should concentrate on the increases in numbers in the health service. He cannot and should not ignore that because to do so reduces his credibility. He is making good points on one level but he is also using language like “antique” and suggesting that everyone is feeling the hospitals when there are increases in the number of staff year after year. We have invested hugely in increasing the number of people. Close to 30,000 extra people have been employed in our health services over the past four or five years. That is additional people coming in.

With regard to the west, we had issues in Galway, where infrastructure and further investment are required. There is no question about that.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: What about Letterkenny?

The Taoiseach: On Letterkenny, we did work on Altnagelvin, which helps people in the north west both in cardiology and cancer care, which we invested in.

Ceisteanna ó na Comhaltaí Eile - Other Members' Questions

Deputy David Maxwell: I ask the Taoiseach about this week's announcement on the nitrates derogation for Irish farmers. Ireland's nitrates derogation is extremely important to the sector. Farmers have shown a willingness and a commitment to improve water quality. The nitrates directive introduced a set of measures for farmers to minimise the loss of nutrients to water from farming. For example, it sets rules on the storage of manure, it identifies periods when slurry must not be spread on land and it places limits on the application of chemical fertiliser. Farmers have embraced these measures. A core element is the limit on the application of organic manure to land, which, in effect, sets a legal limit on the number of livestock the land can carry. The nitrates derogation provides for a higher limit based on scientific criteria such as high rainfall and crops that take up more nitrogen such as grass. It is subject to the farmer implementing additional actions. This is what makes Ireland's grass-based agriculture unique among other European agricultural systems.

The confirmation by the European Commission that we must achieve compliance with the habitats directive to secure a derogation is a significant change. It is vital that we secure an extension of the derogation and that the best possible case is made to the European Commission. We must therefore address this challenge. Does the Taoiseach believe that appropriate assessment at the catchment and sub-catchment scale is the optimal approach to dealing with nitrates derogation compliance? We need an approach that is reasonable, manageable and robust to help farmers retain the derogation. Since 2022, farmers have embraced significant regulatory changes under the current Nitrates Action Programme. There is now unprecedented engagement across the entire agrifood sector towards the objective of reducing agriculture's impact on water quality. Farmers are investing in slurry storage and low-emission slurry spreading through the State-backed TAMS. They are joining voluntary programmes like the ASSAP and Farming for Water and are improving biodiversity on farms through ACRES. Data published earlier this month by the EPA confirmed a 10% reduction in nitrates concentration in rivers in most regions this year. The EPA data gives cause for optimism that the measures are starting to deliver results. It is clear to be seen that the farming community has stepped up to the plate in being progressive. With the ending of the derogation at the end of the year, it is alarming that farmers around the country who have up to this point done everything asked of them could end up being penalised even though they are not the problem.

As it is part of our programme for Government, I ask that the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and the Minister, Deputy Heydon, do everything possible to secure the best deal for farming going forward and that we have a framework going into 2026 that gives farmers direction and certainty for their future.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this important question because the nitrates derogation is of course a critical element in the economic sustainability of many family farms and the broader rural economy in Ireland. I acknowledge the huge efforts being made by farmers in terms of the water quality issue and compliance. Water quality remains the fundamental issue as does the Habitats Directive. However, the Government has said it will do everything in its power to make the case at EU level to secure the retention of the nitrates derogation given our unique grass-based production model.

There is an unprecedented engagement across the entire agrifood industry to drive improvements in water quality. I have established a Cabinet subcommittee on water quality to co-

ordinate these efforts, with the most recent meeting last month. I have also raised this issue and the issue of derogation with the Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen. The Minister, Deputy Heydon, has raised the derogation with the European Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy, Jessika Roswall. The Minister has invited her to Ireland to witness first hand our grass-based system and the importance of our derogation. We are currently engaging with the Commission on the process and have made two presentations to the nitrates committee, the important advisory committee made up of member states. We will continue to engage with that committee and with Commission officials.

The Minister for agriculture and the Minister for housing brought a memo to Government last week, highlighting progress on the development of the next Nitrates Action Programme and engagement with the Commission to agree a pathway to secure a continuation of our nitrates derogation. The Commission recently wrote to Ireland regarding the need for compliance with the Habitats Directive, in addition to meeting the objectives set under the water framework directive. This change has significant implications. The Commission's request of course arises from the ongoing case by An Taisce challenging the validity of our action programme and derogation which is currently before the courts with a number of questions referred to the European Court of Justice. There is other jurisprudence with the Dutch case and the implications of that. Based on that and the advice from the Attorney General there is a clear need for the State to develop a process to ensure the next action programme and derogation are compliant with those requirements.

The Minister, Deputy Heydon, is engaging intensively with stakeholders, including farm organisations and industry, as part of the process of developing Ireland's case for continuance of the derogation post-2025. The Department of agriculture has also provided an update to the agricultural water quality working group this week and we are looking at the optimal way to proceed from a catchment perspective. We will do everything we possibly can to secure the future of farmers in this respect.

Deputy David Maxwell: I thank the Taoiseach for his reply. As I said, the programme for Government states that the Government will do everything in its power to make the case at EU level to secure the retention of the nitrates derogation, given our unique grass-based production model, and will work with farmers, industry, State agencies and local authorities to develop evidence-based solutions to assist farmers in improving the water quality. Maintaining the derogation is critical for the 7,000 farmers who avail of it, and for the broader rural economy. Approximately 60% of the milk produced in Ireland comes from farms in derogation. Irish farmers have done so much in water quality emission reduction and compliance. It is vital farmers have certainty as soon as possible. We must avoid the cliff edge at the end of this year when the derogation is due to end. The latest developments in the renewal process will be concerning for farmers. They need certainty to invest in their farms and to encourage future generations into the sector. I know the Minister, Deputy Heydon, has been engaging intensively with the stakeholders in these latest developments and I ask that every effort possible is made by everyone across Government to support this work to ensure the best outcome for Irish agriculture. FDI from foreign companies is welcome, but farming has been the backbone of the rural economy for generations and we need to keep it there.

The Taoiseach: I appreciate that farming and the food industry have been extremely important to the national economy, but of course it is particularly important to regional economies and to communities across the length and breadth of the country in terms of purchasing power and the impact on other sectors, the supply chain and so forth. It is a significant industry in Ire-

land, and farmers are taking unprecedented actions to improve water quality. We are providing financial support to farmers in this regard. We have the Farming for Water European Innovation Partnership. That is a budget of €60 million, led by the local authorities water programme in partnership with Teagasc and Dairy Industry Ireland. That is providing financial support for specific targeted actions to improve water quality. Approximately 3,600 farmers have applied for support under the Farming for Water EIP. It aims to support up to 15,000 farmers over five years to 2029. Of course, there are also 54,000 farmers participating in ACRES. We will do everything we possibly can. We are working collectively on it as a Government and using all avenues at our disposal to get the right result.

An Ceann Comhairle: Before we move to questions on policy or legislation, I welcome Tom and Catherine Lyons and their family, Vicky, Alex, Daniel and Lily, to the Dáil. They are all from Ardagh in County Limerick.

We will move on to questions on policy or legislation. I remind Deputies that each question and answer is one minute in duration.

Ceisteanna ar Pholasáí nó ar Reachtaíocht - Questions on Policy or Legislation

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: What will students and their families be asked to pay for college in September? Will it be €2,000 or €3,000? The Minister for higher education last night claimed that he believes in giving straight answers to a straight question, and then delivered a ten-minute speech in which he gaslit students and failed to answer that question at all. We have now had ten days of Government Ministers, including the Taoiseach, refusing to give a straight answer to that simple question. It is the question that was on the lips of students as they protested in big numbers at the gates of the Dáil last night. Will their fees be €2,000 or €3,000? Ten days on, will the Taoiseach now answer that question?

The Taoiseach: I gave a comprehensive reply to the Deputy yesterday at Leaders' Questions. The simple matter is that we are in the same position this year as last year. There is an Estimates process under way and then there will be a budget. It is at that stage that clarity will be brought to a range of issues pertaining to supports for students-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: That is in October.

The Taoiseach: -----highlighting in particular that I would like to see additional supports for students with disabilities and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and through SUSI and thresholds to help a broad range of students.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: We know St. John Ambulance has paid money in settlements to a survivor who alleges sexual abuse in childhood by a former senior figure in St. John Ambulance. We are aware of further civil cases, and that some have been referred to An Garda. In 2023, the Shannon review confirmed systemic failures in St. John Ambulance from the sixties to the nineties. I note a recent statement from the Minister, Deputy Foley, confirming her Department provided funding for a 12-month period to ensure that all of Dr. Shannon's recommendations, including safeguarding, would be implemented in full. She also confirmed she had no plans to establish a statutory inquiry. That is regrettable. Survivors need transparency, a plan for the

implementation of all the recommendations from the Shannon review, and they say they are exhausted by delays and the tone of engagement they have received to date. What is the Taoiseach's view on this, and does he join us in supporting survivors' calls for a full public inquiry?

The Taoiseach: First, it is critical that the recommendations of Dr. Shannon be implemented and that our focus is on that. There have been many calls for inquiries in many areas. The Government yesterday took a very significant decision on the establishment of a commission that will have an enormous body-----

Deputy Ivana Bacik: Which we welcomed.

The Taoiseach: I know but I am just making the point. I have made the point previously about the most effective way to investigate or have inquiries into matters of this kind, given the enormity of what had to be covered in the decision yesterday. I had no issue with that, obviously, but I have broader concerns about the commission of investigation methodology and model as a basis for dealing with issues of this kind.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: I return to this State's commitment to evacuate seriously ill children from Gaza because we all want to know what is going on. It is nearly a year since the Government promised to evacuate 30 sick children from Gaza and since then, just 12 children have been evacuated. We now hear that petty bureaucratic concerns about visas are delaying the evacuation of other children. The Taoiseach has been clear today that visas are not the problem. What is the problem? What is the delay? Why, if paperwork is not the issue, have the remaining 18 children not been evacuated? Eight children were approved for treatment in the past month but their travel has been blocked or delayed. What is going on? When will these children be evacuated and why is there a delay?

The Taoiseach: As the Deputy heard earlier, there are no delays in issuing of visas and there is no wrangling going on. There have been about 45 in total, adults and children. The original WHO agreement was one on one but we did not observe that in many respects because there are complex issues involving families, siblings left behind and the need for carers. Logistically, evacuating children from Gaza is very difficult and much of it is not within our control. We work with the WHO and others. Rest assured everything that can be done to get those children-----

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: When?

The Taoiseach: -----out of Gaza as quickly as possible will be done.

Deputy Charles Ward: I was horrified by the "Journal Investigates" report that stated just 12% of cancer patients in Letterkenny University Hospital receive treatment within the recommended 15-day timeframe. Cancer patients in Letterkenny have to wait 50% longer than those in any other hospital in the HSE West and North-West region. This is not just delay; this is life-altering. Research by the *British Medical Journal* has shown delays or reduced treatment options available to cancer patients cause avoidable death. Letterkenny is floundering. The hospital has been stripped of services over the years and risks being downgraded, particularly if a surgical hub is not established. We cannot allow this to happen. The people of Donegal deserve the same healthcare options as everyone else. I am sure the Taoiseach agrees where you live should not determine where you get treatment. What will he do to end health discrimination being experienced by people in Donegal?

The Taoiseach: The Minister met with clinicians in Letterkenny recently and there has been significant investment in Letterkenny hospital over the years. There can be challenges. There have been contributions from the Republic in investment in Altnagelvin. Looking at Donegal geographically, particularly Inishowen, the cross-Border services and capacity need to be strengthened to facilitate access. Under earlier cancer strategies, Galway was the main centre for the north west, which is a significant distance. We need to look strategically at concentrating cancer services, which I believe in. That was the prevailing expert view for a long time. I am slightly concerned that there is an erosion of that principle and people are going back to a county hospital approach to cancer treatment, which, in my view, will not give optimal outcomes. That is something we need to examine. The proliferation of private centres militates against the overarching objective of the State, which should be optimal outcomes and top-class centres of excellence with multidisciplinary teams providing treatment and care.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: What will the Government put in place after the recent bomb find in Limerick near Aughanish Alumina? This was near a Russian-owned business. Five bombs were found in Ireland - three in the South, two in the North. What will be done about looking at Russian-owned buildings and properties in this country to protect the Irish people in case somebody targets them, especially in Limerick, where this happened? People in Askeaton are frightened that something like this might happen again. What will the Government put in place to prevent this?

The Taoiseach: An Garda Síochána will be to the fore in examining this and the background to it. I cannot comment on the case. Perhaps it is still under investigation and, potentially, a follow-through on that. I will talk to the Deputy afterwards. I was not aware of the ownership there.

Deputy Ryan O'Meara: I raise the planning guidelines for anaerobic digesters, ADs, and the regulations of these plants. I acknowledge the need for AD plants to reach our emission reduction targets and improve water quality, particularly in light of the conversation we will have today on the nitrates derogation. However, given the ambition for AD plants to be built across the country under the national biomethane strategy, I am concerned about the preparedness of our local authorities to process such complex planning permission applications. We need statutory planning guidelines for AD plants so that there is consistency across all local authorities. Planning staff also need to be trained as a matter of priority for these complex applications. Clear guidelines are needed on setback distances from homes, the ability of road networks to take increased volumes of HGV traffic and mandatory community engagement to advise local communities of the plans for these plants. In particular, plants looking for capital funding from the State must communicate with their local areas. We also need to look at the powers of the EPA to regulate these plants. As the plants continue to grow in numbers, so must the regulator's powers.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this serious issue. I agree on the need for additional capacity in the planning sense within local authorities and generally within the planning system. I was in the House yesterday and a question about solar panels and agricultural land was raised. People also want guidelines to restrict onshore wind. We need a general debate on how we plan this because renewables are the most sustainable way forward into the future. I will examine with the Minister the issue of guidelines on anaerobic digestion but we have to be careful it is not with a view to restricting it entirely and tying it up so that it will not be possible. It is an important technology that can yield important results in terms of our energy requirements. There is a need for more renewables, without question, but I am concerned we

are increasingly facing obstacles to achieving that agenda.

Deputy Peter Roche: The issue I bring to the Taoiseach's attention relates to LEADER funding. I will throw the spotlight on how the allocations affect us in east Galway. Per head of population, Roscommon receives €97; Offaly, €76; Mayo, €64; Clare, €53; and poor east Galway, €37. I ask that consideration be given to rebalancing how LEADER funding is divvied out and that we get our proportionate share.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy. I will ask the Ministers to examine that. That seems very precise detail and I do not know what timeline governs it but I will certainly have it examined.

Deputy David Cullinane: I have raised with the Taoiseach dozens of times the need to fund the runway extension at Waterford Airport. Every time I raise it, he says he is supportive and that it is in the programme for Government but there is deep frustration in Waterford as we watch on and see funding given to Dublin, Cork, Shannon, Kerry and Donegal airports, while Waterford is left behind.

Last June I was told in a parliamentary question response by the Minister for Transport that all the information needed was with the Department and Minister. We now hear a new business case is being sought, which brings us back to square one and delays an announcement for years. I cannot overstate the disbelief and frustration in Waterford. What is going on and why is the Government not delivering on its promise to give Waterford a fighting chance to have commercial activity in Waterford Airport?

The Taoiseach: The Minister of State, Deputy Butler, met with the Minister yesterday on this topic.

Deputy Mary Butler: Last Wednesday.

The Taoiseach: Last Wednesday, sorry. Business cases are important and all projects have to go through the gateway process in terms of the Department of public expenditure. As the Deputy knows, on another day in here - his own party is fairly adept at it - expenditures that are just approved without going through those gateways-----

Deputy David Cullinane: It has been six years.

The Taoiseach: It is not 60 years.

Deputy David Cullinane: Six years.

The Taoiseach: If the project had not gone through those gateways, the Deputy would be the first to attack it in terms of expenditure.

Deputy David Cullinane: It was signed off on in 2019.

The Taoiseach: It is going through a process. Hopefully, we will get it to come out the other end.

Deputy David Cullinane: Six years later, here we are. It is not good enough.

Deputy Micheál Carrigy: The just transition fund has delivered more than €169 million into the midlands and is in place until 2027. However, a significant number of local projects

struggled to gain the matched funding to deliver those projects on time. I am looking for the Government to seek an extension on that just transition drawdown so these projects can be completed. I want the Government to look at introducing a just transition economic zone, similar to the Shannon free zone. We have seen the benefit that had for that whole mid-west region down in the south. We should consider creating a just transition zone in the midlands to encompass counties Longford, Westmeath, Laois and Offaly, centred on TUS in Athlone. It would drive further economic activity into the midland region into the future.

The Taoiseach: In November 2022, the European Commission adopted Ireland's territorial just transition plan and associated programme. That was launched in April 2023. There is a total commitment of €169 million to the just transition process in the midlands designated territory, as approved by the Commission. Of the total, €84.5 million is from the EU just transition fund out to 2027.

The Deputy's question relates to whether we could create a zone. I refer to the legislative framework under which such a zone would be created in the modern era, or the context. In terms of incentives or supports, they tend to national as opposed to zone by zone. I will discuss it with him further but we need to be very clear about what we are actually looking for. In many respects, the Shannon free zone was a feature of an earlier era and there have been many changes since then. I will talk to the Deputy about it.

Deputy Aisling Dempsey: Navan had the highest driving test waiting time nationwide. Navan and Tallaght were completely oversubscribed, with a record high of 43 weeks. It was four times the recommended wait time of ten to 12 weeks. Thankfully, we have reduced that to 16 weeks. That is in no small part thanks to the emergency action plan the RSA introduced in May of this year. I have no doubt we will get back to the ten to 12 weeks by mid-September, as the RSA has promised. That action plan now needs to just be the plan. We need to ensure that backlog does not happen again. We need to ensure the measures that are introduced stay in place and resources are maintained. With the needs of the population and the number of commuters who leave our county by car every morning, we need a second test centre to cater for the people of north Meath.

The Taoiseach: I thank Deputy Dempsey for raising this issue. It is unacceptable there are such high waiting times for those seeking driving tests. As she has acknowledged, the Road Safety Authority has developed an action plan. We are beginning to see a reduction, as she said. We have to continue to focus on that. The Minister of State, Deputy Canney, has been very much on top of this and he has been in discussions with me to make sure we maintain this downward trajectory. The Deputy's point is very valid. We need to focus on this as opposed to creating new layers or whatever. I agree with the Deputy's approach that all focus should be on the action plan itself.

Deputy Barry Heneghan: Mar is eol don Taoiseach, there are hugely critical recruitment and retention problems for public service workers, go háirithe i mBaile Átha Cliath, i gCorcaigh agus i nGaillimh. These workers include nurses, teachers, gardaí, social workers and paramedics. All of them our key in keeping our public systems functioning. The reality is they are being paid the same whether they are living in Longford or they are living in Lucan or Coolock. They cannot afford to live in the communities they are being asked to serve. In light of this, I ask the Taoiseach if there is any consideration for targeted reliefs, like the key worker scheme that was once used in London, to ensure essential workers can afford to live near their workplace. This is not about preferential treatment. It is about keeping hospitals staffed, classrooms open and

our streets safe.

The Taoiseach: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta. Bheadh sé deacair rátaí difriúla a chur i bhfeidhm ó chathair go cathair ach admhaím go bhfuil fadhb ann. There is a problem in terms of the cost of housing for workers and key workers. Through housing, I would like to see if we can create specific, affordable housing provision for key workers in given locations and whether that would it work side by side with the broader housing developments. I want to see if that could that happen and whether we could focus on that side of it.

In terms of pay rates and conditions, it is difficult to ring-fence one part of the country with different pay rates. There would be huge issues in the industrial relations process to bring something like that about.

Deputy Mark Wall: I want to raise the issue of childcare places, including after-school care, with the Taoiseach. I particularly want to raise the issues of childcare and after-school care in Kilcullen, a town of 4,000 people in my own constituency of Kildare South. I am currently dealing with 14 families who cannot get a crèche place and 16 families who cannot get an after-school place. Unfortunately for the town, there is a fit-for-purpose building lying idle. It is developed and ready to go. When will we see a State-led childcare and after-school service? Will the Minister, Deputy Foley, work with me in Kilcullen for those purposes?

The Taoiseach: Yesterday, I read the education indicators. Approximately 94% of all children between the ages of three and five are now in early years services, which is a huge increase from where we were a decade ago. It represents substantial progress. When we talk about State-led care, we have to be very clear as to how we intend to increase that provision and the methodology by which we would do it. A lot of people have invested a lot in the existing childcare infrastructure. We have to make sure we do not disrupt that in any processes as well.

On the specifics of the Deputy's case, which town did he mention?

Deputy Mark Wall: Kilcullen.

The Taoiseach: I will ask the Minister to examine that and see what we can do to help.

Deputy Catherine Callaghan: The programme for Government has many commendable commitments to support apprentices which, as a former apprentice myself, I welcome. Today, I wish to discuss the disparity in off-the-job training allowances that are currently being paid to metal fabrication apprentices. If two metal fabrication apprentices are doing the exact same training but one is working for a company that is registered as an engineering company, in phase 6 - the off-the-job phase - his or her training allowance is up to €235 per week less than his or her counterpart on the exact same course who is working for what is classified as a construction company. This disparity is because engineering company metal fabrication apprentices are being paid according to 2016 rates, whereas construction company apprentices are paid according to 2025 rates. Will the Taoiseach please work with me to rectify this inequitable situation?

The Taoiseach: I will talk to the Minister responsible in this area. I need to get the background to this before I commit. There are obviously reasons why that is the case right now. On the surface, it does not seem equitable but I will have it examined.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: I know the Taoiseach will be familiar with the huge work that is being done on reducing the waiting times for driver tests. However, I need to draw his

attention to the clumsy way AXA Insurance and the Road Safety Authority have combined to cause learner drivers to fail their test, resulting in them having to wait an extra 15-20 weeks. AXA has issued black insurance discs, not the green ones we are familiar with, and the RSA fails people presenting for a test with a black insurance disc, puts them back on the waiting list again for 15-20 weeks and charges them €80 for it. AXA offered to pay for the retests but it is a ridiculous situation. It is bad enough that young drivers had to wait so long to get the tests in the first instance but to be put back in the queue again through no fault of their own is not acceptable. There is a practical approach or solution: AXA could simply issue correct certificates to all affected drivers and, in the meantime, the RSA should not fail those drivers presenting for a test with the wrong disc but, rather, reschedule their tests for the following week. This is a real option. It would involve a bit of co-ordination between the RSA and AXA but it would make more sense than putting people back on a waiting list.

The Taoiseach: To be fair to the Deputy, he has been a tireless advocate on the issue of driver testing. He has unearthed many issues. What he has just articulated seems ridiculous and should not be the case. Those presenting for a test should not be penalised in the manner in question. I will ask the Minister of State, Deputy Seán Canney, to liaise with the Deputy and also engage with the RSA and AXA to have this issue resolved.

Deputy Seán Crowe: There is a little boy called Rowan in my constituency. He is eight years of age and has still not been able to have his first day at school. He has been diagnosed with ASD and global development delay and, like many others, he has been let down. His mother is struggling to home-school him, with no support from anyone.

Parents of autistic children in some cases apply to 20 or 30 schools for a place for them and get nowhere. How many additional places will be made available for special children like Rowan come September? I am referring not to premises but to actual chairs in classrooms. Will Rowan have to wait until he is nine to go to school? That is what the family faces at the moment.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising the case of Rowan. I understand he spoke to the Minister of State with responsibility for special needs education, Deputy Moynihan, last evening. He will follow it up as quickly as he can to see whether he can get a resolution to the issue, having regard to its background. We are going to change the application process to have earlier timelines and a common application system. Also, there is to be greater productivity on the part of the NCSE in finding places for children, as opposed to the parents having to do all the heavy work. We need more proactivity in this regard, and that work is under way.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: I want to ask a question that others have raised on the issue of Garda vetting. As we know, a teacher doing a summer project, such as mentoring in a GAA club, needs separate vetting. This is quite farcical and the process could be streamlined to be a lot quicker, but every time we raised it were told the Garda vetting review group was the group that was going to report on this. The former Minister for Justice, Deputy McEntee, said in April 2021 that it would take approximately six months. In March, the current Minister for justice said the report was due soon. Has the Taoiseach any information on when the Garda vetting review group will report and whether we will be able to discuss and debate this in September? It is a pressing issue for many.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this. There are some aspects of vetting that make no sense and what the Deputy raised is one of them. If you are vetted for teaching, for

example, and seek to train at a GAA, soccer or rugby club, that vetting should apply. We get huge complaints about backlogs and delays, which can get in the way of providing services. I have views on this and will talk to the Minister for justice about it.

Coroners (Amendment) Bill 2025: First Stage

Deputy Mark Ward: I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to amend the Act of 1962, to provide for a verdict of Iatrogenic Suicide and related matters.

Today Sinn Féin is introducing “Jake’s amendment” to amend the Coroners Act. This Bill will introduce the term “iatrogenic suicide” into the Act, allowing the coroner to return it as a verdict.

Iatrogenic suicide refers to the ending of one’s own life where the primary cause is the effect of medical treatment, including treatment by way of prescribed medication administered by a healthcare professional.

The Bill is named after Jake McGill Lynch, a young boy from Clondalkin who took his life shortly after being prescribed antidepressants. I welcome Jake’s parents, Stephanie and John, to the Public Gallery. Stephanie and John have been campaigning to change the law so a coroner can note iatrogenic suicide as a verdict on the cause of death.

Jake McGill Lynch died in 2013 from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. He was 14 when he was prescribed an antidepressant weeks before his death. His mam said he was not depressed but had exam anxiety. Jake was prescribed fluoxetine. His mother had no idea it was actually Prozac or of the side effects it could have, including suicidal ideation.

Jake was diagnosed with Asperger’s. The evidence indicates Prozac has no benefit for children with Asperger’s. Despite the risk of harm, Jake was still prescribed this drug. The coroner returned an open verdict. The family welcomed the open verdict as the ruling “death by suicide” would not reflect their son’s death, which they believe was drug induced. The coroner did say that Jake was not in his right mind but he could not elaborate on the medication. As things stand, the coroner does not have the option to issue the verdict of iatrogenic suicide, and this is why we are introducing this Bill.

I welcome Jim and Vera Connell to the Public Gallery. Their son Darren died after taking anti-acne medication. Darren Connell was a county minor with Meath and was the pride and joy of his GAA club, Oldcastle. Jim told me Darren was the fittest minor in Meath. Darren was prescribed medication called doxycycline for the treatment of acne on 27 August 2019. On 11 September, he died by asphyxial hanging. He was 17 years of age. At his inquest, the coroner described the evidence put before him as compelling and made a recommendation to investigate the safety of his medication. He went on to say that Darren had no intention to die by suicide.

The ruling of suicide is hurtful for families who have suffered such loss as they know that the medication was the primary cause of their children’s deaths. I hope this Bill will give the families peace of mind in these situations. I commend the McGill Lynch and Connell families

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for their tireless and selfless campaign and for trusting me to tell their sons' stories today.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: I am very proud to join in this renewed effort along with Deputies Ward and Guirke. I welcome to the Public Gallery the McGill Lynch family, whom I worked with in the past, and also Jim and Vera Connell, who have joined them. Jim and Vera are here because the issue has not gone away.

There was a missed opportunity when I introduced this legislation as a Senator. The Government said it had advice from the Attorney General but it did not offer an alternative. The issue is that people are dying – in this case, young people who have been given medication that has led to their deaths. The core issue is that they are not responsible for their own deaths. The medication they were given is responsible. There must be recourse in law for that.

Deputy Johnny Guirke: I am delighted to introduce this Bill along with my colleagues Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Mark Ward. It gives the coroner the option of recording iatrogenic suicide as a verdict. Iatrogenic is the ending of one's own life where the effect of medical treatment undertaken by the deceased, including any prescribed medication, is the primary cause of such action. I welcome Stephanie and John to the Public Gallery and also Jim and Vera Connell. I knew Jim and Vera's son Darren. He was a great footballer. He played with Meath under-14s and played right up to minor level. He was a friend of my own son. He was looked up to by everybody and he was a great young fella. We have a 50-mile walk that we do every year for cancer and he walked it. He probably would be with the Meath team in Croke Park next Sunday if he were still around.

This Bill is important to families like Darren's as it would give them closure by having the correct verdict recorded. Darren's family has asked for a joint meeting with the Minister for justice and the Minister for Health. The Minister for justice has said he is open to meeting. The Minister for Health has had three submissions for a meeting and Jim and Vera have yet to hear back. It would be great if both Ministers could meet Darren's parents and listen to their story. We are looking for Government support for this Bill. It should be a no-brainer.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy. Well done.

Is the Bill opposed?

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): No.

Question put and agreed to.

An Ceann Comhairle: Since this is a Private Members' Bill, Second Stage must, under Standing Orders, be taken in Private Members' time.

Deputy Mark Ward: I move: "That the Bill be taken in Private Members' time."

Question put and agreed to.

Post-European Council: Statements

The Taoiseach: I attended a meeting of the European Council on 26 June in Brussels. The substantial items on the agenda included support for Ukraine, the situation in the Middle East, European security and defence and the preparation of upcoming EU summits with third country partners and regions. The Council also returned to enhancing Europe's competitiveness in the context of global economic developments, not least the ongoing EU-US trade negotiations. Other items covered were migration, support for the Republic of Moldova, the situation in the western Balkans, the EU's internal security and crisis preparedness. Other discussions included external relations with Libya and the Sahel. I will deal with Ukraine, the Middle East, in particular the humanitarian situation in Gaza, European security and defence, competitiveness and trade. The Minister of State, Deputy Thomas Byrne, will later speak to all other issues.

Support for Ukraine following Russia's illegal war of aggression continues to be a top priority for the European Union. President Zelenskyy briefed us on the current situation and recent developments, including Russia's escalation in strikes on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Together with my fellow leaders, we reconfirmed the EU's unwavering commitment to providing continued political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support to Ukraine and its people for as long as it takes and as intensely as needed. The EU has provided substantial military support to Ukraine to enable it to defend itself against Russia's ongoing aggression, but Ukraine requires our help now even more urgently. Ireland will continue to explore how we can provide non-lethal military support, building on the €100 million package of support agreed by our Government earlier this year.

As Russia continues to launch strikes on Ukraine, it is clear that it is not engaging in peace talks in good faith, while it continues to maintain its maximalist demands. Against this background it is more important than ever that we bolster support for Ukraine across all work strands. Leaders discussed how the EU can step up military support for Ukraine, play a constructive role in any potential peace process and contribute to security guarantees as part of a peace agreement. We also discussed how the EU can apply more pressure on Russia to agree to an unconditional ceasefire and engage seriously in peace efforts. It was agreed that strengthening sanctions against Russia is key to this effort. The European Council therefore agreed to the roll-over of existing sanctions on Russia for a further six months and welcomed agreement on the European Union's 17th package of sanctions. More is required, however, and that is why it is important that we reach agreement on an 18th package of sanctions as quickly as possible. Ireland will continue to support strong sanctions against Russia.

Ireland is also engaged in discussions at EU level around short-term recovery efforts and preparations for a successful longer term reconstruction effort for Ukraine. Reconstruction cannot be limited to rebuilding what was destroyed during the war but must look to reform, recovery and modernisation. Raising awareness of this and mobilising support for it will be the focus of the fourth Ukraine Recovery Conference in Rome on 10 and 11 July. Investments aligned with the EU reform agenda will be also key to supporting Ukraine's future European Union accession. Ireland has always been a strong supporter of Ukraine's EU perspective, and I continue to advocate at European Union level for substantial progress on Ukraine's EU accession. I believe that EU membership is an important part of the security guarantees for Ukraine, and I underlined at the Council that it is essential to maintain momentum in Ukraine's enlargement process and to move forward on the next steps without delay. I regret that one member state, Hungary, is holding this up.

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A Leas-Cheann Comhairle, the European Council met against a deeply troubling and shocking backdrop in the Middle East. I again emphasised and strongly contributed on the need not to lose sight of the catastrophic situation in Gaza. European Union leaders recalled the importance of unimpeded access and sustained distribution of humanitarian assistance at scale into and throughout Gaza, and to enable the United Nations and its agencies and humanitarian organisations to work independently and impartially to save lives and reduce suffering. Ireland has consistently called on Israel to immediately lift its blockade of humanitarian and commercial supplies for Gaza and allow the full resumption of unimpeded humanitarian aid, in line with humanitarian principles.

An important element of our discussions at the European Council was the review of Israel's compliance with Article 2 of the association agreement. It is clear from the review that Israel is in breach of its human rights obligations. This is a significant finding and one that the EU must now act upon. The European Union's credibility depends on this. In this context, I welcome that the EU High Representative will bring an inventory of options for follow-up action for consideration by member states to the July meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council. Ireland has consistently said that all options must be considered, up to and including suspension of the association agreement. This is about holding Israel to account and using all the tools at our disposal to apply pressure on Israel to respect its obligations under international humanitarian law. We must use all available levers to bring this awful conflict to an end. There must be a ceasefire leading to a permanent end to the conflict. All remaining hostages must be released. The people of Gaza and the loved ones of those held hostage by Hamas have suffered for far too long.

The European Council also recalled its commitment to a lasting and sustainable peace based on the two-state solution. Ireland has been clear that unprecedented levels of violence, large-scale displacement of the Palestinian population, and record levels of settlement construction erode work to achieve the two-state solution. It is important that the postponed UN conference for the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and the implementation of the two-state solution goes ahead as soon as conditions allow. I understand that may be next week, on Tuesday.

The European Council welcomed the ceasefire between Israel and Iran and called for this ceasefire to be underpinned by diplomacy for lasting peace for the region. The conclusions state clearly that a lasting solution to the Iran nuclear issue can only be achieved through negotiations. We hope that these negotiations can recommence imminently. The EU will continue to urge all parties to the recent conflict to abide by international law and work towards establishing sustained regional stability at this crucial time. We also look towards and will try to support a peaceful and inclusive transition for Syria. On Lebanon, we value that the European Council called for all parties to uphold the ceasefire agreement and recognised the stabilising role of UNIFIL in the region, a role to which Irish troops are bravely contributing.

The European Council discussed implementation of commitments made earlier this year to enhance Europe's defence capabilities and readiness within the next five years. The international security environment continues to deteriorate, and to be contested, dynamic and volatile. The EU is acting with greater decisiveness, ambition and speed to tackle the threats we face. Ireland must be a part of this process because we are part of the European Union, and because such threats are existential for the way in which we live our lives across the European Union. We believe that the White Paper on the future of European defence presents Ireland with a unique opportunity to join with other EU member states to enhance our individual and collec-

tive preparedness and capabilities across all areas of security and defence. Ireland will consider joining projects in areas where capabilities and needs have been identified by our Defence Forces and the Department of Defence. Other member states may have wider interests, but it has been made clear in the White Paper that the positions of all member states will be respected, including those like Ireland that are militarily neutral. Member states remain in the driving seat in determining the capabilities they require nationally, and it remains a national prerogative to decide how to use capabilities developed jointly.

I welcome the adoption by the Council of the security action for Europe, SAFE, regulation, which will provide member states with a financing mechanism to support their investment in defence. However, I would stress that decisions on defence spending remain a matter for individual member states. We are focused on developing our national defence capabilities and transforming our Defence Forces, and we will leverage the common procurement opportunities offered under the SAFE regulation as much as possible to progress delivery of Ireland's defence capabilities and needs as quickly as possible. We look forward to continuing this work and to complementing this by working with other member states on common projects to the benefit of us all.

Leaders returned to competitiveness issues, having agreed in March that 2025 would mark a step change in our collective action to strengthen the EU's Single Market. It is clear that geopolitical developments and the pace of technological advances are posing new challenges to Europe's economic dynamism, which remains constrained by fragmented market rules in fast-evolving services sectors. Last year's Draghi report highlighted, in particular, the key performance gap with the United States in terms of scaling fast-growing young firms at the technological frontier. There is much we can do to simplify regulatory frameworks and reduce administrative burdens on firms. We must also remove barriers within the Single Market, particularly for services. Recent work by the IMF suggests that remaining Single Market barriers are equivalent on average to a 44% tariff on goods and a 110% tariff on services, so there is a lot we can do ourselves in respect of removing barriers and making ourselves more competitive within the Single Market. Leaders welcomed in this context the detailed Single Market and startup and scale-up strategies presented by the Commission in May and called for work on their implementation to begin without delay. I made clear my own view that we must make Europe the best place in which to start and grow a business, including through a completely modernised digital environment and strong investment in research and innovation. I strongly welcome the broad-based agreement we have established that this will remain a crucially important political focus for the period ahead.

The European Council also endorsed the Commission's proposal that Bulgaria adopt the euro on 1 January 2026, having fulfilled all the convergence criteria set out in the treaty. I take this opportunity to congratulate Bulgaria on reaching this important milestone towards becoming the 21st member of the single currency area from the beginning of next year.

In the context of strengthening our competitiveness, European leaders reflected on the European Union's place in the world. This takes in a number of perspectives, including our trade relations. This is not just about current negotiations with the United States but also how the European Union can focus on market diversification via an expanded set of EU free trade agreements and work with other like-minded regions and groupings.

While European Union-US trade negotiations were not a formal agenda item, they were naturally a topic of interest and discussion among leaders. During the summit, Commission

President von der Leyen provided an update on the current state of trade negotiations with the United States. There was a strong view among EU leaders that the Commission should have a mandate to continue to negotiate a deal with the US. Leaders also agreed that while a successful outcome to the negotiations and an agreement that works for both side remains the objective, the work on potential countermeasures that protect EU businesses and consumers must also continue. As the House will be aware, the deadline to reach agreement or to end the US pause on higher tariff rates has now been extended to 1 August. It is increasingly clear that any deal is likely to include a baseline tariff. It is very important therefore that the EU seeks to achieve a zero-for-zero approach for as many sectors as possible. The Government has been engaging actively with the Commission to ensure that they understand Ireland's position and concern in areas such as pharmaceuticals, medtech and agrifood. I spoke again with President von der Leyen on Monday, when she updated me on the latest situation. I wished her, Commissioner Šefčovič and their team in the Commission well in their efforts to secure the best possible deal for the EU. In spite of recent turbulence, the European Union is in prime position when it comes to global trade. The openness of our trade regime has meant that the European Union is the biggest player on the global trading scene. This is worth defending.

This was yet another busy and important meeting of the European Council. It was clear from our discussions that we face many challenges, and it is important now that there is effective follow-up to the conclusions of the meeting across a range of areas. Leaders will return to many of these issues to assess progress and discuss further actions at the next formal meeting of the European Council in October.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The most recent meeting of the European Council placed a heavy focus on the ramping-up of EU defence readiness. Of course, under the Commission Presidency of Ursula von der Leyen, the term “defence readiness” is simply code for the acceleration of a militarisation agenda, an agenda that pushes Europe into a new arms race, an agenda that will see the European Union spend an unprecedented €800 billion on arms. These are all signs of a European Union going in the wrong direction. Russia's criminal invasion of Ukraine, Israel's brutal genocide against the people of Gaza and its unprovoked attack on Iran, the potential for the expansion of conflict in the region and the destabilising impact on the entire Middle East all speak to a heightened sense of danger, violence and a lurch towards war in today's world. However, we cannot hope to turn the tide of militarisation by adding to it. We cannot prevent and resolve conflict by sending signals of European readiness to partake in them. When fear and warmongering become the driving force behind policy decisions, then militarisation becomes a dangerous, self-fulfilling prophecy, an unstoppable quicksand that drags the world in only one direction, down. It has never been more important for those of us who believe in a better vision of the future, for military-neutral states, to stand up and be counted; for those who believe in peace, diplomacy, dialogue and the primacy of international law to stand out ground and champion a world in which peace may be hard-won, but in which war is not inevitable. We will not get there if we are governed by a might-is-right philosophy that does not whisper, but screams in the ear of the powerful to arm up. Militarisation is a zero-sum game in which the only winners are the arms corporations that profit from conflict while so many face poverty and deprivation every day. The real story of descent into militarisation is told by the headstones of young, working-class men and women, sons and daughters of ordinary mams and dads, sent off to die in rich men's wars. History warns us of this time and again and those who ignore the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them. It is not lost on anybody that this intensification of the EU militarisation agenda comes at the exact time that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael move to demolish Ireland's cherished neutrality, the attempt to dismantle the

triple lock being the first shameful attempt. That move would allow the Government to deploy Irish troops to EU-led and NATO-led military misadventures and imperialist conflicts without any UN mandate anywhere in the world.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: This is just terrible stuff.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Indeed, the Tánaiste's plan to align Ireland with the von der Leyen Commission's new EU militarisation instrument, security action for Europe, shows exactly why our neutrality must be defended to the hilt. We are talking about a proposal that would raid the coffers of EU social funds for €150 billion and redirect that money to military purposes.

The Taoiseach: It is a loan facility.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The ordinary people of Ireland will not surrender our neutrality just so Micheál Martin or Simon Harris can get a pat on the head from the high and mighty at the European Commission. The mothers and fathers of Ireland did not raise their sons and daughters to be sent off and die-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: This is terrible stuff. This is shocking.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: -----in imperialist wars of aggression, in conflicts that have nothing to do with this country because, make no mistake, that is where the plan of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael to demolish our neutrality leads us. That is where von der Leyen's turbo-charged militarisation leads us. So, with everything we have got, we are going to stand up and defend out neutrality and in doing so, we will safeguard the future for our people, a future of hope over fear, a future of diplomacy over conflict, a future of peace over war. I have said it before and I will say it again today that if the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste and the entire Government are so confident in that their plan to undermine and demolish Ireland's neutrality and dismantle the triple lock has the support of the Irish public, then they should put that proposition to the people by way of referendum. Give the people their say, and I believe the Taoiseach will get his answer loudly.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Rachaidh mé tríd na hábhair faoi mar a bhí siad i ráiteas an Taoisigh. In the first instance, I will say again that we abhor the Russian Federation's criminal invasion of Ukraine. It is a war of aggression that has caused untold human suffering. It is very clear from the events of recent weeks that Vladimir Putin has no interest in peace and that he is using opportunities of discussion to stall and delay, all the while trying to strengthen his own position and that of Russia. In such a context, it is important that international pressure come to bear on Russia. Ireland must use its voice at diplomatic levels and in terms of humanitarian support to advocate on behalf of Ukraine and against Russian aggression, and in support of sanctions where appropriate and necessary.

A number of Deputies across all sides of the House have reflected on the role of the EU in what is going on in the Middle East. It is an extraordinary situation. The EU's response to what is happening in the Middle East is undoubtedly one of the darkest chapters in its 50-odd year history. It is an absolute blot upon it. It has been trying for years to negotiate the EU-Israel association agreement clause 2, which makes it clear that human rights have to be complied with. There is no doubt that clause 2 has been broken thousands of times over the last number of years and yet the EU's pathetic response is to delay a decision for a further month. It is simply not good enough, and it reflects a profound lack of leadership, including from von der Leyen. It is

right and appropriate that there are questions over her leadership at this point. She has shown no moral character in how she has responded to what is happening in Gaza, from the genocide and human suffering to the potential famine situation it is facing it and, indeed, with regard to the aid situation. Some 80% of people who have been killed in Gaza in recent weeks died while they were queuing for food and aid. Kaja Kallas has given cover in the past to the Israeli Government for the demonisation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, UNRWA, and given political cover for it being excluded from the distribution of aid. That was used quite deliberately and consciously by the Israeli Government and the US in bringing forward this Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, GHF, model, which is leading to chaos. It is not by any manner or means ensuring aid is being reached by people and it is leading to death because of the chaos that is involved.

The Taoiseach referenced the two-state solution conference, which is vital. I would also identify the ministerial conference in Bogotá next week, which is a conference in defence of international law. In the context of what is happening in the Middle East, it is vital that the Irish Government be represented there. Portugal will be there, and a number of other European countries are potentially going to be there. It is a crucially important conference, and I urge the Department to be in attendance.

We have seen headlines in the last couple of days with regard to tariffs, and yet more pronouncements by President Trump in relation to maybe 200% on pharmaceuticals. It is impossible to know where that situation will end up. It is impossible to know what President Trump will say next. What is clear, however, is that the direction of travel is towards tariffs. It is potentially towards at least a base tariff across the board for EU countries. From an Irish point of view, that leads to a number of questions. I believe Ireland has been left uniquely vulnerable by the policies of recent Governments and by their failure to invest in infrastructure, their over-reliance on tax incentives and their failure to diversify on who Irish businesses are doing business with. That needs to be addressed.

In our view, what are the priorities? The first has to be dealing with the issue of tariff distortions. We are potentially in a very particular situation because of the North-South economy. That needs to be a priority for the Irish Government. We need to use our voice at European level in defence of key Irish sectors, such as pharmaceuticals and life sciences but also some of the areas that would be most quickly affected, such as food and drink like whiskey and dairy products. They need to be right at the heart of the approach, as does preparation for supports. We have heard very little from the Government about what it is going to do to support businesses on the ground if this comes to pass.

Finally, infrastructure is one of the key things businesses up and down the country are highlighting with regard to the fact that the opportunity was not taken. Our infrastructure is too poor in terms of energy, transport, healthcare and housing, and that is one of the key reasons we are uniquely vulnerable. The Government needs to address that, whatever the outcome from negotiations on President Trump's plans.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: I thank the Taoiseach for the update on his attendance at the European Council. I attended the Party of European Socialists leaders' summit on the morning of the European Council in Brussels on 26 June. As the Minister of State, Deputy Byrne, knows, there is a group leaders' summit in advance of Council meetings. We in the Labour Party are proud affiliates of the Party of European Socialists and, of course, our MEP in the Socialists and Democrats group is Aodhán Ó Ríordáin. I think I can say that it is good for Ireland that we now

have an MEP in the S and D group in the European Parliament. It is the second largest group in the Parliament and, of course, it has a good deal of influence and impact on European decision-making. Others in attendance with me at that pre-summit meeting were obviously party leaders from socialist parties across Europe, including the Spanish Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez, and some socialist Commissioners too, including Teresa Ribera, the Spanish Commissioner, with whom I engaged directly.

I want to address a number of issues the Taoiseach raised. First, I will speak about Ukraine. I am really glad to hear the Taoiseach's reaffirmation of our strong solidarity with the people of Ukraine in the face of Russia's brutal and illegal invasion and aggression. I am glad we are supporting the strong sanctions the EU is to take against Russia. Indeed, I hope we will see strengthened sanctions against Russia. I hope we will also see greater progress on EU accession. European Union membership for Ukraine is a vital component for the future of Ukraine.

I ask that the Minister of State bring back, particularly to the Tánaiste, the question as to why a Russian ship was moored off Killiney Bay over recent days. I know they have moved on, but it is a cause of serious alarm to see them come so close to our shore when Russia is facing such strong sanctions. I note that Government representatives have been asking this question too.

Second, on Gaza, clearly this is of the utmost and pressing importance at EU level and it is good to know it was discussed at Council, but it is hugely disappointing to see the lack of unity and lack of solidarity from the EU collectively with the people of Gaza as they endure Israel's appalling genocide. In Ireland, clearly, we have very strong views. Across this House, there are such strong views and there is such strong distress at the appalling and ongoing brutality that is being inflicted upon the people of Gaza, upon civilians and upon children. In advance of my journey to Brussels, the Tánaiste and I spoke about how Ireland could press collectively, from both Government and Opposition side, for stronger action on Gaza and stronger action against Israel at EU level. I am glad to say I did engage directly with socialist leaders from Spain and other countries about the need to go further and, in particular, the need to suspend the association agreement. Again, it is a matter of regret that did not come out as a strong call from the Council meeting. I hope at the next level of engagement we will see a decision taken to suspend immediately that association agreement with Israel. It is appalling that association agreement is still in place.

I also engaged on the need for other states to adopt Ireland's approach and bring in occupied territories legislation. I am conscious that we in opposition are pressing hard to ensure that the occupied territories Bill will include goods and services, crucially, but we also want to see similar legislation being brought forward in other member states, particularly states like Spain and Belgium, which have taken a strong stance in support of the people of Gaza. Spain, of course, has recognised the Palestinian state along with us. It is regrettable to see a block on stronger action against Israel from states like Hungary and again, I urge the Minister of State to please go further. Here at home, we need to see much stronger action, in particular on bringing children out of Gaza for humanitarian purposes. I listened earlier to the Taoiseach's response and it was unsatisfactory. I have met with Gazan families in my constituency. They are living in Merrion in the Sandymount area, and they are absolutely desperate because family members are being killed in Gaza while they await the visas and wait for the red tape to be cut through so they can bring over these desperately injured children and their siblings. I am appealing to the Minister of State again. I have spoken directly to the Ministers for health, justice and foreign affairs, but we need to do more on this.

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On the matters raised relating to EU security and defence, it is welcome to see strong recognition of Ireland's military neutrality. We are strong believers in the triple lock but we also believe in investing in the Defence Forces. Neutrality is not a cheap option and we need to see our Defence Forces properly supported and sustained.

Regarding trade, I welcome the extension of the deadline for Trump's tariffs to 1 August. I agree on the point of zero-for-zero but, undoubtedly, there is immense uncertainty now for business across the country. I ask the Tánaiste to continue to provide briefings for Opposition leaders and spokespersons on progress made with tariff talks. It is extremely helpful for us to be kept informed of what is going on.

Finally, I express my deep concern at the growth of the far right across the European Union. We are seeing it take control in certain governments and having a strong impact on policies in different member states. I appeal to the Minister of State to use every lever in his power and that of the Government to hold off that threat of the far right-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: From this side.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: -----here in Ireland.

Deputy Malcolm Byrne: I welcome the Minister of State's strong commitment to the European Union. In this time of global turbulence, it is more important than ever that we talk about why the European Union is in place. It is the world's greatest peace and prosperity project. It is not perfect and there are lots of reasons we can criticise the European Union, but if we think about what the EU has achieved, not just for Ireland but also for this Continent and the world, it is more important than ever that we start talking about European values regarding human rights, the rule of law and respect for democracy. This needs to be applied both inside the European Union and when we talk about it globally. In particular, I reference the ongoing concern, which I know the Minister of State has expressed, about what has been happening with the repression of rights in Hungary, particularly with regard to LGBT rights. We need to communicate effectively, both internally within the Union and more widely, why those values are so important, especially given this Continent's history.

In that regard, I was very happy to hear the Taoiseach again emphasise Ireland's and the European Union's support for and solidarity with Ukraine and the work being carried out by President Zelenskyy. Day after day, we see the continued bombing and destruction of infrastructure. We have seen children abducted from Ukraine and taken into Russia and Belarus. I am glad it remains on the European agenda but I am concerned it does not get discussed as often as it should on the political agenda here. We have war in Europe and we have had only one opportunity for statements on the issue within this House. Within the media, with the honourable exception of the *Irish Independent*, coverage of Ukraine has often dropped off the agenda. As Deputy Bacik mentioned, Russia is engaging in hybrid warfare against the Ukrainian state and this is not being taken sufficiently seriously. We see soft interviews on "Morning Ireland" regarding issues relating to Russia. Ukraine is not getting the level of attention it deserves. I encourage the Minister of State, as I know he has been doing, to continue to keep this at the heart of the European agenda.

I also want to raise the forthcoming EU-China summit. The Minister of State might indicate in his response who will be representing Ireland at that summit. I welcome Ursula von der Leyen questioning China's continued support of Russia in its war on Ukraine. That has to be

central to any engagement between the EU and China. While we do want to do business with China, and I have huge respect for China and the Chinese people, its continued sabre-rattling against Taiwan, its oppression of minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet and what has been going on Hong Kong are not acceptable. I ask for this to be a priority at the forthcoming summit.

I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Smyth's, indication that we will have a major AI summit next year. Before our AI committee yesterday, I was glad to hear her officials confirm they will be working towards an AI summit. I would like artificial intelligence to be a key aspect of the Ireland's EU Presidency agenda.

The Taoiseach mentioned the competitiveness agenda and I know the Minister of State is very committed to it as well. It remains crucial. We have to keep a focus on what was raised within the Draghi report. It is essential we move on the development of a capital markets union. I hope the Minister of State, in his response, will be able to address those issues.

Deputy Joe Neville: The issues I wish to raise relate specifically to our competitiveness across the EU, especially with the technological hat we have on as a country. I can see it especially in my own constituency with Intel in north Kildare. We are in a very lucky position as a country to be at the forefront of speaking at these EU summits. It is something we should not take for granted. Many people from this country over many years have contributed well and our standing across the EU is in high regard because of them. Indeed, they have a level of trust in what we speak and stand for as a country. Historically, we as a country have been beneficiaries of the EU, both financially and technologically. Now, we are probably at a slightly different stage in that journey whereby we are helping others, which is positive. That being said, there are other wider benefits we continue to see in all discussions and in our standing within the EU.

As I said, the area I wish to focus on is EU competitiveness. This needs to be strengthened through innovation and promoting EU technological leadership. As we know, Europe has been behind the US and China in its technological growth, which is something we need to resolve and fix. Fortunately for us, Ireland has seen the benefit of the level of foreign direct investment, abilities and knowledge we are accumulating in our own country, but we have been at the forefront. This leads to my key point: we need to ensure we are at the forefront and that the EU also gets there. We need to ensure we can support the companies here, such as Intel, which is based in Leixlip.

The European Chips Act, which was adapted in July 2023, addresses some of the key challenges facing the semiconductor industry but we know those challenges will only get tougher. There are key challenges coming from not just China but also Taiwan with TSMC, and there is Nvidia in the US. We are seeing the development of companies on their side and we need to ensure we have that strong knowledge within the EU. These industries are the industries of the future and Europe needs to have a key share of it. The EU's market share of the semiconductor industry represented only 12.7% of the global market. We need to ensure this is supported and grows in order that Irish manufacturers will be once again at the forefront of that. That is key and it is why it is important we speak about it not only here but also at the highest level.

At the EU summit, there were key discussions around what is happening in Gaza. Ireland as a country has shown great leadership in Europe in this regard. I heard previous Deputies complain, give out and say the EU was not strong enough. They might be right in some of that but, at the same time, where Ireland has led, many other countries in the EU have followed. Countries like Spain may have been with us at the start but we are generally seeing the people's

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view moving towards that of Ireland. We have all been questioned about whether we could do more but, as I said, this Irish Government has been at the forefront of speaking for Gaza. That might not be acknowledged on the Opposition benches but it has been acknowledged in Europe and Palestine. This Government has been at the forefront of speaking for the people of Gaza and Palestine. This was reflected over the previous couple of weeks and continues to be reflected as Ireland shows leadership in that way. I commend the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste on their efforts in this regard and, indeed, the whole diplomatic team.

There have been many references to the EU and what is happening in Ukraine. The EU has strongly supported Ukraine and we know the damage being done there. As Deputy Byrne said, we need to keep this at the top of the agenda and if we have the opportunity to do so, we must continue to do that.

Deputy Bacik referenced the growth of the far right but there is also the growth of the far left. It has caused significant damage across Europe and different parts of the world for many generations. We saw the damage done in Eastern Europe. As much as we discuss the far right, we also have to look at the far left. The centre must always hold. We as a Government have been fortunate to be in a country where the centre has held and we have been lucky in many ways.

2 o'clock

I, for one, would like to be part of a Europe where the centre holds. It is not about the far left or the far right. It is important that we play a key role in the leadership we are showing and will continue to show.

Deputy Seán Crowe: Europe is becoming obsessed with spending on greater security and militarisation. We are so wrapped up in creating a fortress Europe that we are neglecting the fundamental concerns of conflict prevention and resolution. Surely it would be better to prevent a conflict in the first place than build walls and manufacture weapons of war. I spoke at the OSCE annual parliamentary assembly last week where I made the point that fewer and fewer countries are participating in conflict resolution and peacekeeping in an increasingly fractious and dangerous world. The international community seems increasingly unwilling or unable to uphold the core Helsinki principles of respect for human rights and peaceful resolution of disputes. States that once championed the Helsinki principles now often ignore them in pursuit of their own selfish interests. They turn their backs on conflicts because their supposed friends are involved. Trade partners are an exception to outrage when it comes to crimes against humanity. As long as there are acceptable exceptions to the rule of international law, as long as those selfish interests come first, the spirit of multilateral co-operation will continue to diminish. Once that co-operation is gone, we are left isolated and scared.

I do not believe security action for Europe is the answer. It is little more than a bankrolling of the European arms manufacturing industry. Hard-learned lessons from the financial crisis are being thrown aside so that massive deficits will be allowed as long as the money goes into arms.

We should, of course, do what we can to help Ukraine repel the Russian invaders and then work towards rebuilding the country so life can resume and it can apply for EU membership. What we should also do is not use Russia as a bogeyman while we become a paranoid, inward-looking bloc. There are more economic levers we can use against Russia and sanctions that

will hurt it more than any loss on the battlefield. While we have reduced the volume of Russian gas in the European energy mix, it still represents a substantial proportion of gas imports at 20%. We still buy its gas and uranium, and its shadow fleet of oil tankers still evades sanctions. Greater investment in renewable energy is needed if we want to cut this dependency on Russia and really hurt it as an energy exporter. In Ireland and across Europe, renewable energy should be considered as the first line of defence. Clean energy is secure energy.

It is far too late for the European Council to think that its condemnation of settler violence in the West Bank will make the slightest difference. The Israeli Government has decided there will be no peace and no let-up from the destruction that rains down on children's heads. The same Israeli Government has heard all this before and has seen that nothing ever comes of it. The only thing that will make the Israelis sit up and pay attention is economic sanctions. As long as the violence in Gaza and the West Bank continues, the empty words of the European Council, while welcome, carry little weight with the Israeli war cabinet. There must be a revocation of the EU-Israel association agreement, not endless talk of reviews. The evidence is plain to see. It is the bodies of over 50,000 dead children and 134,000 injured in Palestine.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I thank the Government for the briefing on the European Council. I particularly welcome the update on the work done on Ukraine and encourage more of that. I agree with the Minister of State, Deputy Byrne's comments that we need to make sure it does not fade from view in the media and in our discussions.

I want to focus my comments on concerns I have around three specific topics: European defence, Gaza and the omnibus. First, with regard to defence, I want to highlight in particular the words of the European Council President, António Costa, immediately after the European Council. The emphasis was not just on defence but on the EU as a defence alliance. The Council President celebrated how the EU is tying our actions on defence to the decisions and work of NATO as two sides of the same coin. We are framing the funding of arms manufacturers and research on how best to kill people as key to European prosperity. We hear from the most senior figures of the EU that what the European Union wants is a "common European defence system".

I have heard empty assurances these past few months about the love that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have for our neutrality. This is cold comfort when the most powerful people in the EU are attempting to turn the European Union into a defence union. What has Ireland done to push back and to protect our sovereignty and neutrality within this context? Not only that, but last week, we heard at the defence committee that the EU will classify defence spending, that is spending on bombs, guns and missiles, as "sustainable finance". This is pitting the companies that are fighting climate change, poverty and hunger directly against arms companies, including ones that are directly supplying Israel in its genocide in Gaza. What has Ireland done to push back against this subversion of truth and twisting of reality? Is it that bombs are sustainable, that guns and bullets are a green investment or that war will bring peace?

I despair at the fact that while we have continued and increasingly strong words from the Government on Gaza, we have yet to see tangible actions. We have been told when we raise this issue that the Government strategy is to keep in step with Europe entirely and then to refuse to lead as a country. As I have repeatedly pointed out, this is unacceptable when we consider the very unique solidarity of the Irish people with this cause. We alone in Europe have a clear mandate from our population. It is clear from the report on the EU-Israel association agreement that Israel is in breach of its obligations. This is something the European Council has

said, yet we, as a Union, have done nothing. In black and white, we now see the human rights requirements of EU trade agreements are not worth the paper they are written on. It is clear that Europe has failed the test of moral courage that will define these times, so what are we waiting for? Why can Ireland not be brave and take that first step?

There is one other thing that I have repeatedly said and that I want to keep reminding people of. Even when we go as far as suspending the EU-Israel association agreement, and the words of the Taoiseach in his opening comments were that Ireland has consistently said that all options must be considered up to and including suspension of the association agreement, that is simply the revocation of a privilege. It does not even amount to sanctions. All it does is level the playing field with our other trading partners. The fact that we would even consider capping it at the suspension of the EU-Israel association agreement and not seek to go further with sanctions against Israel that mirror the sanctions imposed on Russia by European Union is galling.

Regarding the omnibus, we hear frequently from the Government of the importance of simplification and how competitiveness trumps all. It appears that our competitiveness is apparently more important than human rights, employment rights and social spending. We in the Social Democrats are not against making compliance as simple as possible for small businesses. However, we are against deregulation that results in the continuation of slavery and human rights violations in our supply chains. I have been struggling for months to get a straight answer from the Government on whether the CSDDD will be protected. The assurances I got were minimal and swept away by an omnibus package being approved by the Council that Human Rights Watch said turned this supply chain law into window dressing at best. Under current proposals, fewer than 1,000 companies will be bound by the directive, most supply chains will be out of scope and there is no requirement to implement climate action plans at all. How can we stand over this package? What has Ireland done to push back against this deregulation package?

I look forward to answers to those questions from the Minister of State.

Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil: I commend Deputy Byrne on the work he has been doing as Minister of State with responsibility for foreign affairs and, in particular, European affairs. There are two areas that I would like to cover following the European Council meeting: Ukraine and the Middle East.

It is critical that Ukraine remains at the forefront of our minds and that we continue to call out the illegal aggression of Russia as it continues to bombard the country. I urge the Government to push as much as possible to ensure that Ukraine can acquire full EU membership. This is tantamount to ensuring the safety and future of the Ukrainian people and, indeed, the Ukrainian state, and I appreciate the efforts that the Minister has been making in this regard.

On the Middle East, and Gaza in particular, we are constantly hearing from the Opposition that the Government is not doing enough. They fail to mention the recognition of the State of Palestine by the Government, the progress with the occupied territories Bill, the funding of UNWRA and the work on the International Criminal Court, ICC, case, among many other measures.

Earlier on Leaders' Questions, the leader of the Opposition criticised the Taoiseach and the Government in relation to children coming to this country from Gaza to seek medical assistance. There have been concerted efforts by the Government to help children as much as pos-

sible travel here safely to ensure that they get the medical attention that they require in keeping with the WHO initiative that other member states are working on as well and what frustrates me is the politicisation of this. Here we have sick children, the State is doing its utmost to help them and we are not seeing any recognition. It is merely trying to politicise it, time and again. If someone genuinely has concerns or questions about issues such as this, sometimes that type of work is better done behind the scenes rather than trying to politicise it. I commend the Taoiseach and, indeed, the Minister, on the amount of work that they are doing to ensure that those families and individuals can come here. The Minister for Health is bringing a memorandum to Cabinet that will allow not only a parent or a carer to come, but, indeed, siblings and a second parent or second carer.

I called in this House last week for the refugee status that we granted to Ukrainians coming to the State, particularly throughout the war in Ukraine, to be extended to the people of Palestine because there are a lot of Irish families helping Palestinian families. Irish families are funding Palestinian families to try to help them buy food, such as flour, etc., but it would be great to see an initiative like that. Not everybody will want to come here from Gaza or from the West Bank, but for those individuals and families who do want to come here, at least we can provide that opportunity. It is impossible for them to get the required documentation because they are in a war zone that most refugees will pass through. Exceptions need to be made, particularly for people from Gaza, because as many people rightly have said here, there is a particular affinity between the Irish people and the Palestinian people. I will send the Minister of State an email on this and see if it is something that the Department or, indeed, the Minister for Justice could look at in more detail. I had contacted the Minister. We stand with the people of Palestine.

Deputy Martin Daly: Following the 26 June post-Council European statement, I note the EU position on Gaza, Iran, Ukraine and Syria. Ireland has led the EU in advocating for the beleaguered Palestinian people in Gaza and in the West Bank. The Taoiseach has called it genocide and forcefully decried the lack of action on the part of the European Union. There has been formal recognition at EU level, driven by Ireland, of the human rights abuses and a promised review of the Israel-EU association agreement. There is tentative hope that a ceasefire brokered by the US will supersede this and allow a massive humanitarian aid programme to begin. Ireland should continue to campaign for a ceasefire that allows the release of the hostages, relief of the Palestinian people and a permanent political solution based on the two-state principle. The affirmation of the EU commitment to the security of Ukraine and ensuring that Russia does not prevail in creating a potential threat to the Baltic States is also welcome.

I have made statements on those two issues previously, most recently on the Middle East last week, and would like to focus on the EU's recommitment to competitiveness that was enunciated in the Draghi report. We are living through an era of extraordinary global uncertainty. Geopolitical tensions are deepening, markets are fragmenting, and with the return of aggressive tariff policies under President Trump, the rules of international trade that once brought stability and predictability are being rewritten. In this context, one question that should focus all our minds is: how do we ensure that Europe and Ireland remain competitive in a world that is increasingly volatile, protectionist and unpredictable? Competitiveness today is not only about low costs or access to markets. It is about resilience, innovation, the ability to attract talent, to develop new industries and to lead in the technologies that will shape the future. If we want to succeed, we cannot stand still and we cannot rely on the old assumptions.

At the same time, we are witnessing a profound shift across the Atlantic. In the United States, long regarded as a powerhouse for innovation, the environment for research and devel-

opment has become more uncertain. Universities, research institutions and tech industries are grappling with the unstable funding, political interference and growing barriers to collaboration. That creates a strategic opening for Europe in Ireland. We have the opportunity, not only to compete but to lead. We can be a place where researchers, innovators and entrepreneurs can find a stable, ambitious and forward-looking environment in which to thrive. Thankfully, we are already taking steps in that direction. We are investing in innovation hubs, advanced manufacturing clusters, digital technologies and green energy solutions. We are supporting our universities and research centres to collaborate with industry and to attract the brightest minds from across the globe.

The European Union is also playing its part, with the Horizon Europe programme, the European Chips Act, and a new push to cut administrative burdens on small businesses and start-ups. The message is clear. We want Europe to be the home of the industries and jobs of the future. However, we must go further. Competitiveness is not only about policy papers; it is about delivery. It means removing the obstacles that hold back growth. It means speeding up planning, strengthening digital infrastructure, supporting education and skills and ensuring that we are not only catching up with global trends, but setting them.

Ireland has every reason to be confident. We are an open outward-looking economy with a strong track record of innovation and resilience, but confidence must be matched with action. In the face of global instability, Ireland can be a magnet for investment, a centre of innovation and a leader in shaping Europe's competitive future. That is the ambition we must hold and it is the action we must take.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: Ursula von der Leyen has been one of the staunchest defenders of the current Israeli regime. She has consistently provided cover for them, going for photo opportunities at every possible moment.

She talks about human rights and international law but it is clear for all to see how unequally she applies this. She will talk about Russian war crimes but she will not talk about Israeli war crimes. She will talk about the need to defend Ukrainian lives but she is silent on the need to protect Palestinian lives. She is proud of the 18th sanctions package against Russia but she has not mentioned a single sanctions package against Israel. She has pushed ahead with her poorly titled SAFE, Security Action For Europe, programme. This is a programme of militarisation which will make us less safe. She has ridden roughshod over the EU Parliament, so much so that the President of the Parliament has threatened legal action.

A hard-hitting report from the Bundestag said the SAFE programme may be illegal and now there is a no-confidence motion coming in her. Fine Gael has already stated that it will support her. It is hardly a surprise. I understand that Fianna Fáil MEPs will not support that motion.

This Commission, led by her with her carbon copy, Kaja Kallas, has weakened Europe's standing on the global stage but, obviously, we can only do what is within our powers. We continue to fail to exercise the powers that we have. The occupied territories Bill, without including sanctions, is weak. It is also tokenistic. Israeli war bonds will continue to be facilitated by the Central Bank and we will continue to have lofty statements backed by little meaningful action.

The Irish Strategic Investment Fund could be directed by the Minister to divest from those eight companies identified by *The Journal*. These companies have operations within the oc-

cupied territories.

They are on the UN blacklist. It really pains me to see the way that the UN blacklist and international law is being ignored and destroyed. Only earlier this week, the Prime Minister of Israel, for whom there is international arrest warrant issued, was allowed to fly unperturbed through EU airspace. Of course, it is not only EU airspace, but Irish airspace as well, where a blind eye is turned.

The international system, the foundations of which were initially put in place after 1945, is slowly being dismantled before our eyes and the words that come from the mouths of western leaders have little relationship to reality. We need to do better not only for the Palestinian people, but for all the people.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The Commissioner of the EU, Ursula von der Leyen, is not just complicit in the genocide in Gaza; she is actively supportive of the Israeli state and what it is doing. She still uses the term, “Israel’s right to defend itself”, right up until now. Even when Gaza is being starved, children are being killed for sport and doctors are being murdered, Israel has the right to defend itself, according to her. It is absolutely shameful that she is heading up the EU. Tomorrow, the Minister of State’s party, Fine Gael, the Labour Party and other parties will have the right to send a message on that because there will be a vote of no confidence in Ursula von der Leyen. Any Irish MEP who votes to support her, given what she has done, should hang his or her head in shame. Such MEPs are not representing the views of the majority of Irish people. We believe that Fine Gael will troop up - it is not fully clear what Fianna Fáil will do - and apparently the Labour Party has also professed its support on the basis that a far-right group is putting the vote. I will tell the Minister of State now-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: On vaccines.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: -----you can distinguish your vote-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: On vaccines.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: -----when you make a vote, and can come out publicly to explain your stance, but the reality is it is a vote of no confidence. If the parties are not happy about that, they can put one themselves, which should have happened a long time ago.

I will raise another issue. The Minister of State and the Government constantly say how much Ireland is doing. There are two examples of basic care that we could give to people suffering the genocide. Medical evacuation for Palestinian children was raised today. Why are children with the most horrific injuries, who we promised to care for in our health system, being blocked and delayed in Gaza? Is it because their siblings might want to come with them? Is that the reason? Are we that cruel that we would not assign people some family support? How can we justify this? They were promised this care months ago.

I will also raise the matter of the GAA team from Palestine. I received emails from the GAA regarding the Palestinian hurling club. The GAA wants to bring the Moatez Sarsour club over. It is due to visit Croke Park but it is not getting the visas. It is getting conflicting information. Let us allow those children in, as well as other people.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: I have two and a half minutes, so I will try to be as focused as I can. I absolutely agree with the comments on Frau von der Leyen. Europe lost its moral

compass a long time ago. Frau von der Leyen is telling us that Israel is entitled to defend itself. It is just beyond. If the MEPs from Ireland vote against the motion of no confidence, we are seriously in trouble in Ireland.

On the action from the EU in the context of these discussions, I welcome that we finally have a statement that deplores the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza and the unacceptable level of civilian death. What we have is slaughter. We are still playing with words. I welcome that we got those words, however weak and vague, although it has taken more than 20 or 21 months, but there has been absolutely no action. It is simply unconscionable that it has taken this long. It puts into acute focus the need for leadership from this country, as an independent sovereign state and a republic with a particular history of colonisation and famine, and to lead on this matter. It goes to our credibility. For me, the credibility of the EU has been gone for a very long time, although I am a committed European. I put that in, ar eagla na heagla.

I asked for a review of the trade agreement in a question I tabled as far back as November 2021 because at that stage, what was going on was simply unacceptable. Again, there has been no action on that whatsoever.

Our credibility on Iran is at stake. We have a declaratory statement: “The EU has always been clear that Iran must never be allowed to acquire a nuclear weapon.” This is despite the fact that the International Atomic Energy Agency stated that the agency had not found any proof of an effort to obtain a nuclear weapon on 17 June. Its director said reports that Iran has not been actively pursuing acquiring a nuclear weapon since 2003 are accurate. US intelligence officials have found no evidence of Iran moving towards a nuclear weapon. We are back to weapons of mass destruction. We are back to Israel, a genocidal regime, invading a sovereign state and all we can talk about is mutual conflict between two countries. If we are to call out Russia, which I absolutely do, we need to call out the genocidal state that is Israel. We have to lead.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: The Taoiseach correctly described the failure of the European Union to come to a unified position on Gaza as a huge strain on the bloc. He also said that if it fails to do so, Europe will have no credibility. European Union Commissioner, President Ursula von der Leyen, today lacks any credibility on human rights or international humanitarian law. It was Ursula von der Leyen who, at the onset of Israel’s onslaught against the civilian population of Gaza, through offering Benjamin Netanyahu unconditional and unqualified support, provided the political cover for the barbarity of the genocidal regime that has unfolded in front of our eyes. It was von der Leyen’s Commission that threw red tape and bureaucracy in the way of funds to organisations that work to alleviate the suffering of the people of Gaza on the basis of a baseless Israeli slander. It was von der Leyen’s Commission that has taken virtually no meaningful action or sanction against Israel intended to pressure it or to bring an end to the genocide there. It was von der Leyen’s Commission that ignored the request from the Irish Government in February of last year to examine Israel’s war crimes. Despite this, we know that a leaked internal EU report from the Commission has found that Israel has committed war crimes. Von der Leyen’s response has been little to naught. Despite a more substantive review last month, she now sits on her hands for a further month.

In the face of a European Commission bereft of credibility or basic morality, it has become incumbent on the Government to act, to take meaningful action and to sanction Israel for its inhumane crimes. The Government has failed in that regard, nowhere more so than in the terms of the occupied territories Bill. The Tánaiste announced on the eve of the election that Fine Gael would support the Bill and not a watered-down version that excludes services. The

Taoiseach and the then Minister for Foreign Affairs had officials cosponsor a UN General Assembly resolution last year, alongside Palestine, on the implementation of the ICJ decision on the consequences of Israel's illegal occupation. This was a resolution that made no distinction between goods and services. I will call it what it is: both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have played politics with the occupied territories Bill. Ursula von der Leyen's credibility on human rights and international humanitarian law is long gone and buried beneath the rubble and ash of Gaza. In choosing whether to include services in the occupied territories Bill, and in picking and choosing when the Government complies with international law, the Tánaiste and the Minister of State should be aware that their credibility is also on the line.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: It is good to have the opportunity to speak about the European Council meeting that took place at the end of June. Even in the past couple of weeks, things have moved on and changed. The next meeting is not until October. I acknowledge that it is a difficult job for the Government, as a member of a very large bloc and a small country, to try to get our views across. There were 12 key headings, including any other business, and more than 50 individual topics for discussion, not all of which related to us because they concerned EU security issues where we have an opt-out under our neutrality.

I will comment on the major issues. There was fairly unanimous agreement among European Union member states on Ukraine. Its position on Iran is a little watered down. We did not see too much on that. Aside from the condemnation of the bombing of Iran and trying to ensure that Iran does not get its hands on nuclear weapons, it has been very lax in dealing with the regime itself which has been responsible for record numbers of executions since its inception and continues to harass and murder its own population. While I would condemn any US or Israeli bombing of the Iranian population, I hold no love for the Iranian regime, which funds Hezbollah and Hamas and also helps the Russians to bomb Ukraine.

The key issue for Ireland, as a colonially oppressed nation, is the ongoing sympathy we have for the suffering and the genocide taking place in Gaza and our opposition to the continued Israeli settler incursions in the West Bank. The European Council's conclusions state:

The European Council calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza... It deplores the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza, the unacceptable number of civilian casualties and the levels of starvation. The European Council calls on Israel to fully lift its blockade on Gaza, to allow immediate, unimpeded access and sustained distribution of humanitarian assistance...

The European Council recalls the imperative of ensuring the protection of all civilians... It deplores the refusal of Hamas to hand over the remaining hostages.

It is all motherhood and apple pie, except it is not about apple pie, but about actual people. As others have said, the European Union has been morally bankrupt on this issue for a long time. Therefore, it behoves countries like Ireland to show moral leadership.

At the European affairs committee last week we had a presentation from the Danish ambassador. Given that Denmark is a small country that was occupied by the Nazis in the Second World War, one would think it would be to the forefront on this issue. However, going by its history, with Denmark helping Danish Jews to flee the Nazis, it has had a kind of friendship with the Israeli state. I would like to have a friendship with the Israeli state if it was not murdering people. The Danes see the Israelis as their friends. The Israelis see Danes as having played a key role. Obviously, I condemn the fact that Ireland was not really to the forefront in assist-

ing Jewish refugees. We had a very piecemeal approach during the Second World War and we should be condemned for that. However, we can see where the Danes are coming from; they are reluctant to fully condemn the Israelis. Therefore, we have to do it. We should work with Denmark to try to push it further because it is a small country like us.

Deputy Paul Lawless: Last year the Government sought to introduce censorship laws under the guise of hate speech legislation. The Government essentially sought to assert itself as the arbitrator as to what is and what is not hate. Recently the European Commission warned Ireland that we are outside the laws in terms of hate speech legislation. An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, recently told an NGO that we will be working on this issue and that we must be within the European framework. This is of great concern to the people across Ireland. The Government was out of step with public opinion last year and was brought kicking and screaming into reducing or sidelining that part of the legislation. Now the European Union seeks to introduce this again. I call on the Government to tell the EU to get stuffed on this issue. We need to ensure that we have civil liberties and freedom of speech. Freedom of speech is important for everyone. Recently in Germany pro-Palestinian protesters were dispersed with water cannons and batons under the guise of spreading hate. In the Netherlands students who were voicing their opposition to what was happening to the poor people of Gaza were labelled as inciting hate. This is not just for the far right or the far left, but for everyone. It is really important that we write back to the European Union and tell it that we will not be introducing censorship laws in Ireland.

Deputy Barry Ward: I will shortly talk about EU expansionism but I feel I need to address some of the comments Deputy Lawless has made about hate speech legislation. I am very much an advocate for free speech. Quite apart from the fact that it is a right under the European Convention, it is a constitutional right in this jurisdiction which must be respected and maintained. However, having a law that says that people cannot use their power and their right to speak freely to incite hatred against certain groups is not a restriction of free speech that is unwarranted. Listening to Deputy Lawless, one would think that-----

Deputy Paul Lawless: Does the Deputy support changing the legislation, the legislation he supported last year? I have no difficulty-----

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mattie McGrath): Please, Deputy Lawless-----

Deputy Barry Ward: The Deputy can read the comments I made on this in the Seanad. As the Fine Gael justice spokesperson in the Seanad, I spoke for a very long time on many occasions on that Bill. There is no doubt whatsoever about my views on this. The Deputy speaks as if there are no restrictions on free speech and suggests we should tell the EU to go and get stuffed. What kind of a comment is that to make? We were introducing legislation that would protect minorities that are put upon by people because of what they are, not who they are, because of characteristics like their sexual orientation,-----

Deputy Paul Lawless: The Irish people said “No” and the Government dropped it.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mattie McGrath): Please-----

Deputy Barry Ward: -----race and religion. I do not want people like that to be put upon by other people because they choose to speak out against them. The Deputy speaks as if there are no restrictions on free speech, as if it is an absolute thing. Presumably he would throw out the defamation laws as well because-----

Deputy Paul Lawless: So the Deputy wants the Israelis to-----

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mattie McGrath): An Teachta Lawless-----

Deputy Barry Ward: -----he believes people should be able to say whatever they want, as is the case in America. He believes people can say whatever they want and it does not matter if they do down someone's good name or incite hatred against them. What an absolute nonsense stance to take. He should be responsible and recognise that no right in our Constitution or any other international instrument we are part of is absolute. Every right comes with a responsibility. While people have free speech, they cannot use that right to do down a group because they have particular characteristics. That was what that law was about. He is quite right that it did not pass in full. It certainly did not pass to the extent I wanted to pass in the previous Oireachtas. I welcome that the Taoiseach has said the Government will work to reintroduce such legislation. As the Deputy has said, we are outside the norms of the European Union because other European Union states actually have the courage to stand up and say they want to protect people who are being put down by people who think that they can use their characteristics to operate against them. That is what that is about. Let us not misrepresent what is actually there.

Let us also recognise that when we look at the progress of European legislation, workers in this country are better off, safer and have better conditions because of European law. We did not tell the European Union to "get stuffed" on that stuff either. The reality is we have benefited time after time from the European Union. By the way, we cannot speak about it as if we are not part of it because our Ministers sit at the European Council table. We have a Commissioner at the Commission table. We are part of that decision-making process. We have benefited from the fact that collectively as the European Union, we have handed down legislation in this country that means we have good health and safety, good employment rights and good employment benefits.

Therefore, if we tell the European Union to go and get stuffed, we are telling ourselves to go and get stuffed because we sit around the table in Brussels as much as any other country. The big change for us in joining the European Union in 1973 was that we went from being in the shadow of a former colonial power to being an equal party at the table. Perhaps the most significant thing when we talk about the European Council statements is that our leader sat at that table, equal to the German Chancellor and equal to the leaders of France, Spain and Italy, which are much bigger countries by population and economy but we have an equal place. When the Deputy says, "Go and get stuffed", he is telling our country to go and get stuffed. He should have a little bit of sense and decorum in relation to what we are actually trying to do with that legislation.

What I actually wanted to talk about are the items on the agenda referring to European enlargement, which is hugely important. It is something that has stalled to a large extent. I have raised this issue on a couple of occasions and I do not do so in any way to undermine the process of enlargement and the process by which countries must meet the Copenhagen criteria before they become members of the European Union. I also do not say it with a view to saying that countries should not have the right to veto a new member, but I do not think any member state should have the right to veto the process through which another country goes to apply for membership and to start the process of joining.

These are issues I have raised at COSAC, which is the European committee where the chairs of the European Union affairs committees of each member state come together twice during

each Presidency. I spoke on this in Warsaw last month and in Copenhagen last week. These are important issues. We know that European enlargement is better for the European Union. We are better if we are bigger and have more members. As a bloc, we are much stronger. We know that the countries coming into the European Union are better off when they are inside the European Union because they sign up to adherence to the rule of law and the other instruments that form part of the Copenhagen criteria which make the citizens of those countries better off. If enlargement of European Union is better for those of us who are in and better for those who are coming in, let us make sure it progresses because it feels very much like it has stalled at the moment.

Regarding Moldova, I acknowledge that there was a bilateral summit between Moldova and the European Union, the first such summit, which is very welcome. Moldova is wedged on the edge of Europe and on the edge of Ukraine and is in a very vulnerable position. The ambassador here, Ms Jana Costachi, will have spoken to many Deputies in this House, I am sure. She is constantly talking to people here about that membership process. Moldova is not alone in that regard. There are countries like Serbia, for example, that are probably further away from being ready for membership. Georgia unfortunately has taken a turn in the opposite direction through the dominance of Georgian Dream in Georgian internal politics. The approach to opposition politicians in Georgia is deeply regrettable and sinister and is something the EU needs to keep an eye on and address. However, I do not think it reflects the attitude of Georgian people, the population of Georgia who have for a long time been progressing towards EU membership but have now been set back by that. Türkiye also has a number of issues that it has to address before it will be ready to meet the Copenhagen criteria. North Macedonia, on the other hand, has taken huge steps forward. It changed its name and flag after it ceased to be known as a former Yugoslav republic. It is now being asked by the EU to make constitutional changes as well. This week I met with the Bulgarian ambassador to Ireland who has specifically spoken about the Bulgarian minority in North Macedonia. That needs to be respected too but the danger with countries like North Macedonia and, indeed, Montenegro, which is probably the readiest of the accession countries, is that if they do not see progress down the road of membership then the people who are opposed to EU membership within those countries will start to point to the EU and say, “Look, we told you. They do not really want us as members. They just want us to keep jumping through hoops and every time we jump through the next hoop, they will produce another one.”. That is not what is happening but there is a danger that we allow that to be the narrative within those countries.

Let us recognise the readiness of countries like North Macedonia and Montenegro, the progress made by countries like Albania, and the distance still to be travelled by Bosnia-Herzegovina. Let us recognise the work they are doing. At a European level let us say that we want to welcome these countries in, we want to make progress down that road, to help them to reach the Copenhagen criteria and when they have done that, to make them full members of the EU on an equal footing with Ireland, Germany and all of the other countries that have signed up to those common ideals that are so valuable to us in Ireland.

Somehow, in this Chamber, we still have a few Deputies who will do them down for the sake of scoring their own political points. That is not the way to do it and it is far too easy to say that it is Europe’s fault. We are Europe. We make those decisions as well. Let us stand by them and recognise the value they have for the people we represent in this Chamber.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I am delighted to be able to speak in this debate. I wish the Minister of State the very best in his job. He will know my views from previous debates here

when he was previously a Minister of State. It was interesting for me when I was sitting in the Chair for the last few minutes to listen to Deputies Lawless and Ward. We have to have a balanced debate. We have people in Ireland who think their voices are not being listened to and who believe the Government is not representing all of us. I am one of those people who wants to be able to ask questions about Europe's role, how it is behaving and about the EU spending on defence. Of course, that is necessary but we must cut our cloth according to measure. I honestly believe that while we are at the table and are an equal member in Europe, on this and many issues over the last number of years, including the Covid so-called pandemic which I do not believe it was, the EU dictated totally. There are huge questions to be asked about the whole situation regarding doctors here in Ireland who have concerns. They are genuine, qualified people - of course they are.

There are thousands of people out there who have issues with our ongoing and strong efforts to be at the top of the class in Europe. That is the difference between me and Deputy Lawless. I know we cannot tell people to go and get whatever else - it is not a nice thing to say - but we need to be heard. We need to stall the horses a bit here. We are and have always been a neutral country but the triple lock is now under question. The Taoiseach has said that our neutrality is an outdated concept.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: He did not say that. He never said that.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I do not believe it is and the Irish people will have to have a vote if we want to meddle with the triple lock. It was given as a sop. I am old enough to remember canvassing in favour of Nice I and Nice II. If it was today, I would not be canvassing in favour. Nice II was passed because of concessions, one of which was the triple lock. We need to have our voice heard in Europe and our concerns need to be listened to. More balance is needed, especially from our current Taoiseach and Tánaiste. For them, everything goes. We are top of the class and will do whatever Europe wants. We have seen that with many pieces of legislation as well.

I may be straying from the European Council now, but I also recognise the European Court of Justice has given access to justice to people here when they could not get justice in Ireland. We have seen many cases like that, where the European Court of Justice gives people a hearing when they do not get a fair hearing at home. As regards the post-European Council and our issues there, we are in a very volatile time.

What is going on in Gaza is incomprehensible. Words cannot even describe how people feel but we need to be careful. We need to be an cúramach ar fad. Hopefully, that will end soon. By God, it cannot end soon enough, the slaughter of children and everything else is horrific, but we need not to make too many enemies out there either. Why are other European countries, in spite of the horror they see, being so careful and prudent? Why are they not rushing out? I say this in the context of the clamour here for Senator Black's Bill and all of the emails we get about Gaza. We are the only people making these noises. We have to have a balanced and more nuanced view. We have to accept that we are a small island and while we are part of Europe and need to be an equal player, we do not have to be the best boys in the rang gach lá. Some days we can be the buachaill or cailín dána, assert ourselves and assert the hard-fought freedom we have here as an independent State.

I also canvassed for accession to Europe in 1973. I am probably showing my age now but a lot of things have changed since then, with Ms Merkel and others. There are huge issues, and

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I am not even talking about immigration. There are huge issues with migration here. There is funding there to support it but I do not even know how we claim that funding, as a partner in Europe. We are entitled to it to pay towards the costs of migration. We cannot have completely open borders. We must be seen and heard at these meetings to be standing up for the voice of an independent, neutral country, not in a cosy cartel, trying to be the best boy in the class. We do not need to be the best buachaill in the class gach uair. That is difficult.

I look forward to hearing the Minister of State's response to the debate. People in Ireland want more of a balance. They do not want us running headlong into every issue in Europe, trying to be at the front line and the centre of it. We need to have balance and we need to have respect for the electorate here in Ireland.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty): We will now move on to questions and answers. The Taoiseach or another Minister or Minister of State will take questions and answers for a period not exceeding 20 minutes and the following arrangements will apply. There is no set time for a question or an answer but it is normal for the Chair to ask Members to be concise given the short time period available. Opposition parties and groups will be called in the following order to put a question: Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, the Social Democrats, Independent and Parties Technical Group, Independent Technical Group and Other Members. Owing to the short time available, it is usual to allow all Opposition parties and groups to ask at least one question before going back to any party or group for a second question. I now call on the Minister of State.

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Thomas Byrne): There is always a bit of confusion about this slot. A range of questions have already been asked and I am more than happy to answer them now. However, the ruling from the Chair is that the questions should be fresh in coming forward. I am in the Chair's hands on this.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mattie McGrath): I call Sinn Féin.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: How long do I have?

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mattie McGrath): The Deputy should be prudent. It depends on how many Members are offering but there are only two Deputies doing so at the moment.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Apologies, I was not anticipating this and am not sure this was a feature during the last statements on-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: It is always the way.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Okay.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mattie McGrath): Is it not good to have it?

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: It is great, yes, outstanding.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: The Deputy can ask me anything.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: I will take the opportunity. One of the primary issues I raised was the tariffs. The picture is somewhat uncertain but I ask the Minister of State to give us an update in relation to the feedback the Irish Government is getting on the discussions with

the Commission. I am interested not so much in the areas that are most vulnerable because several areas are thus. I am more interested in some of the areas that are most immediately vulnerable, namely agrifood and drink. As they are on the shelf, the impact could be quite sudden in relation to those particular products.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mattie McGrath): An bhfuil aon cheist eile ag aon duine?

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: Yes.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: It might be easier if I just quickly answer Deputy Ó Laoghaire's question because it is likely there will be several questions. On tariffs, there were discussions about tariffs and this particular debate on the margins of the European Council meeting. Discussions between the EU and the US are ongoing. As the Taoiseach already said, President von der Leyen spoke to him on Monday. Commissioner Šefčovič, who is lead for the EU, is in constant contact with the Government and with the Tánaiste. I also meet with him in Brussels. Those discussions are at a very advanced stage. I was not updated this morning because I was dealing with other matters but these discussions are ongoing. We know that the US side has announced an extension but we should be under no illusions; the trading position of the EU, and therefore of Ireland, is highly vulnerable. We are in constant contact with the Commission. I am sure the Commission is well able to handle criticism from Members of the Irish Parliament. We are talking to these people every day about the trading position of this country, which is really important for jobs and economic growth. I can think of many industries in the Deputy's constituency, in my own and in everybody else's that will be impacted by the agreements I hope will be reached and the decisions that may be made by one side or the other. We are working as hard as possible to make sure the Irish economy is protected to the greatest extent possible. That work is ongoing as we speak.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I set out a range of questions, which I am happy to go through again, but I also have a fresh one to put to the Minister of State. What is the Government's position on the European Parliament's case against the Commission, which alleges that the Commission overstepped and bypassed the Parliament with regard to the SAFE regulation?

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I will get the Deputy an exact answer on that. As I understand it, we are not part of that. The decision was taken by the Council, of which we are part, and our position is generally to facilitate what other member states want to do. As the Taoiseach has said, we are very clear that defence is a national competency. There is no EU army. If Deputy McDonald said what she said today in a presidential debate, people simply would not take her seriously. It was over the top and outrageous. She spoke about the sons and daughters of Irish parents being sent to European wars. I have never heard that before in the Dáil, although we heard it in some of the referendum campaigns. In fact, we were promised it in 2008 and 2002. Nothing could be further from the truth. I will get the exact position on that but my understanding is that our position has been to facilitate what member states want to do.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: Does the Government support the Parliament or the Commission?

Deputy Thomas Byrne: We are working very closely with the Commission. The Council has taken its own decision and that is the position we have taken on the matter. I do not accept what the Deputy has said, which is that we are funding arms manufacturers and research on how best to kill people. That is not happening. There is a country called Russia. Deputy Seán

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Crowe criticised us and told us not to use Russia as a bogeyman. I know Sinn Féin Members recently went to Malta to sign a memorandum of understanding on neutrality but, if they had gone to Finland, they would have heard the far left, the far right and everyone in between say that Russia is not a bogeyman but a serious threat to that country and that it must protect itself. We meet interlocutors in Finland and Lithuania. The Lithuanians will be over tomorrow and I am sure they will meet the Deputy's parliamentary group. They will tell the Deputy exactly the same. They do not want war. They want peace but they are determined to protect themselves. That is all they are looking to do. We certainly support their right to protect themselves, as any democracy does.

Deputy Gibney is very genuine in her point of view but she has said that Ireland, as a country, has refused to lead. However, she went on to quote the report on the EU-Israel association agreement. We led the campaign for that report. It was our diplomacy over a long period to get more countries on board that led to it. Despite what Deputy Bennett said, this is not a leaked report from the Commission. It is a report from Vice-President of the European Commission and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Kaja Kallas. She was mandated to produce this report. It was not a secret report done by the Commission. The member states of the European Union voted for this to happen. We led on making it happen and having this report published. It was published a few weeks ago. The Council conclusions talk about follow-up to this report. Again, we led on this report.

We could all do more. As I said the last time, the Opposition should criticise Government and look for us to do more. However, I could quote a minister from one particular country who is in the middle ground on this issue. He said that he is not like Ireland and Spain. That is the view. The view is that Ireland and Spain are at one end of the spectrum in the European Union. That is because of our diplomacy and our practical support for the people of Gaza. I believe I heard the Deputy looking for sanctions against Israel outside of the occupied territories Bill. Perhaps I did not pick her up correctly on that but I feel she did. Did she ask for sanctions against Israel rather than just the occupied territories? If she did not, it is fine.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I am sorry; I am not-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I am raising the issues the Deputy raised when she spoke.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mattie McGrath): Will an tAire Stáit answer the question? The Deputy can come back in afterwards.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I will come back in.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mattie McGrath): An bhfuil aon cheist eile ag an Teachta?

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I am just not sure whether this is a back and forth but, to respond to the Minister of State, what I said was that the EU-Israel association agreement is essentially a privilege. It is a trade advantage to Israel. My point is that, when we talk about sanctions against Israel for committing genocide, which the Minister of State's Government has recognised is happening, people associate that with the EU-Israel association agreement but all that would involve is the revocation of a privilege. The Social Democrats and I support sanctioning Israel at the domestic and EU levels for the genocide it is committing. I am absolutely crystal clear on that. I do not believe the suspension of the EU-Israel association agreement does that. I also do not believe the occupied territories Bill, if passed with services included, would do

that. All that would do is put in place the measures required by the ICJ ruling. We can dance on the head of a pin as to exactly what sanctions mean and whether removing privileges or meeting our legal obligations comprise sanctions but what I am talking about is the kinds of sanctions we have seen imposed on Russia, which would actually start to hurt Israel's economy. The other example is the Israeli bonds. These are all measures that would actually start to halt the genocide. Anything else is not a sanction.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I will be clear. We have called for follow-up action on the association agreement report. I will attend the Foreign Affairs Council meeting on the issue next week and I will be taking a very strong position that is consistent with what we have done before. The report is brief but it tells you enough about what Israel has done, which is exactly what the Deputy has said. The Government has taken a leadership role in approving the general scheme of the Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory Bill. Other countries have come to us directly to seek information on it. We have to be clear on its impact. The Government remains open to including services, subject to legal advice, but, as the Taoiseach said last week, we should be concerned about how the Bill could be misunderstood in the United States. The Taoiseach has highlighted US legislation that is present in many states that could penalise a company perceived to be engaging in a boycott. The Bill is the right thing to do but there is a need for honesty about its impact. The Taoiseach said that last week.

With regard to sanctions on Russia, from day one, we were very clear that we did not want to impose sanctions on Russia that would end up doing more harm to us than to it. We have to take a consistent approach. This country is very dependent on trade. All of us, including Social Democrat TDs, represent constituencies in which there are jobs that are dependent on our trading relationship with basically every country in the world. We should strive very hard for follow-up action at the EU level following the publication of the EU-Israel trade association agreement report, a report we called for and pushed for. Our shared goal has to be the end of this and to have two states living in peace and stability. We can never lose sight of that.

Deputy Barry Ward: Today, I and other members of the Ukraine parliamentary friendship group met with the ambassador, H.E. Larysa Gerasko. One of the concerns she expressed was that she has heard that Ukraine is no longer a priority for Ireland. I have never heard any such statement from any member of my party, of the Minister of State's party or of Government. Will the Minister confirm that Ukraine remains a priority for Ireland as regards the aid and support we can give to help Ukraine resist the Russian invasion?

Following on from that, I ask the Minister of State about the ship, the *Shtandart*, that was anchored off the coast of my constituency in Killiney Bay this week. It sailed under a Russian flag at the time of the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, subsequently took on the flag of the Cook Islands and is now claiming it is not a Russian ship. Can the Minister of State confirm that it is in fact a Russian ship for the purposes of sanctions?

It is not allowed to dock in Irish ports. It has now left Irish waters, but not before it forced itself into Clogherhead in County Louth to resupply, as I understand it, under a false description of an emergency it had had.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Ukraine is a top priority. I told ambassador Gerasko that was the case. I had an article published in the *Irish Examiner* this week reflecting on my visit there. I certainly encourage Members of the Oireachtas to visit Ukraine if it is safe to do so. It is never 100% safe, but it should be organised at an Oireachtas level. On my impression of the situation

in Ukraine, what really struck home to me was the lack of sleep people are having. We are not trying to compare different situations. Each situation is different, but the situation in Ukraine is a top priority. We are to the fore in supporting Ukraine at various levels. Recently we also signed onto what is called a non-paper supporting qualified majority voting at the intermediate steps in the accession process, not at the start or at the end, which is always subject to unanimity and the veto. At the intermediate steps we have supported removing unanimity because some countries, particularly Hungary, are using that to block progress.

On the *Shtandart*, the Department of Transport became aware of this on Sunday night. The ship would be required to submit a pre-arrival notice. This did not happen. There are restrictions on vessels of this type under EU restrictive measures. The operators would be well aware of this. It may be that they are looking to get a formal response from the authorities. I do not know. The ship has moved. There are derogations from the sanctions. There was no application for derogations. The EU's restrictive measures allow for the refusal of access. The vessel changed its registration from Russia to the Cook Islands in June 2024. The Department has reminded harbourmasters this week of their responsibilities under the EU restrictive measures. Apparently, this vessel has gone to Clogherhead. It has not received any permission to enter Clogherhead port. We think it left Irish waters this morning and we are looking for a report from Louth County Council. That is simply the information I have, and I cannot speak specifically about that vessel. However, there have been other occasions when we have seen hybrid measures by Russia involving this type of activity, designed to confuse and cause chaos, but usually designed to confuse, upset the local system and annoy people. There are various ranges to that but let us see what the outcome is.

Deputy Michael Cahill: I again raise the Presidency of the European Union. The Heads of State will be coming to Ireland next year, and I specifically mention Killarney as a destination for meetings and a place to stay. We have the best of hotels. There are 42 hotels in Killarney. We have the best of hotels and the best of restaurants. We have the national park, the Lakes of Killarney, the Ring of Kerry, the Gap of Dunloe-----

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mattie McGrath): Teachta, I hate to stop you, but this is not really relevant. I know you have to promote Kerry, but-----

Deputy Michael Cahill: It would be a great boost to the local economy as well.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mattie McGrath): Brostaigh ort.

Deputy Michael Cahill: I want to emphasise that.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: It is relevant because we are talking about a meeting of the European Council and there will be an informal meeting of the European Council in Ireland during our Presidency.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mattie McGrath): Not in Kerry, though.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: The final decisions have not been taken as to where the locations will be.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mattie McGrath): Good try.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: There are not many places in the country that have the capacity to hold such an event. I have no doubt that whatever decisions are taken, there will be some events

in Kerry, and I certainly hope there will be some in Tipperary and Meath.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: I have two quick questions the Minister of State might take together. The clauses of the EU-Israel association agreement are clear. Israel is in breach of clause 2, as far as I am concerned. This has demonstrated the difficulty, where international agreements are breached, to bring that to a conclusion. Is the Minister of State concerned, with regard to future potential agreements like Mercosur, for example, where commitments are given, that enacting and enforcing provisions to ensure compliance with the rules might be difficult to achieve in practice? Second, will the Government be represented at the ministerial conference in Bogotá next Thursday relating to the two-state solution and international law?

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I do not know the answer about the one in Bogotá, but we were to be heavily involved in the one France and Saudi Arabia were organising in the UN. In fact, the Taoiseach was asked to chair one of the working groups. What Ireland has done in support of the two-state solution goes back to Brian Lenihan as Minister. We think of all the great Irish foreign Ministers. Even in the conclusions this week, the non-proliferation treaty is mentioned with regard to Iran. That was Frank Aiken. Two former foreign Ministers who sat here were heavily influential on global politics even to this day, in terms of the two-state solution and the non-proliferation treaty. I am proud that is the heritage of my party. I do not know. I will get an answer for the Deputy on the Bogotá conference, but we were to be involved in the important UN conference.

I turn to the difficulties with treaties. It is easy for one person to make a decision. It is easy for one person to say “Yes” or “No”. We are in a democracy, and there are 174 of us here who make decisions. That is a bit more difficult. It is very difficult to make decisions when there are 27 people representing 27 countries around the table. It was 12 when we joined. Overall, those 27 have made really good decisions, not on every occasion, but overall, they have, and Ireland has benefited disproportionately from the decisions they have taken.

On the issue of Israel, as I said to the committee, I strongly urge that Members talk to MPs, Senators or whoever in countries like Germany, Austria or Hungary and ask them why they have these particular positions. I think we all know the answer to that, but it is good to talk to people and engage with them. The problem is not on the Irish side. The Irish side has been really clear from Government level to the Dáil, but we need to talk to our counterparts across the EU at every level. I have done that at ministerial level. I think everybody could, to find out what the reasons are.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Mattie McGrath): Before I call on an Teachta Gibney, I want to issue a *fiorfháilte* to my guests from south Tipperary, who are in the Gallery.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: A question I asked earlier was about the corporate sustainability due diligence directive, the omnibus and simplification. We have heard so much today from Government representatives about simplification and competitiveness. My issue is that too much importance is being placed on competitiveness and too little on the human rights concerns we have about supply chains. It is comparable to the Minister of State’s earlier answer to my question about sanctions. He talks about sanctions as if the only thing we need to consider is how it affects us. This is akin to asking how much a life costs. That is what I am hearing from the Minister of State when I hear that response.

Deputy Michael Cahill: I ask about visas for siblings of children in Gaza who require ur-

gent surgery. Will the Government do everything possible to expedite the processing of those?

Deputy Thomas Byrne: On the simplification agenda, there is an agenda on reporting requirements that we support. What is happening at European Commission level is that every part of the Commission is coming forward with simplification proposals that have to get discussed in the European Parliament and at the Council of Ministers. The idea is to cut red tape, not to reduce our human rights compliance or environmental credentials but to protect jobs in Europe. What motivates me every day of the week is protecting jobs. We cannot have a strong voice around the world unless we have a strong economy. We will be supporting the simplification agenda, but we will be supporting the environmental and social agenda as well. Indeed, in terms of support to poorer countries with overseas development aid, Ireland is on an upward trajectory when other countries are on a downward trajectory.

Deputy John Lahart: On the subject of our contributions, we had the Gates Foundation in yesterday. It was about maternal and child health. Ireland remains up there with just the Nordic countries and the Dutch in retaining that level of support. We are beacons in the ocean of development aid funding, but specifically in that area. The Minister of State may want to comment further.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: The work of the Gates Foundation is very important. I know the Taoiseach recently addressed the summit in Brussels and spoke to Bill Gates. We are aligned with the work that needs to be done around the world to ensure people have better lives and outcomes.

We have had a range of statements and questions and there were some other items on the European Council agenda, including Moldova, the western Balkans and EU internal security and preparedness. Migration was discussed and President von der Leyen updated the Council on the work being advanced by the Commission, including its engagements with countries of origin and transit.

The Council encouraged an intensification of work with third countries to develop comprehensive partnerships, the implementation of EU legislation such as the migration pact, and efforts to prevent and counter irregular migration and the instrumentalisation of migrants. Leaders took note of ongoing discussions on recent legislative proposals related to returns, the establishment of a list of safe countries of origin at EU level and the application of the safe third country concept.

Earlier the Taoiseach outlined that global economic developments, including trade, were discussed by leaders as part of the EU and the world agenda item. The Council further discussed the EU's preparations for upcoming summits with third countries and relations with partners, including the first EU-Moldova summit, which took place on 4 July in Chişinău. At the summit, the EU and the Government of Moldova signed a joint declaration outlining our mutual commitment to Moldova's European future and to the principles that will guide our future co-operation. European leaders agreed that the summit and the joint declaration send a further strong signal to the Moldovan population of the EU's steadfast support for their country's European future, especially as it faces continued threats from Russia, including hybrid threats aimed at interfering in its parliamentary elections, which are to be held in the autumn.

The Council also discussed developments in the western Balkans. The President of the Council, António Costa, provided a debrief to European leaders on his recent visit to that re-

gion. Ireland will continue to work closely with the countries of the western Balkans and support the reform efforts they are making on their European paths, as well as advancing the gradual integration between the EU and the region in the enlargement process, in a reversible and merit-based manner.

The June European Council conclusions included a first-ever reference to enhancing our preparedness for crises and we welcome that. Ireland is very supportive of the overall all-hazards, whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach to preparedness that the EU is taking. While it is a new approach to most member states, including Ireland, we see the utmost value in ensuring critical capacities and capabilities are in place for the full spectrum of crises we may face. The conclusions also identified serious and organised crime, terrorism, radicalisation and violent extremism as major threats to the Union's internal security. We condemn all types of hybrid activity against the EU.

Turning to external relations issues, the Council welcomed the outcome of the UN Ocean Conference and looked forward to the fourth international conference on financing for development. EU leaders also welcomed the outcomes of the high-level pledging summit for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, which I referred to earlier and which the Taoiseach attended on 25 June, the evening before the Council meeting. Deputy Lahart will be interested to hear Ireland has announced it will pledge a further €22 million to Gavi over the next five years, which is an increase on the previous five-year tranche. The Gates Foundation is generous in its support and the British Government has also made an extraordinary pledge to Gavi. The Council also addressed the Black Sea region; the worrying situation in Libya, reaffirming the EU's support for the UN support mission there; and the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel.

Deputy Paul Lawless asked the Minister for justice to tell the EU Commission "to get stuffed". I do not think he will do that. I know Deputy Lawless got his TikTok video so maybe he will not be interested in finding out the exact position. The EU is asking Ireland to implement a number of offences that I do not think anyone would have any difficulty with. They involve denying genocide, basically; denying or trivialising the Nazi genocide, the Holocaust; and public incitement to violence or hatred directed against a group of persons or a member of such a group, defined by reference to race, colour, religion, dissent or national or ethnic origin. The Minister for justice will communicate directly with the Commission but it is already an offence in legislation. We have common law in Ireland and incitement to violence on those grounds is already an offence. What Deputy Lawless discussed is not what was discussed last year. It is simply scaremongering to suggest the EU will somehow threaten our freedom of speech. The reality is the EU is now among the few places in the world where there is freedom of speech. There are issues there that are part of the balancing act and which I am not sure anybody would have any difficulty with.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 3.15 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 4.15 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 3.15 p.m. and resumed at 4.15 p.m.

Meastacháin i gcomhair Seirbhísí Poiblí 2025: Teachtaireacht ó Roghchoiste

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Tá Roghchoiste na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus Phobal Labhartha na Gaeilge tar éis a bhreithniú a chríochnú ar na Meastacháin Athbhreithnithe seo a leanas i gcomhair seirbhísí poiblí le haghaidh sheirbhís na bliana dar críoch an 31 Nollaig 2025: Vóta 42 - An Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail, agus Gaeltachta, clár D - an Ghaeltacht.

All-Island Strategic Rail Review: Statements (Resumed)

Deputy Joe Neville: Today, I am delighted to resume statements on the all-island strategic rail review recommendations. In my constituency of Kildare North, many people depend on rail transport to commute to work and I have been one of those over the years and continue to be. People living in towns such as Naas, Maynooth, Kilcock, Leixlip and Celbridge all commute daily. I commend the work the National Transport Authority, NTA, has done so far on building a strong rail service to our capital city. Over the years as my career has continued, I have seen those improvements. The Minister of State, Deputy Canney, in his statements last week acknowledged that the works for DART+ West to Maynooth and DART+ South West to Hazelhatch and Celbridge have been approved. This will double the city centre's rail capacity, which is vital for people living in my constituency. I have raised this issue already in the Dáil many times and I have raised it previously as a councillor, but I would I like to see the DART+ West project extended to also serve the people of Kilcock.

More nationally, I welcome the fact that rail journey times between the island's major cities would be significantly reduced, by 50% in some cases, with the introduction of the plans here and that there would be an introduction of hourly services between key cities. We have all seen those maps through the years of what our rail service used to look like and Ireland was greatly connected by rail. These modern, new upgrades will hopefully bring us back to that. The report outlines the hopes to connect as many towns of 10,000 or more to the rail network as possible. In the report, we also see the benefits we could get. We could have increased speeds of up to 200 km/h on core routes. Previously, that is something we might only have seen in the likes of Japan and France with their bullet trains. We all looked longingly at those compared with our own trains. We need to get there. In the modern State we have, with the financial support we have and the investment we are ready to give, we need to get there. Like that, it also calls for quadrupling tracking and capacity expansion near Dublin, which should be rolled out further. Hourly intercity services with two-hour regional frequencies were previously things we could only dream about.

As I outlined, we will see the extension of electrification and the rolling stock replacement. Once again, that is critical. I talk about electrification and, as I speak, the lights go out in the Chamber. I do not want to blame myself for that but it is exactly what happened. We would have DART underground - I shudder to think that when I say "DART underground", the place will shake - inclusion as a long-term goal too. Ultimately, these are all plans on a report and something we need to get to.

As the report says, rail has the potential to deliver on accessibility, climate, connectivity,

economic growth, environmental and regional development goals across the island. As a country, we have had our borders - real borders and borders we do not see - but at the same time, somehow our rail has always been limited by them. We need to get back to our pre-State situation where lines did come across the Border. I welcome the statements we are making on the report that was delivered previously. I welcome the Minister's engagement on this and I, for one, want to see all the items put in place.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: I am really glad the Minister of State, Deputy Seán Canney, is here, and the reason for that is the western rail corridor. He has always been committed to it. I commend him on how he worked when in opposition to secure the western rail corridor – first the link from Athenry to Claremorris and then the link from Claremorris to Collooney. Therefore, I do not need to tell him how important it is; he knows.

What I want is to get the Claremorris–Athenry line up and running. The Minister of State and I know from conversations, whether with Colman Ó Raghallaigh from West on Track or those involved with the Bradley report, that the project is absolutely viable. Not only that, but it is also necessary for businesses and the growth of the region. The western rail corridor, no more than Knock Airport, would be a catalyst for development in the region. It is what people want.

I certainly welcome the all-island strategic rail review but I am concerned that the Claremorris–Collooney part is not in it. Although this is the case, can I have a commitment from the Minister of State, as someone who is now in government, to open both parts of the line fully? Could he indicate, even today, when the Athenry–Claremorris part will reopen?

It is not often in this House that we have cross-party agreement but there is cross-party agreement on this project. We have the money to go ahead with it. Indeed, we had money many times over that we could have levered from the EU, but we did not avail of it. That is history, however. As enterprise spokesperson for Sinn Féin, I am interested in our getting the line up and running as quickly as possible.

We had much discussion in the past few days on student fees and the absolutely dire situation many families are in because of the cost of education. Accessing education is very important and that is why we need the line. It would open up transport.

Tourism is also a factor. I just met representatives of the Irish Hotels Federation and they would tell you how important rail is. When people come to this island, they want to be able to travel by rail. I am glad to see the Minister of State in the position he is in, and I have every faith and hope that he will do the right thing regarding the western rail corridor.

Deputy Michael Collins: The all-island strategic rail review, published in July 2024, outlines a comprehensive vision for enhancing the rail system across Ireland and Northern Ireland up to 2050. Recommended in it are additional capacity, faster services, higher frequency, electrification and new routes. These are great except if you live in rural Ireland, where I happen to live. Light rail is to come to Cork city but, for the whole of 128 km down to Ardgroom or 120 km down to Mizen Head, there is not even a sign, never mind a piece of rail. The funny thing is that in 1850, there was a rail line to Schull and I would have been able to walk from the house to hop on the train. Today, there is not even a sign for 120 km or 130 km. The first thing the Minister of State should do is put up a few signs to let people know rail exists in Cork. It comes to Cork city. That there is none in west Cork is not the Minister of State's fault but that of his predecessors. Unfortunately, in the 1950s and 1960s, somebody came up with a bright idea to

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pull up the rail line and that was the end of it. The problem we have is that nobody has a vision. West Cork is only one place but I am speaking on behalf of every rural community that does not have light rail. Rural Ireland has an entitlement to have some kind of transport service, at least to bring people to rail services. That is what we are examining. I am involved with this locally. There is no point in my dreaming that rail will come back to Bantry and Schull, where it was in the 1850s, because we seem to have no money now. We had plenty of money then.

We should push very hard to ensure there is at least connectivity of some sort, and a plan. We were slated during the election campaign for saying light rail should be brought to rural communities. The least we should do is put a feasibility plan together and cost it. We know the Minister of State cannot bring light rail down to Castletownbere or Goleen, but he might, in the lifetime of the Government, commit to bringing it to Bandon and having connecting buses to Bandon every morning. He should bring people to Cork city, where there is rail at present; however, for the love of God, he should also put a sign up indicating rail exists and give us some hope that some Minister will decide someday that Cork county needs a bit of rail as well. That is all I am asking of the Minister of State today. I plead with him.

The problem we have is that we have so many issues and worries today that even the roads are an issue. There was a protest outside today, organised by Councillor Ian Neary of Independent Ireland, on the closure of Herbert Road, Bray, County Wicklow. The protesters were worried about losing their road, never mind rail. Imagine closing a road at this time in Bray, County Wicklow. This issue is of great importance.

I ask the Minister of State to work with us to deliver at least a plan for how to connect to light rail. If light rail is not going to be brought to rural communities, they should at least have bus links to rail. We are not at this point at the moment.

We have very many issues in rural Ireland, including west Cork. In this regard, I am going to raise a certain matter even though I need the Minister of State to talk to other Ministers. CCTV is going to be lost to the people of Skibbereen, Dunmanway and Clonakilty. Today it was switched off. This was an outrageous decision that will lead to a lot of crime, an increase in crime. I had no other opportunity to raise this today. I plead with the Minister of State to speak to the relevant Minister to ensure CCTV will be restored, at least in Clonakilty and Skibbereen.

I plead with the Minister of State to work with us on rail. Independent Ireland has a plan and proposes that communities should at least have connectivity if they have no rail. There should at least be signs and bus connections to every rail link in the country. We genuinely would settle for that as an honest solution to an almighty crisis.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I welcome this opportunity. I remember doing the Leixlip–Ballycoolin water main in 2004 or 2005. An area from Clonee to Navan was supposed to be left for rail. The rail was nearly to come the following day but the position is still the same. Although the posts are up and will soon be rotten, no rail ever came.

In the west, the Claremorris–Athenry line is ferociously important. The Minister of State will remember that, in 2016, the time he went into government, he and I were talking about including the western rail corridor in the programme for Government. Enda Kenny was Taoiseach at the time. That was nearly ten years ago but nothing has happened since other than the review, although I agree it was needed. A bridge was taken down at Barnaderg or Ballyglunin at the time of the road project and there was a big hullabaloo about it. The NRA said it would

put it back up. How much will it cost to put it back up now compared with at the time in question? I do not know whether the cost was €1 million at the time. It is going to cost an awful lot more now to put it back up.

The bottom line is that I am sick of hearing about reviews and various focus groups. We know the service is needed from Claremorris, and indeed Collooney, as a previous speaker has said. There should be a joined-up approach. The west of Ireland, no more than any other part, deserves rail. The south and the east need it. I have mentioned Navan before. A lot of people live there. Either we decide to fund rail or we do not. The Foynes line is being done under TEN-T, I believe. That is great because it needed doing. We need to make sure our ports are developed and given facilities for bringing goods from A to B.

When the term of this Dáil is over, someone else could be in the position of the Minister of State. He has the ball in his court now. He should hop it and put the necessary funding in place for the western rail corridor. My fear is that the minute someone from the west is not in government, the Government will consider another part of the country and try to direct the money towards it. That is my honest opinion. I wish the Minister of State luck in this regard. If the project is not carried out now, we will be as well to forget about it. I have been here a long time and nothing has happened.

Deputy Paul Lawless: When the Ministers were announced, I was delighted the Minister of State, Deputy Canney was being given this responsibility. He realises the importance of the western rail corridor. The Claremorris to Athenry line is fundamentally important for our region. The Minister of State is only up the road and knows the value of this. I ask him to drive on this project and make sure that the legacy of Seán Canney in government is the western rail corridor reopened from Claremorris to Athenry and beyond from Claremorris into Collooney. We cannot forget about north Mayo and Sligo. It is really important. I attended a Western Development Commission presentation recently, which stated our region is lagging well behind in infrastructure and transport.

One argument the Government has made over many years relates to the viability for this project. I have looked into the data on the Limerick to Galway line. Since that line has been opened, there have been 5 million journeys. It is growing rapidly every year. In 2023, there were over 600,000 journeys. It is really important and there is a significant case for this. I commend the Minister of State and his work over many years. My colleague in Tuam, Luke Silke of Aontú, has worked with the Minister of State. I refer particularly to the West on Track campaign and Colmán Ó Raghallaigh, who has been a tremendous advocate on this. I commend the great work and ask the Minister of State to drive on this project and make sure that the legacy of this Government and Seán Canney for our region is the western rail corridor from Athenry to Claremorris and on to Collooney.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: We heard recently that the population of the island of Ireland has gone above 7 million for the first time. It is really a great time to be looking at an all-island rail strategy. What is not to like about this strategy? I commend the Minister of State but I also want to commend Eamon Ryan who initiated this strategy a few years ago. It is great that it was done. Rail is a great way to distribute economic growth and bring economic development to different regions. What is not to like about that? Rail is a great way to do transport-led planning, so we can plan residential areas and build-ups around rail and public transport, not around the private car. Rail is a key part of this island's plan to do decarbonisation. We can get away from the car and from diesel engines. We can look at electric and battery-operated locomotives,

which is already planned between here and Drogheda. Rail has a huge part to play in that.

There are fairly significant costs associated with this and an investment of €32 billion is the price tag being put on the table. In the long term, from a decarbonisation perspective alone, it is a price worth paying if we can get the economic development done. The Minister of State is very familiar with rail issues in his own region. It is so important all around the country. I am fully supportive of this and really look forward to Government supporting it and running with it in the context of the NDP and all the projects to come.

Deputy Albert Dolan: It is great to have a debate on the all-island strategic rail review. One of the key recommendations of the review is the reopening of the western rail corridor and the consideration of same. The Minister of State has been a strong advocate for the western rail corridor since long before I entered politics in 2019. I commend him on that. I will be doing everything I can as a Fianna Fáil representative for Galway East to ensure that this project gets the funding necessary to be a success and gets the necessary backing in our national development plan to drive forward not just Galway and Mayo, but the western seaboard.

The Minister of State may have heard me on Galway Bay FM last week raising concern around Ballyglunin train station. It is vital that Ballyglunin station be operationalised and considered in any plans for the reopening of the corridor. There is a stretch of about 30 km between Athenry and Tuam and we cannot leave that entire hinterland without rail. If consideration is being given to the western rail corridor, we need to ensure that rail is reopened and Ballyglunin forms a central part of it.

Deputy Peter Roche: I acknowledge the extension of the last train from Galway to Dublin on Saturdays, which is now running at 8.50 p.m. as opposed to 7.25 p.m., which is a step in the right direction. It is important also to highlight the inconsistency in the service during the week. The last train departs at 10.25 p.m., yet on Saturdays, when demand for cultural and social events peaks, the cut-off is at the earlier time of 8.50 p.m. That is a little bit short of what is required to support cultural events. Now with the Galway International Arts Festival around the corner and many headline events coming up during the summer, most of which will be finishing at 9 p.m., we are missing the opportunity to support those local cultural events and the night-time economy. I ask the Minister of State and Irish Rail to consider better Saturday departure times so as to better accommodate those passengers.

There have been a lot of contributions today on the western rail corridor. The west is crying out to be opened properly by rail. It is 32 years since we had a freight service on that line and 48 years since we had a passenger service, which really tells its own story. Like many in east and west Galway, Sligo and Mayo, I am anxious to find out the timelines as to when it is possible that we would be looking at investment. The all-island rail review and the feasibility study indicated that there was no consideration going to be given to anything else except rail along that alignment. I am delighted to be the Minister of State's colleague from east Galway and that he is in the position where he can deliver this. The timelines are something I am anxious to understand.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: I welcome the publication of the all-island strategic rail review. This transformative plan sets out 32 strategic recommendations that would almost triple the number of people using our rail network, from 65 million journeys a year to 180 million by 2050. Critically, it would bring 700,000 more people within a 5 km radius of a railway station, boosting access in communities North and South that have been underserved for decades.

With faster trains, more frequent services, new routes, and electrification, the plan aligns with our national economic objectives and would greatly enhance cross-Border connectivity. It is a railway strategy that looks to the future, but the work must start now.

At the same time, we must be honest about where we focus public investment. Too often, we have seen eye-watering sums spent on short-term interventions, or layers of consultancy, indeed sometimes with inadequate consultation or none at all, that deliver little lasting value and actually undermine public support for change. Every euro spent on transport should be justified through a clear cost-benefit analysis, with a strong bias in favour of long-term, sustainable solutions. As we look to the decades ahead, this also means protecting vital infrastructure, especially our coastal rail lines. This work needs to get under way urgently. In my own constituency of Dún Laoghaire, and along the eastern rail line, we must future-proof our network against sea level rises. While the consultation on the east coast railway infrastructure protection projects is under way, progress is painfully slow and needs to be accelerated. This is a moment for ambition but also for wise, strategic investment.

Deputy Ryan O'Meara: I would like to raise the Limerick to Ballybrophy regional line with the Minister of State. Before coming in here, I told one of my colleagues what I was going to speak on and the response was, "Oh, do you have a railway line in north Tipperary?" This railway line is probably one of Iarnród Éireann's best-kept secrets. It services Birdhill, Nenagh, Cloughjordan and Roscrea but it is a regional line within infrequent services that sees a lot of cancellations. To be fair to Irish Rail, it has seen significant investment in recent years, particularly in continuous welded rail. It links County Limerick and rural towns and villages in north Tipperary to the main Dublin-Cork line. It has massive strategic and regional importance and enormous potential for the people I represent to connect us far more by rail to Limerick, but also to Cork and Dublin. However, investment is needed. The all-island strategic rail review states lines such as this should see one train per two hours on regional lines. That is the frequency we need to get to for this route. We need faster speeds. To do that we need to reduce the number of rail crossings, particularly manual rail crossings on that line so trains can go faster. The investment has been put into the continuous welded rail, but Irish Rail is limited by the number of manual crossings that are there. They either need to be removed or automated to allow trains to move faster to give more commuters a reason to travel along that line and get to places faster, but also more frequently.

I wish to bring this line to the attention of this House because I am conscious many Members do not seem to know about it. I would be delighted to welcome the Minister of State to Birdhill, Nenagh, Cloughjordan or Roscrea. The train station in Cloughjordan is only 1 km from my home. He would be very welcome for a cup of tea while he there as well.

Deputy Darren O'Rourke: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the all-island strategic rail review. It is an important piece of work. Anyone who looks at the old maps of the railway lines compared to today knows there is a significant job of work to fill the gaps. There are lots of gaps, such as the west and the north-west, but I wish to focus on my area. It is important and I welcome that we have DART+ West at M3 Parkway. We need to go further with that, including up the east coast. In principle, it is fundamental that we invest and expand the rail services. It will deliver transformational change.

I wish to specifically address the Navan rail line. The Minister of State will not be surprised. It is a matter I have raised with him on a number of occasions. I attended a meeting with the project leads who are well placed local people. They know the area very well. They have got

skin in the game like myself and thousands of others. We want to see that project delivered. I welcome the investment and progress in it thus far. We heard the public consultation on the emerging preferred route is likely by the end of the year or early next year. It will be an important consultation on that. People will have the opportunity to have their say. This will be transformational for the whole county, including Navan, Dunshaughlin, Ratoath and Ashbourne, which have a huge population. We are repeatedly hearing that we need to push, push, push to ensure there is continual funding to bring this beyond the planning stage. There is funding up to 2027 to bring the project to a railway order, but we need continuous funding to see this rail line delivered. That is the number one priority for us. I ask the Minister of State to hear that. We want funding in the national development plan for the uninterrupted progress on the Navan rail line, which would be transformational for the people of County Meath. It is certainly a priority for me, Sinn Féin and my colleague, Deputy Guirke.

In the meantime, bus services need to work for people. I would like to bring the 103 bus service to the Minister of State's attention. Services were cancelled yesterday morning. The 7.40 a.m. bus was cancelled. The 8.30 a.m. bus broke down. This morning, the 8 a.m., 9 a.m. and 11.50 a.m. services were cancelled. This affected a huge number of people. They are well used services but are being interrupted and cancelled all too often. There are a shortage of drivers, mechanics and roadworthy vehicles. I ask the Minister of State to do everything to ensure Bus Éireann is running a fleet that is fit for purpose. It is incredibly important while we wait for delivery of a 21st century rail service.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I am delighted the Minister of State is here. I compliment him on his appointment and I wish him well. I have been working with him on many issues. I look forward to engaging fully. We have a rail service from Waterford to Limerick. It is wholly inadequate. I get on the train in Cahir and change at Limerick Junction. Cahir train station is not open. People cannot buy a ticket. Níl aon leithreas ann. Is baile an-lárnach agus an-mhór ar fad é Cluain Meala and it is the same way. The station is there, and buses are all stopped there, but the train station is locked. Tá sé dúnta. It is not good enough that people may have had a long journey and want to use the toilets or facilities. It is the same for Carrick-on-Suir. People cannot buy tickets. Passengers have to buy a ticket on the train or at Limerick Junction when they change. We need huge investment in the Waterford strategic line through Carrick-on-Suir, Clonmel and Cathair Dún Iascaigh and onto Tipperary town. Again, that station is closed but my daughter does not get on there. There is a train every hour at Limerick Junction. It is a great central service. I salute the drivers, office staff, floor staff and ground staff in Limerick Junction and Thurles. They are exceptional. I got the train yesterday at 3.45 p.m. in Thurles. I was in this Chamber at 6 p.m. after getting the bus from Heuston Station. We are blessed to have that. We need to look after this small line and upgrade it to allow the trains to go faster.

Importantly, it should be ar oscailt i gcónaí and people should know about it. Nobody knows the train goes from Cahir. There are very few people I meet. There is absolutely no marketing. I am sure it is the same from Carrick-on-Suir, Clonmel or Tipperary town. People do not know. They ask me how I get a train from Cahir. I reply that I go to the station. They do not believe it. We must praise the staff who are in there. It is a strategic line. It is important to the south-east region. It is so important to Tipperary, Limerick and Waterford. We must invest in that line to make sure there are more trains. There are only a number of services per day. There is one in the morning at Cahir at 8.25 a.m. There is not another one until the evening. There is only one tonight. My daughter has gone home on it today. The 5 p.m. train from Heuston to Cahir is the only one. We need more trains on. We definitely need the leithris ar oscailt. God,

we do. It is not fair for people to come off a bus or a train and have no facilities. It is just not good enough. They are fine stations. They are lovely iconic buildings. They are need of some repairs, but they must be kept open and functional. It is pity that we have not done so. I look forward to engaging with the Minister of State. I ask him to come down and visit to see for himself. Bheadh fíorfháilte roimhe chuig Tiobraid Árann theas.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am glad to get the opportunity to ask the Minister of State to provide enough trains and carriages to bring the people from Kerry up to Dublin on Saturday and to bring them home. We are taking on Tyrone and we need our supporters there. We hope we will win the match. We will be looking for more trains then to come up again.

We have one train service that operates at different hours of the day from Tralee through Killarney and onto Mallow. We are very forlorn in that there is not even a dining car or trolley car on that train. We are three hours and 20 minutes away from Dublin. I recall a time when my father was coming up here and he appreciated a dining car where he could get his breakfast on the train. That is not available anymore. Why is that? I am asking the Minister of State to rectify that. It not on at all in today's service for people to come all the way to Mallow. Sometimes they may get it on the Cork train if they change at Mallow. The service we are getting at the minute is not good enough.

Between Mallow and Tralee and Killarney and Tralee, only one junction is not automated. This is the junction at the gates at Stagmount, Rathmore. I have asked Iarnród Éireann several times before to provide an automated crossing there. It is the only junction without one. When I submitted a parliamentary question, I was told there were 130 of them in the country, but it is the only one on the Mallow to Killarney line that is not automated. There are 14 families, including young women and children, crossing these gates several times per day and late at night. We are coming into the wintertime again. They have to get out to open the gate and have to go back to close it. In this day of age, they are afraid of having to do that. I am appealing to the Minister of State now, and I am expecting him to react to this, to put in an automated crossing for the people of Stagmount in Rathmore. They have been waiting long enough for it. We have been asking for it for 15 or 16 years. I am appealing to the Minister of State, in his time in government, to ensure that the crossing is automated at Stagmount junction at Rathmore.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Cathal Crowe): I travelled with the Deputy on the train recently and we had a good sing-song. It was a very memorable trip.

We will finish this segment with a statement from the Minister. Deich nóiméad le do thoil.

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Seán Canney): The first thing I want to do is wish Kerry and Meath the best of luck next weekend. I thank all the Deputies for their contributions during this afternoon's debate and also last week's debate. They can see from my record and my opening statement that there is a continued commitment in investment in public transport with the significant progress that has been made over the last few years in our rail network.

Notably, we have made progress on the DART+ programme with recent planning decision for DART+ West and DART+ South West. I look forward to achieving a major milestone in the programme next year when the new DART battery electric train fleet is scheduled to start entering service between Dublin and Drogheda. We also made good progress in upgrading train stations across the network with the recent opening of a new platform at Cork Kent Station, which

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I visited recently, ongoing works at Ceannt Station in Galway and the ongoing construction of the new Plunkett Station in Waterford.

I would also like to reiterate that the Government remains clear on the need to continue investing in the transport sector, and implementing the vision as set out in the all-island rail review will be a key priority for this Government. By taking a holistic view of the rail network across the whole of the island rather than looking at one region or another, the rail review not only encourages balanced regional development but also looks at how individual lines or projects fit into and strengthen the wider network in its entirety. The review has set out 32 strategic recommendations to enhance our rail system in Ireland and Northern Ireland up to 2050, aligning with the net zero carbon commitments in both jurisdictions. The implementation of these recommendations would have a transformative impact on the rail system across the island. Frequency would increase to at least hourly on key intercity routes and every two hours on regional and rural lines. Rail journey times within cities and regions would also be significantly reduced. A decarbonised railway would be provided for largely through overhead electrification of the busiest routes, with alternative low-emission traction technology such as batteries deployed on the more lightly trafficked lines. The recommendations will significantly increase the length of the rail network from around 2,300 km across the island currently to circa 3,000 km. Furthermore, the vision involves the construction of new rail lines, particularly in the north midlands and north west, widening accessibility and connectivity. The vision includes a commitment to commencing reinstatement of the western rail corridor between Athenry and Claremorris at the earliest possible date.

Individual projects will all be subject to detailed economic analysis as they are advanced through the approval process. As I noted in my opening statement, my Department is currently working with a range of stakeholders to bring forward a rail review recommendation for further analysis and progression. In this context, my Department is supporting Iarnród Éireann's ongoing assessment of the western rail corridor from Athenry to Claremorris, and I expect to receive a report on this matter this year. We are also working with the European Investment Bank, EIB, and other rail stakeholders, North and South, to consider how to best sequence and implement the recommendations of the rail review with a view to optimising their development for passengers and societies.

This work with the EIB has included the preparation of a project prioritisation strategy. The strategy has been broadly agreed by the project steering group and will be published later this year. This work is also helping to inform my Department's engagement with the ongoing review of the national development plan. The outcome of this review will ultimately determine the amount of capital funding available to progress new transport infrastructure over the medium term.

I would like to reiterate that this Government remains committed to investment in public transport. Individual programmes and projects referred to within the rail review will be advanced, subject to funding and relevant approvals. I also look forward to working closely with the National Transport Authority and Iarnród Éireann in the coming years to progress the review's recommendations and make these investment plans a reality.

I will address some of the issues that were raised here last week by some of the Deputies. I am currently unaware of any plans for a new train station in Drogheda, although this will be kept under review. Irish Rail will continue to engage with parties proposing a new station, and my Department will keep me informed of this issue.

Somebody raised the issue of the extension of the DART service to Wicklow. The National Transport Authority's Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy 2022-2042 includes a recommendation to extend the DART service to Wicklow town. I understand this extension can be facilitated through the utilisation of the new battery electric DART carriages, which are coming into service.

Somebody else raised the issue of the Shannon Airport rail link. On the plans for a rail link to Shannon Airport, I note that one of the strategic recommendations in the rail review is to connect international airports, including Shannon Airport, to the rail network. The programme for Government also includes a commitment to improve connectivity and public transport to our airports. As with other recommendations in the review, this proposal will be advanced subject to securing approvals and funding, which will be informed by the outcome of the national development plan.

Lastly, I am pleased to inform the House that Irish Rail, or Iarnród Éireann, recently reached an agreement with Translink for the expansion of the quieter coach initiative to the cross-Border Enterprise rail service. It is hoped that this will be introduced by early next year. This follows on from the successful introduction of a quieter coach on the Dublin to Cork rail services.

With regard to having services available, such as a cup of tea or a breakfast on the trains, Irish Rail is looking at that at the moment to see how best they can deliver it. I will talk to Irish Rail about the Galway service line. Navan rail is progressing and hopefully a rail order will be delivered on that the year after next.

We are talking about the rail network and the all-island rail review. Before I finish up, I want to acknowledge the work that was done by my predecessor, the Minister of Transport, Eamon Ryan, in bringing together the vision everybody had for their own area and putting it into a strategic plan. When we pull it together into one plan, each element of it becomes more viable. I want to acknowledge the work he undertook in opening up the rail line from Limerick to Foynes Port, which is another catalyst to allow for the Atlantic economic corridor across the western region to develop as a rail network.

We have a lot done. People are complaining that we do not have enough carriages now when 30 years ago we were closing down railway lines. We have got to a stage where the tipping point has been reached and instead of closing down, we are opening up and modifying. When I see the work that has been done in Limerick, Galway, Cork and Waterford stations, outside of Dublin, I would say that this is going to be good for regional development. We will work on it as best we can with the support of all in the House.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Cathal Crowe): I thank the Minister of State very much. I thank Members.

Estimates for Public Services: Messages from Select Committees

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Cathal Crowe): The Select Committee on Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science has completed its consideration of the following Revised Estimate for public services for the service of the year ending on 31

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December 2025: Vote 45 - Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

The Select Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation, and Taoiseach has completed its consideration of the following Revised Estimates for public services for the service of the year ending on 31 December 2025: Vote 1 - President's Establishment; Vote 2 - Taoiseach; Vote 3 - Attorney General; Vote 4 - Central Statistics Office; Vote 5 - Director of Public Prosecutions; and Vote 6 - Chief State Solicitor's Office.

Mental Health Bill 2024: Report and Final Stages

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Cathal Crowe): I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Butler.

Amendment No. 1 in the names of Deputies Clarke, Cullinane and Ó Murchú has been ruled out of order. It was previously rejected in a committee of the whole Dáil.

Amendment No. 1 not moved.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Amendment No. 2 in the names Deputies Clarke, Cullinane and Ó Murchú arises out of committee proceedings. Amendments Nos. 2, 3, 5, 34, 39, 49, and 121 to 133, inclusive, are related and will be discussed together. Does Deputy Clarke wish to speak to these amendments?

5 o'clock

Deputy Sorca Clarke: I move amendment No. 2:

In page 16, to delete lines 32 to 35 and substitute the following:

“ “mental health difficulty” and/or “psychosocial disability” mean, in relation to a person, any mental disorder, illness or disability, whether of a continuous or intermittent nature, which affects the person's thinking, perception, emotion, or mood and impairs the mental function of the person;”.

We had this debate at length on Committee Stage but it is important and I want to come back to it. Words matter. How people feel about themselves matters, as does how they and others view the challenges they may have with their mental health care.

The definition of a mental disorder does not sufficiently capture those struggling with mental health issues, particularly those who do not have a formal diagnosis, which may be a result of various factors, including lack of access to diagnostic services. The term “mental disorder” implies a clinical and medical model of mental health but ignores the social, cultural and sociological factors which contribute to mental distress. Recovery-based models emphasise empowerment, self-determination and social inclusion. This reinforces my previous statement on how words matter. Acknowledging psychosocial disability would also better align us with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the social model of disability where the term is used. It also lays the foundation for more holistic support by acknowledging both mental health difficulty and psychosocial disability. This amendment seeks to ensure the provision of multidimensional support. That is not just medical treatment but everything else a

person needs to overcome the illness they have and to live their best life.

Deputy Liam Quaide: The use of the term “mental disorder” is archaic and pathologising. Language reflects reality but also shapes it, and the term “mental disorder” is reductive medicalising. It has the potential to objectify people with mental health difficulties. We have had a long history of that and stigmatisation. This is something we need to move away from, not only in our concrete actions but also in the language we use.

It is also unnecessary in the Bill. Every instance of the term in this Bill is qualified by further comments on severity and impact, and that includes the sections on involuntary treatment. It is not as if “mental health difficulties” trivialises someone who might require involuntary admission or treatment because you can have severe mental health difficulties just as you have mild mental health difficulties. I continue to advocate for the substitution of the term “mental health difficulties” for “mental disorder” in the legislation, in line with Sharing the Vision, our national mental health policy.

It is also worth noting that people in secondary and emergency mental health services typically do not meet the criteria for just one so-called mental disorder. They tend to experience a range of mental health difficulties which overlap diagnostic categories. In this sense, the term “mental disorder” is also simplistic. “Mental health difficulties” is more reflective of the multi-faceted nature of severe psychological states. “Mental disorder” suggests an outdated medical model of these states and personality patterns.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): I do not intend to rehearse the extensive debate on similar amendments which Deputy Clarke raised on Committee Stage. I acknowledge the amendment tabled by Deputy Quaide.

I already moved the Government amendment on Committee Stage to amend the definition of “mental disorder” by inserting references to “serious” and “significant” in the definition to address concerns the definition was too broad. It is important to ensure there is a legal distinction between the type of condition that is more severe and enduring and may lead to involuntary admission, and other mental health difficulties which may require treatment but will not lead to involuntary admission.

More than 90% of mental health service provision is in the community and the term “mental health difficulty” is often used in the context of people accessing those services. It is important there is a legal distinction between a mental health difficulty and a more severe and enduring mental disorder. While any term used to describe mental health conditions may be contested, I do not believe the alternatives to “mental disorder” proposed here on Committee Stage are the better options. I am not opposed to using a term other than “mental disorder”, however, if a suitable alternative is proposed. I do not believe “psychosocial disability” or “mental health difficulty” are better options. At the same time, when we get to the Seanad with this Bill, if a wording other than “mental health disorder” is proposed, I will certainly consider it but I do not believe either of the two suggested on Committee Stage and now on Report Stage are right either.

I know it is complicated. I would not call the wording archaic but, because 90% of mental health service provision in Ireland is in communities and those people would have mental health illness and mental health difficulties, the term “mental health disorder” is more appropriate for those who are involuntarily detained or even voluntarily detained.

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Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I move amendment No. 3:

In page 16, line 32, to delete “ “mental disorder” ” and substitute “ “mental health difficulties” ”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Amendment No. 4 has been ruled out of order. It was previously rejected in a committee of the whole Dáil.

Amendment No. 4 not moved.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I move amendment No. 5:

In page 18, line 5, to delete “mental disorder or other”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Amendments Nos. 6 and 7 have been ruled out of order. They were previously rejected in a committee of the whole Dáil.

Amendments Nos. 6 and 7 not moved.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Amendments Nos. 8, 26, 33, 50, 53, 72, 74 to 86, inclusive, 89, 90, 92 to 96, inclusive, 105 to 109, inclusive, and 118 to 120, inclusive, are related and may be discussed together.

Deputy Mary Butler: I move amendment No. 8:

In page 21, lines 4 and 5, to delete “Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform” and substitute “Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation”.

The amendments in this grouping are all technical amendments relating to changes required to ministerial titles previously used in the Bill. These amendments update the titles of the Ministers for justice, children and public expenditure.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: I move amendment No. 9:

In page 21, line 9, after “Act” to insert “and shall carry out an interim review after 2.5 years”.

This is an area that has me very concerned. While five years is some progress, it is not enough. The Government has the opportunity here to put some very real and substantial oversight into the Bill by accepting the Sinn Féin amendment which proposes the carrying out of an interim review after two and a half years. Five years is too long; it needs to be much quicker than that. Without the two-and-a-half-year review, my serious concern is any unintended consequences will not be highlighted quickly enough for us to be able to make meaningful decisions and changes. We could see implementation failures. Reviewing after two and a half years, however, would allow us to ensure those do not become embedded as the norm. It would

also highlight emerging issues coming through.

The Bill, when passed, will affect some of the most vulnerable people in our society, many of whom are in crisis, especially those subject to involuntary admission. If legislation has unintended negative consequences, a five-year review may allow significant harm or inequality to persist for too long. A two-and-a-half-year review would ensure earlier accountability and correction where needed. A shorter-term review will allow almost real-time monitoring and course correction during the lifetime of the Act and not just afterwards. It could improve public trust and give Members of the Oireachtas, the health committee, service users, clinicians, stakeholders and third parties concrete data and feedback to inform ongoing legislative improvements. Including a two and a half year review would bring us in line with international human rights frameworks that demand timely scrutiny of coercive and high-impact legal provisions.

Deputy Mary Butler: I thank Deputy Clarke for the amendment. Section 8 of the Bill provides for a review of the operation of this enactment five years after its commencement. If it is necessary for a review to be carried out sooner than five years after the commencement of this enactment, that option will be available to the Government of the day. Section 8 of the Bill provides for a review to take place not later than five years after commencement. This means that the review may take place at any time within the five-year period if it is the wish of the Minister of the day; that is my understanding.

I believe we will need significant time for the legislation to bed in across the mental health services and there will be a significant lead-in time, as we have discussed. I am not sure whether we would be able to deliver a meaningful review after two and a half years. However, section 8 of the Bill, which we have already voted on, provides for a review to take place not later than five years after commencement, which means the review can take place at any time within the five-year period. Therefore, I think it is already covered.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: I understand that completely. My concern is that “not later than five years” can mean four years and 364 days. I want to see something that is more tangible, and I think it needs to be put into this Bill. While five years is a standardised approach, two and a half years is much more effective because it allows us, as legislators, to make the appropriate changes as soon as possible. It means those who are delivering the care, receiving the care or advocating on behalf of those receiving the care can point to a definitive line or definitive time-frame and say that the review will be done within two and a half years. If the full review was to be done within the four years and 364 days, that is well and good, but two and a half years is a halfway point. It allows people to look at it, engage with it and ensure that those of us who have been handed the responsibility of managing and developing legislation act as quickly as is appropriate.

Deputy Mary Butler: I am satisfied with the five years. The whole Bill will not all be enacted on the same day. I expect the parts of it regarding the governance of CAMHS and community premises to come first. The changeover in age verification and the piece in regard to voluntary detention and the Garda may take longer until we have all the authorised officers in place. To set a definitive timeline of two and half years is not appropriate when some parts of the service might only have been up and running for six months. That is why we landed on the period of up to five years as against the ten years that was in the original draft. That is the reasoning behind it.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: By not accepting the amendment and not recognising the value of

the two and a half year interim review, the Minister of State is closing the door on potential learnings for the new parts of the Bill that may not be enacted or may not be fully in place. There may be very valuable learnings from parts of the Bill that have been enacted and the services that have been in place for two and a half years. Those learnings will not be shared with or available to the other parts that need to come more into place.

Deputy Mary Butler: Again, I am satisfied. It is a massive piece of legislation, as the Deputy knows, with 220 different sections. A huge number of changes will be made to how we deliver mental health services and there will also be major change for those who deliver mental health services. It will be a staggered, incremental roll-out of the Bill, in terms of a review for a service that might only be up and running for six or nine months. By the time we get to the five years, I expect that all the services will have been well embedded for about two or three years at that stage and that is the reasoning behind it. Nonetheless, I appreciate where the Deputy is coming from.

Amendment put:

| <i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 64; 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>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i> | <i>Burke, Colm.</i> | |
| <i>Coppinger, Ruth.</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>Daly, Pa.</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>Farrelly, Aidan.</i> | <i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i> | |
| <i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i> | <i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i> | |
| <i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i> | <i>Chambers, Jack.</i> | |
| <i>Gannon, Gary.</i> | <i>Clendennen, John.</i> | |
| <i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i> | <i>Collins, Niall.</i> | |
| <i>Gould, Thomas.</i> | <i>Connolly, John.</i> | |
| <i>Graves, Ann.</i> | <i>Cooney, Joe.</i> | |
| <i>Guirke, Johnny.</i> | <i>Crowe, Cathal.</i> | |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Hayes, Eoin.</i> | <i>Cummins, John.</i> | |
| <i>Healy, Seamus.</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>Dolan, Albert.</i> | |
| <i>Kerrane, Claire.</i> | <i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i> | |
| <i>Lawless, Paul.</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>Mythen, Johnny.</i> | <i>Grealish, Noel.</i> | |
| <i>Nash, Ged.</i> | <i>Harkin, Marian.</i> | |
| <i>Newsome Drennan, Nata-sha.</i> | <i>Harris, Simon.</i> | |
| <i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i> | <i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i> | |
| <i>O'Callaghan, Cian.</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'Hara, Louis.</i> | <i>Higgins, Emer.</i> | |
| <i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i> | <i>Keogh, Keira.</i> | |
| <i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i> | <i>Lahart, John.</i> | |
| <i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i> | <i>Lowry, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i> | <i>Maxwell, David.</i> | |
| <i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i> | <i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i> | <i>McCarthy, Noel.</i> | |
| <i>Quaide, Liam.</i> | <i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i> | |
| <i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i> | <i>McCormack, Tony.</i> | |
| <i>Rice, Pádraig.</i> | <i>McEntee, Helen.</i> | |
| <i>Sheehan, Conor.</i> | <i>McGrath, Mattie.</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>Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.</i> | |
| <i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Murphy, Michael.</i> | |
| | <i>Neville, Joe.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i> | |

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| | <i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Connor, James.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Dea, Willie.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</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>Roche, Peter.</i> | |
| | <i>Scanlon, Eamon.</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 Liam Quaide; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Amendment declared lost.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh): Tá leasuithe Uimh. 10 go 24, go huile, as ord.

Amendments Nos. 10 to 24, inclusive, not moved.

Deputy Mary Butler: I move amendment No. 25:

In page 32, line 39, to delete “for recommendation” and substitute “for a recommendation”.

I will move amendments Nos. 25, 46, 62, 65, 97 to 101, inclusive, and 112, which have been grouped. These are all technical amendments required to correct various typographical errors in the Bill as amended.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Mary Butler: I move amendment No. 26:

In page 33, line 36, after “Justice” to insert “, Home Affairs and Migration”.

Amendment agreed to.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh): Tá leasuithe Uimh. 27 agus 28 as ord.

Amendments Nos. 27 and 28 not moved.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh): Amendments Nos. 29 and 30 are related and may be discussed together.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: I move amendment No. 29:

In page 37, line 22, after “for” to insert “no more than”.

As the Chair said, amendments Nos. 29 and 30 are related. They concern one of the issues that has most frequently been brought to my attention since Committee Stage of the Bill, namely, the extension of the involuntary detention period from 21 days to, potentially, 42 days. The doubling of that timeframe has caused very real concern both for professionals and individuals who have previously been involuntarily detained, and for their advocates and the groups that support them. What has been very clearly said to me is that concern is based upon the increased risks associated with prolonged involuntary interventions. The doubling of that timeframe, and particularly its point of entry into this Bill, has shaken many groups to their core.

One group put it to me that the additional 21-day extension appears to proceed without necessitating a new capacity assessment. I can understand those concerns. I understand where it is they are coming from. They are coming from a place that wants the best possible treatment for people when and how they need it. However, the lack of what is perceived to be, and the Minister of State may clarify this, an absolute need for a new capacity assessment to be carried out within those 42 days is deeply troubling. If possible, I ask her to provide clarity on it. As I said, it is the topic that has been raised with me most often since Committee Stage. I would appreciate that clarity, as would the groups, the ex-patients and those who support them.

Deputy Marie Sherlock: I support amendment No. 30. The rationale for this extension is far from clear. It is obviously a matter of great concern to those who understand the intricacies of involuntary detention or involuntary treatment, the timeframe and the process surrounding all that. Those who have approached us, and I think everybody in the Opposition, believe there are very significant grounds for inappropriate care of the individual without the necessary safeguards being in place.

The other important point is there have been calls to ensure we have an appropriate advocacy and complaints mechanism within the Bill to ensure those who are involuntarily detained or are being treated can get the proper representation. There are two elements to this: a lack of a new capacity assessment if the period is extended and a wholly inadequate or absent advocacy and complaints mechanism for those advocating on behalf of individuals. In that context, it is very difficult to support an extension from 21 to 42 days. We need to go back to the original 21 days, ensure it is kept at that and that the necessary safeguards are in place. We very much support the amendment.

Deputy Mary Butler: I do not believe amendment No. 29 is necessary as, under the Bill, a person may only be involuntarily admitted when the consultant psychiatrist believes that person has a mental disorder that meets the criteria for involuntary admission. If at any point during

the person's admission the responsible consultant psychiatrist no longer believes the person meets the criteria for involuntary admission, that person must be discharged. That is what is in the Bill. This can happen at any time during the 21 days of the initial admission order or at any point during any renewal order. As such, it is not necessary to include "no more than" because if the responsible consultant psychiatrist believes the person no longer meets the criteria before the end of the 21-day period, he or she is legally obliged to discharge that person, as per the Bill.

Amendment No. 30 does not align with the principles of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015. The 2015 Act presumes that all people have the capacity to consent and that a capacity assessment should only be carried out where there is a reasonable belief that a person must lack capacity. It does not provide for automatic capacity assessments, as this presumes that a person lacks capacity. I know it is very technical but a significant amount of time has been spent on this piece of the Bill. Furthermore, capacity assessments should be specific to a decision rather than a general status determination.

Section 23 provides for the duration and renewal of an involuntary admission order. That is already in a different section of the Bill. It does not include any information on consent to treatment for involuntarily admitted people. Capacity assessments are regularly carried out during a person's involuntary admission, under the current Mental Health Act, and that will continue under this enactment. A consultant psychiatrist must be satisfied that a person continues to lack capacity before treatment can be administered at any point. This is the new person-centred approach. If, after a few days of treatment of a person who lacks capacity, the consultant psychiatrist believes that person may now possess the capacity necessary to make decisions about their care and treatment, the psychiatrist is obliged to carry out a formal capacity assessment. As stated, the Bill makes it clear that a person with capacity cannot be treated without their consent, outside of very limited circumstances on application to the High Court.

It may be too prescriptive to specify in primary legislation how regularly a capacity assessment should take place. This might be better left to secondary legislation, or guidance or a code of practice from the Mental Health Commission.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: I fundamentally disagree with the last part where the Minister of State said it should be left to secondary legislation. This House has seen no secondary legislation. I agree that regulations have a place, but it is not here. It would not give the confidence or reassurance to a patient who is being involuntarily detained, their loved ones or their advocates that at some point a regulation may exist that would entitle them to a formal capacity assessment.

I am also very concerned that by not putting this into the Bill, we are not establishing from day one that every individual who may be involuntarily detained for more than 21 days is entitled to the exact same rights and entitlements in the exact same format regardless of where they are receiving their treatment. It would not be best practice to not have that in this Bill. I believe it is best practice to include it in primary legislation because everybody needs to be crystal clear as to what exactly their entitlements or their loved ones' entitlements are when we are talking about people who have been involuntarily admitted for a period exceeding 21 days.

We need to bear mind that 21 days is three weeks. If that it extended to 42, it becomes a month and a half. Why would anybody argue against somebody having a formal capacity assessment if the 21 days is to be extended? What is to be gained from it? In my opinion, the individual, their loved ones and advocates will lose. It needs to be standardised and needs to be

a formal capacity assessment. It needs to ensure that the person who is receiving treatment is receiving it only for the length of time that they need it.

Deputy Liam Quaide: Along with my colleagues, I express my concern here about the late-stage doubling of the timeframe for involuntary treatment from 21 to 42 days in a Government amendment submitted on the deadline for Committee Stage amendments. At the moment we are discussing the necessity of a capacity assessment after 21 days. However, the 21 days itself is fundamentally problematic. The whole point of this Bill is to strengthen human rights safeguards and not to just have a doctor-knows-best approach to treating people in emergency care. The Government's Committee Stage amendment dramatically increases the risk of prolonged involuntary interventions. As my colleagues have said, it does not appear to mandate a new capacity assessment after the 21 days have elapsed.

I know the Minister of State said that capacity assessments happen regularly in psychiatric settings. However, from what she has said, it sounds like it is at the discretion of the psychiatrist. It is not mandated in law according to this provision. That is our concern. As we know, capacity is not fixed. It is fluid and it can change from day to day. Therefore, it is really important to have that safeguard implemented.

Deputy Mary Butler: This is not a late-stage amendment. It was discussed on the very first day; I do not think Deputy Quaide was here. We had a discussion for four hours. That was part of an amendment that was taken I think about a month ago; it is not new today. That was discussed at that time. This is another amendment that has been brought forward in relation to the 42 days.

We cannot provide secondary legislation until primary legislation passes. It is just not possible.

I just want to go back to the point that a very small cohort of people, who lack capacity, will be involuntarily detained. That is a fact. It is the smallest number possible. However, this area has attracted a huge amount of concern. We all hear from people who have an enduring mental health condition who may spend a lot of time in an approved centre in the psychiatry department. It can be like a revolving door. They have capacity and come out. Then they might be back in within two or three weeks. They might present at the emergency department.

I want to be crystal clear that a consultant psychiatrist must be satisfied that a person continues to lack capacity before treatment can be administered at any point. That is really important. For that to happen, they have to assess whether a person lacks capacity or not. A person may lack the capacity today, could give consent today that their loved ones would be involved but by tomorrow they could change their consent. As Deputy Quaide has worked in mental health, he understands this.

Regarding the capacity piece, if the responsible consultant psychiatrist no longer believes that the person meets the criteria for involuntary admission, it means the person now has capacity within the 21 days or within the 42 days. It can happen within seven days or 14 days. That person must be discharged if they do not want to stay there voluntarily. There is no choice; it will be in the law when the Bill is passed. This could happen at any time during the 21 days. It could happen on day two, day four or day six and as such it is not necessary to include "no more than" because if the responsible consultant psychiatrist believes the person no longer meets the criteria-----

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An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I thank the Minister of State.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I clarify my remarks about the late-stage amendments. What I was referring to was over the time span of this Bill, which is a number of years, it was a late-stage amendment that was very dramatically impactful. It really altered much of this Bill. It took people by surprise and did not give sufficient time for consultation with interest groups outside of psychiatry. It is obvious that this came from lobbying by interest groups for psychiatry, as is their right, and I can see where they are coming from. At the same time, service users are an equally important if not more important interest group because they will be receiving the treatment.

It came at a late stage just on the deadline for submissions on Committee Stage. I was not here for that; I was sick on that day. I am not sure there was any discussion of it actually because it came in under the radar based on my reading of the transcript from that day. I think it needs to be justified. What is the human rights rationale? What is the clinical rationale to go from 21 days to 42 days? We have had an expert group working on the Bill for years. We have had the Mental Health Commission working on it. That is quite an about-turn.

Deputy Mary Butler: I-----

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh): I am sorry. The Minister of State has spoken twice.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: I move amendment No 30:

In page 37, between lines 39 and 40, to insert the following:

“(c) where a person is subject to involuntary treatment for a period exceeding 21 days, shall carry out a formal capacity assessment at regular intervals to determine whether the criteria for continued involuntary treatment still apply.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh): Tá leasuithe Uimh. 31 agus 32 as ord.

Amendments Nos. 31 and 32 not moved.

Deputy Mary Butler: I move amendment No. 33:

In page 41, lines 14 and 15, to delete “Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform” and substitute “Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation”.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I move amendment No. 34:

In page 47, line 13, to delete “a mental disorder” and substitute “mental health difficulties”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh): Tá leasú Uimh. 35 in ainm an Teachta Quaide as ord.

Amendment No. 35 not moved.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh): Tá leasuithe Uimh. 36, 40 go 45 go huile agus 48 gaolta agus pléimid le chéile iad.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I move amendment No. 36:

In page 60, to delete line 21.

This amendment relates to the changes in respect of involuntary treatment. I have spoken already about my concerns about the doubling of the timeframe for that from 21 to 42 days at a very late stage of the legislative process. The expanded criteria for involuntary treatment is also very concerning. While detaining somebody on the basis that he or she is “likely to benefit” from treatment is problematic, it does at least allow for a continued respect for a person’s capacity to consent to or refuse specific treatment, except in emergency circumstances where not having that treatment poses a risk to his or her well-being. However, extending that same “likely to benefit” criterion to justify involuntary treatment, particularly before a capacity assessment is even carried out, risks rendering nearly any involuntary intervention permissible once a person has been involuntarily detained. As such, a person subject to involuntary detention is likely to face a significantly broader and less accountable regime of involuntary treatment. Instead of the term “likely to benefit”, there should be more specific language to ensure that the legislation reflects that involuntary treatment may only be administered in urgent circumstances where the delay or absence of such treatment would pose a serious risk to the health or safety of the person.

A key omission from the Bill which makes the amendments around involuntary treatment all the more concerning is the continued absence of a commitment to an independent complaints process or a statutory right to independent advocacy for those who experience involuntary detention and treatment.

I want to put on the record that to rule amendments on an independent complaints mechanism and independent advocacy out of order on the basis that they have a cost implication is not a defensible position. The Bill is meant to strengthen human rights’ safeguards for people attending mental health services and the fact that this would come with some financial cost in terms of the resourcing involved is self evident.

Deputy Mary Butler: I will speak to amendments Nos. 36, 40 to 45, inclusive, and amendment No. 48. The safeguards contained in the amended Bill in relation to consent to treatment are appropriate and balanced. I would like to reiterate that consent to treatment provisions in the Bill, in line with the Mental Health Act 2001, only apply where a person has been assessed as lacking capacity. Outside of very limited circumstances, a person who has capacity cannot be treated without his or her explicit consent. Furthermore, the Bill allows for consent to be granted by a substitute decision-maker where a person lacks capacity. Similarly, if a person has made a valid, relevant advance healthcare directive when he or she had capacity, the decisions in that directive must be respected when the person loses capacity. All people should be encouraged to make advance healthcare directives or to appoint designated healthcare representatives to make sure their will and preferences are respected when they lack capacity.

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Amendment put and declared lost.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh): Ta leasuithe Uimh. 37 agus Uimh. 38 as ord.

Amendments Nos. 37 and 38 not moved.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I move amendment No. 39:

In page 63, line 6, to delete “a mental disorder” and substitute “mental health difficulties”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I move amendment No. 40:

In page 63, to delete lines 10 and 11 and substitute the following:

“(iii) the life of the person, or that of another person, is at risk, or the health of the person, or that of another person, is at risk of immediate and serious harm,”

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I move amendment No. 41:

In page 63, to delete lines 13 to 23

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I move amendment No. 42:

In page 63, line 34, to delete “or further treatment period”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I move amendment No. 43:

In page 64, line 1, to delete “or further treatment period”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I move amendment No. 44:

In page 64, lines 4 and 5, to delete “or further treatment period”

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I move amendment No. 45:

In page 64, line 7, to delete “or any further treatment period”

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Mary Butler: I move amendment No. 46:

In page 64, line 18, after “proposed,” to insert “or”.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: I move amendment No. 47:

In page 64, line 21, after “made” to insert “within 5 days”

This amendment relates to a potentially prolonged involuntary treatment period without timely access to decision-making supports. This amendment seeks to put in a definitive timeframe for when an application to the Circuit Court to put decision-making supports in place for somebody who lacks capacity or who is waiting on a capacity assessment can be done. It can be done at any time for involuntary treatment but the five-day window seeks to do just that and to ensure that people get the proper decision-making supports in a timely way and that everybody is fully aware of what the timeframe will look like. If somebody is involuntarily detained or admitted, his or her first 21 days is well known, with the potential to be extended to 42 days under this Bill, but there is no definitive timeline around an application to the Circuit Court for decision-making supports and that is what this amendment seeks to do. At the very least everybody should be fully aware of what a timeline for involuntary admittance is going to look like. Should the decision-making capacity of an individual be under question, everybody should be fully aware of the timeframe for assessments to take place.

Deputy Mary Butler: Again, this amendment relates to people who are involuntarily detained who do not have capacity. In many cases a person can regain some level of decision-making capacity within two to three weeks of admission. If an application is made on behalf of all these people, the vast majority of the applications will not be required as they will have regained capacity a short number of days after the making of the application. Requiring that applications to the Circuit Court be made within five days of a person being assessed as lacking capacity will be incredibly resource-intensive both for mental health services and for the Courts Service.

It is appropriate to leave the decision on when to apply to court within the period after admission to the person’s responsible consultant psychiatrist and multidisciplinary team. It is important to stress that any time a person is involuntarily detained in any approved centre or department of psychiatry, the Mental Health Commission is informed.

6 o’clock

That is another safeguard to be aware of. People who are involuntarily detained will also be entitled to a tribunal. It is important to allow mental healthcare professionals to prioritise applications in respect of people they do not expect to regain capacity rather than taking up court time making applications in respect of people who are expected to regain capacity within a short period of time after admission.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: With the greatest respect to all those health professionals and to the Minister of State, nobody knows what is going to happen in the future. There may be a presumption of two or three weeks but that presumption may turn out to be false. There may be a presumption of a week that turns out to be false. None of us has the ability to see into the future. I agree with what the Minister of State said earlier on. The number of people who are involuntarily admitted is very low and the number of those who lack capacity is even lower. However, it is my firmly held belief that anybody who is a member of such a minority has a level of vulnerability that is without compare in the general community. That is why we have proposed this definitive timeline as to when an application should be made to the Circuit Court.

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These people are one of the most vulnerable sections of our community, if not the most vulnerable. They deserve whatever additional protection we can provide through this Bill, specifically with regard to clear timelines.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I move amendment No. 48:

In page 64, line 31, to delete “and any further treatment period”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I move amendment No. 49:

In page 64, line 39, to delete “a mental disorder” and substitute “mental health difficulties”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Mary Butler: I move amendment No. 50:

In page 67, line 7, after “Justice” to insert “, Home Affairs and Migration”.

Amendment agreed to.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh): Tá baint ag leasuithe Uimh. 51 agus 52 le chéile agus pléifear le chéile iad.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: I move amendment No. 51:

In page 68, between lines 6 and 7, to insert the following:

“(4) The use of chemical restraint shall be notified to the Mental Health Commission within 24 hours and made available for review upon request by the individual or their advocate.”.

This amendment relates directly to the use of chemical restraint on those subject to involuntary admission and treatment. This is an area within the Bill that we absolutely need to strengthen. Previous patients, their loved ones and advocates have strongly asked for provisions on chemical restraint. Earlier drafts included a comprehensive section on chemical restraint but all references to and protections against the use of chemical restraint were subsequently removed. I believe this is partly down to the Bill having been introduced four years ago with pre-legislative scrutiny having been done almost three years ago. The sheer number of amendments we see here today is the result of that passage of time. This omission is really troubling given that this practice is not covered under existing regulations or codes of practice. Why were such significant changes made to this Bill in respect of the use of chemical restraints? Why was a requirement to notify the Mental Health Commission of the use of chemical restraints not included as a Government amendment?

Deputy Mary Butler: I thank Deputy Clarke. Amendment No. 51 does not provide for a definition of “chemical restraint” or “advocate”, two terms which have not been used elsewhere in the Bill. Amendment No. 52, proposed by Deputy Quaide, exactly matches the text of the published general scheme and includes terms that have not been used in the Bill itself. The

Department has not included provisions on the use of chemical restraint in the Bill as initiated or as amended. While a reference was included in the published general scheme of the Bill, there was not a consensus on what constituted chemical or pharmacological restraint, the extent to which it is used in Ireland or a definition of the practice. At a practical level, when a doctor administers medication to a person, it should always be for the purposes of improving the condition of that person. Everyone will agree that the issue of chemical restraint is complicated. I do not believe the amendments proposed here today adequately address the complexities of the issue. It may be more appropriate for a future review of this enactment to consider the matter in greater detail. I will refer the question to the Mental Health Commission for its opinion.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I echo Deputy Clarke's concerns about this. The Bill provides no specific safeguards or statutory provisions governing the use of chemical restraint on persons who are subject to involuntary detention and treatment. It does not even really acknowledge the reality of chemical restraint. Chemical restraint happens quite often. It involves administering powerful sedatives to people who are in extreme states of mind. While the intentions may be good, there is a need for very clear safeguards. In the context of the human rights impact of the practice, it is worth bearing in mind that, where people with intellectual disabilities are admitted to a psychiatric ward, their behaviours and mental state can deteriorate because such wards are often not suitable for their needs. They can then be subjected to disproportionate rates of chemical restraint when compared to other groups of service users. That is something we really need to bear in mind when devising legislation on mental health.

The heads of Bill included a comprehensive section on chemical restraint but all references to and protections against the use of chemical restraint were subsequently removed. It is worth noting that the Mental Health Commission and Mental Health Reform issued a very clear call as to the need to closely monitor and regulate the use of chemical restraint. The omission of this section is very troubling given that, as Deputy Clarke has said, it is not covered under existing codes of practice and is therefore not properly reviewed by the Mental Health Commission. It is really important that we reintroduce that section to the Bill.

Deputy Mary Butler: I will be brief. As I have said, chemical restraint is a complicated matter. I do not believe the amendments proposed here today adequately address the complexities of the issue. The Mental Health Commission can determine a code of practice in respect of any restrictive practice. It is positive that the Mental Health Commission noted in its latest publication that there has been an overall reduction in episodes of restrictive practices. That is very welcome. It is what we want to see. I am not satisfied that the proposed amendments deal with the issue. I will refer the matter to the Mental Health Commission with a view to determining a code of best practice on chemical restraint.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: After such a length of time since the Bill was introduced, that is simply not good enough. Chemical restraint must be governed with the same clear rules and subject to the same level of oversight as any other restrictive practice outlined in this Bill. I do not know why the decision was made to take out the reference to chemical restraint but that was the Minister of State's decision and this is where we stand today. Any restrictive practice causes concern for patients and their advocates and rightly so. However, it was the Minister of State who referred to other regulations, secondary legislation and whatever else was mentioned earlier on. That does not give her a plausible platform to dispute the term "advocate", especially given that Government has said it will be bringing in safeguarding legislation which, as we heard in the health committee today, will deal with advocates and make strong asks in respect of the term.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I move amendment No. 52:

In page 69, between lines 6 and 7, to insert the following:

“Chemical restraint

57. (1) In this section, “chemical restraint” means the use of medication to control or modify a person’s behaviour when no medically identified condition is being treated, or where the treatment is not necessary for the condition or the intended effect of the drug is to sedate the person for convenience or disciplinary purposes.

(2) A person shall not apply chemical means of bodily restraint to a person unless such restraint is determined, in accordance with the rules made under *subsection (3)*, to prevent the person from injuring himself or herself or others and unless the chemical restraint complies with such rules.

(3) The Commission shall make rules providing for the application of chemical restraint on a person.

(4) Chemical restraint should be used only in exceptional circumstances, where there is no safe alternative and for as limited a time as possible.

(5) Each approved inpatient facility will keep a register of the use of chemical restraint, and each use of chemical restraint shall be recorded in the register, and on the person’s clinical file, in addition to any other information required by the Commission, as set out in the Commission’s rules made under *subsection (3)*.

(6) In this section, a “person” includes involuntary persons, intermediate persons and persons detained in the Central Mental Hospital or in a designated centre (within the meaning of the Criminal Law (Insanity) Act 2006) but does not include voluntary persons.

(7) A person who contravenes this section or a rule made under this section shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding €5,000.”.

Amendment put:

| <i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 67; 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> | |

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| <i>Collins, Michael.</i> | <i>Burke, Colm.</i> | |
| <i>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</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>Daly, Pa.</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>Farrelly, Aidan.</i> | <i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i> | |
| <i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i> | <i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i> | |
| <i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i> | <i>Clendennen, John.</i> | |
| <i>Gannon, Gary.</i> | <i>Collins, Niall.</i> | |
| <i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i> | <i>Connolly, John.</i> | |
| <i>Gould, Thomas.</i> | <i>Cooney, Joe.</i> | |
| <i>Graves, Ann.</i> | <i>Crowe, Cathal.</i> | |
| <i>Guirke, Johnny.</i> | <i>Cummins, John.</i> | |
| <i>Hayes, Eoin.</i> | <i>Currie, Emer.</i> | |
| <i>Healy, Seamus.</i> | <i>Daly, Martin.</i> | |
| <i>Hearne, Rory.</i> | <i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i> | |
| <i>Kelly, Alan.</i> | <i>Devlin, Cormac.</i> | |
| <i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i> | <i>Dolan, Albert.</i> | |
| <i>Kenny, Martin.</i> | <i>Feighan, Frankie.</i> | |
| <i>Kerrane, Claire.</i> | <i>Fleming, Seán.</i> | |
| <i>Lawless, Paul.</i> | <i>Foley, Norma.</i> | |
| <i>Lawlor, George.</i> | <i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i> | |
| <i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i> | <i>Geoghegan, James.</i> | |
| <i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i> | <i>Grealish, Noel.</i> | |
| <i>McGettigan, Donna.</i> | <i>Harkin, Marian.</i> | |
| <i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i> | <i>Harris, Simon.</i> | |
| <i>Mitchell, Denise.</i> | <i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</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>O'Callaghan, Cian.</i> | <i>Keogh, Keira.</i> | |
| <i>O'Donoghue, Richard.</i> | <i>Lahart, John.</i> | |
| <i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</i> | <i>Lawless, James.</i> | |
| <i>O'Hara, Louis.</i> | <i>Lowry, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i> | <i>Martin, Micheál.</i> | |
| <i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i> | <i>Maxwell, David.</i> | |

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| <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>Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.</i> | |
| <i>Wall, Mark.</i> | <i>Murphy, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Ward, Charles.</i> | <i>Neville, Joe.</i> | |
| <i>Ward, Mark.</i> | <i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i> | |
| <i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</i> | <i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Connor, James.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Dea, Willie.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</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>Roche, Peter.</i> | |
| | <i>Scanlon, Eamon.</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 Liam Quaide and Sorca Clarke; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Amendment declared lost.

Deputy Mary Butler: I move amendment No. 53:

In page 70, line 11, after “Justice” to insert “, Home Affairs and Migration”.

Amendment agreed to.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 54 to 59, inclusive, have been declared out of order.

Amendments Nos. 54 to 59, inclusive, not moved.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I move amendment No. 60:

In page 75, between lines 20 and 21, to insert the following:

“(4) Where a child is involuntarily admitted to a registered adult acute mental health centre pursuant to an involuntary admission order under *section 66* that this period shall be no longer than 72 hours.”.

The significant decrease in the number of admissions of children to adult psychiatric wards is very welcome. However, the absence of legislative safeguards in the Bill leaves children vulnerable to this practice becoming more widespread again in the future. Notably, concluding observations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed serious concern about Ireland’s practice of admitting children to adult psychiatric units. The Bill should explicitly prohibit the admission of children to adult units. Allowing the practice to continue is essentially legislating for the continued under-resourcing of CAMHS inpatient units by Government. As a compromise, we need at the very least a maximum period of 72 hours for such admissions. That would allow for emergency situations at weekends and so on.

Deputy Mary Butler: I spoke at some length on Committee Stage about child admissions to adult units and do not propose to speak about the matter in great detail again but I would like to speak to the amendment. We do not need to put a time limit in primary legislation on how long a child can be admitted to an adult unit. The small number of child admissions that currently take place are done on an emergency basis and for as short a period as possible. I cannot accept a restriction on the length of an admission because there may be cases when it is not safe or in the child’s best interest to move him or her within 72 hours after admission. We should work towards the elimination of the practice of child admissions to adult units at the level of service and policy, rather than through legislation. So far this year, two young people who gave consent and whose families consented were admitted to an adult ward.

On the Deputy’s comment on underfunding of CAMHS, 51 CAMHS beds are fully staffed today and 15 of them are vacant.

Deputy Marie Sherlock: The fundamental reality is there is a misalignment regarding the ages at which children age out of paediatric mental health services and physical health services. It is 16 for mental health services and 18 for physical health accommodation. We need to put in place safeguards for children who are admitted to an adult psychiatric facility. That is why we propose in amendment No. 63 that the District Court has to play a critical role. We have

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spent some time talking about this and are disappointed the Minister of State will not support either amendment No. 60 or amendment No. 63, which is an important compromise regarding the misalignment and the unacceptable situation whereby children are treated in an adult centre. We very much support amendment No. 60 and I note amendment No. 63, which we will not have time to get to.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The time for this debate has now expired. Do Members have any short comments?

Deputy Mark Ward: We have had this conversation many times about admitting children into adult psychiatric facilities. The Government had four years to get this right and it has failed. It is draconian. The practice is wrong. Every human rights organisation has said it is absolutely wrong. The Government also had four years to get the regulation of CAMHS in place. It is not in this Bill. It is literally not good enough. We will be voting on a Bill that does not regulate CAMHS. There were numerous reports, including the Maskey report and the Mental Health Commission report, which outlined all the problems there were in CAMHS. The number one recommendation in those reports was that CAMHS needed to be regulated and the Government failed to do so. There is not one mention of dual diagnosis in the Bill either.

Deputy Mary Butler: The Deputy was not speaking to the amendment. May I conclude?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: No. It is now 6.29 p.m. and I am obliged to put the question.

The time permitted for this debate having expired, I am required to put the following question, in accordance with an order of the Dáil of 8 July: "That the amendments set down by the Minister for Health and not disposed of are hereby made to the Bill; Fourth Stage is hereby completed; and the Bill is hereby passed."

Question put:

| <i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 86; Níl, 69; Staon, 0.</i> | | |
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| <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>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i> | |
| <i>Butterly, Paula.</i> | <i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i> | |
| <i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i> | <i>Cronin, Réada.</i> | |
| <i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i> | <i>Crowe, Seán.</i> | |
| <i>Cahill, Michael.</i> | <i>Cullinane, David.</i> | |
| <i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i> | <i>Cummins, Jen.</i> | |

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| <i>Calleary, Dara.</i> | <i>Daly, Pa.</i> | |
| <i>Canney, Seán.</i> | <i>Devine, Máire.</i> | |
| <i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i> | <i>Doherty, Pearse.</i> | |
| <i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Donnelly, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Chambers, Jack.</i> | <i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i> | |
| <i>Clendennen, John.</i> | <i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i> | |
| <i>Collins, Niall.</i> | <i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Connolly, John.</i> | <i>Gannon, Gary.</i> | |
| <i>Cooney, Joe.</i> | <i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i> | |
| <i>Crowe, Cathal.</i> | <i>Graves, Ann.</i> | |
| <i>Cummins, John.</i> | <i>Guirke, Johnny.</i> | |
| <i>Currie, Emer.</i> | <i>Hayes, Eoin.</i> | |
| <i>Daly, Martin.</i> | <i>Healy, Seamus.</i> | |
| <i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i> | <i>Hearne, Rory.</i> | |
| <i>Devlin, Cormac.</i> | <i>Kelly, Alan.</i> | |
| <i>Dolan, Albert.</i> | <i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i> | |
| <i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i> | <i>Kenny, Martin.</i> | |
| <i>Feighan, Frankie.</i> | <i>Kerrane, Claire.</i> | |
| <i>Fleming, Seán.</i> | <i>Lawless, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Foley, Norma.</i> | <i>Lawlor, George.</i> | |
| <i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i> | <i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i> | |
| <i>Geoghegan, James.</i> | <i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i> | |
| <i>Grealish, Noel.</i> | <i>McGettigan, Donna.</i> | |
| <i>Harkin, Marian.</i> | <i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i> | |
| <i>Harris, Simon.</i> | <i>Mitchell, Denise.</i> | |
| <i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i> | <i>Murphy, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i> | <i>Mythen, Johnny.</i> | |
| <i>Heneghan, Barry.</i> | <i>Nash, Ged.</i> | |
| <i>Heydon, Martin.</i> | <i>Newsome Drennan, Nata- sha.</i> | |
| <i>Higgins, Emer.</i> | <i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i> | |
| <i>Keogh, Keira.</i> | <i>O'Callaghan, Cian.</i> | |
| <i>Lahart, John.</i> | <i>O'Donoghue, Richard.</i> | |
| <i>Lawless, James.</i> | <i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</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>McCormack, Tony.</i> | <i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i> | |
| <i>McEntee, Helen.</i> | <i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i> | |
| <i>McGrath, Mattie.</i> | <i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i> | |
| <i>McGrath, Séamus.</i> | <i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i> | |
| <i>McGreehan, Erin.</i> | <i>Quaide, Liam.</i> | |

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| <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>Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Smith, Duncan.</i> | |
| <i>Murphy, Michael.</i> | <i>Stanley, Brian.</i> | |
| <i>Neville, Joe.</i> | <i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i> | |
| <i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i> | <i>Wall, Mark.</i> | |
| <i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i> | <i>Ward, Charles.</i> | |
| <i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i> | <i>Ward, Mark.</i> | |
| <i>O'Connor, James.</i> | <i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</i> | |
| <i>O'Dea, Willie.</i> | | |
| <i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</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>Roche, Peter.</i> | | |
| <i>Scanlon, Eamon.</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 Sorca Clarke and Marie Sherlock.

Question declared carried.

Statute Law Revision Bill 2024 [Seanad]: Report and Final Stages

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: As there are no amendments tabled for Report Stage, we now proceed to Fifth Stage.

Bill received for final consideration.

Question, “That the Bill do now pass”, put and declared carried.

Supports for Survivors of Residential Institutional Abuse Bill 2024: From the Seanad

The Dáil went into Committee to consider amendments from the Seanad.

Seanad amendment No. 1:

Section 3: In page 6, lines 31 and 32, to delete “Minister for Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform” and substitute “Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation”.

Seanad amendment agreed to.

Seanad amendment No. 2:

Section 6: In page 9, between lines 28 and 29, to insert the following:

“(5) (a) The Minister shall review the criteria determined under *subsection (3)* on a regular basis and may amend the criteria following any such review.

(b) The first review under *paragraph (a)* shall be carried out not later than 3 years from the date on which the criteria under *subsection (3)* are first published, and, in the case of each subsequent review, not later than 3 years from the date of the previous review.

(c) The Minister, on being satisfied that no application has been made under *subsection (1)* for a period of not less than three years, may, by order, appoint a day on which this subsection shall cease to have effect.”.

Question put: “That Seanad amendment No. 2 be agreed to.”

| <i>The Committee divided: Tá, 85; Níl, 64; Staon, 0.</i> | | |
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| <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>Brennan, Brian.</i> | <i>Brady, John.</i> | |
| <i>Brennan, Shay.</i> | <i>Buckley, Pat.</i> | |
| <i>Brophy, Colm.</i> | <i>Carthy, Matt.</i> | |
| <i>Browne, James.</i> | <i>Clarke, Sorca.</i> | |

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| <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>Cahill, Michael.</i> | <i>Cummins, Jen.</i> | |
| <i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i> | <i>Daly, Pa.</i> | |
| <i>Calleary, Dara.</i> | <i>Devine, Máire.</i> | |
| <i>Canney, Seán.</i> | <i>Doherty, Pearse.</i> | |
| <i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i> | <i>Donnelly, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i> | |
| <i>Chambers, Jack.</i> | <i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i> | |
| <i>Clendennen, John.</i> | <i>Gannon, Gary.</i> | |
| <i>Collins, Michael.</i> | <i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i> | |
| <i>Collins, Niall.</i> | <i>Gould, Thomas.</i> | |
| <i>Connolly, John.</i> | <i>Graves, Ann.</i> | |
| <i>Cooney, Joe.</i> | <i>Guirke, Johnny.</i> | |
| <i>Crowe, Cathal.</i> | <i>Hayes, Eoin.</i> | |
| <i>Cummins, John.</i> | <i>Healy, Seamus.</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>Dolan, Albert.</i> | <i>Kerrane, Claire.</i> | |
| <i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i> | <i>Lawlor, George.</i> | |
| <i>Feighan, Frankie.</i> | <i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i> | |
| <i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i> | <i>McGettigan, Donna.</i> | |
| <i>Fleming, Seán.</i> | <i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i> | |
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| <i>Heneghan, Barry.</i> | <i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</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> | |

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| <i>Lowry, Michael.</i> | <i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i> | |
| <i>Maxwell, David.</i> | <i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i> | |
| <i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i> | <i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i> | |
| <i>McCarthy, Noel.</i> | <i>Quaide, Liam.</i> | |
| <i>McCormack, Tony.</i> | <i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i> | |
| <i>McEntee, Helen.</i> | <i>Rice, Pádraig.</i> | |
| <i>McGrath, Séamus.</i> | <i>Sheehan, Conor.</i> | |
| <i>McGreehan, Erin.</i> | <i>Sherlock, Marie.</i> | |
| <i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i> | <i>Smith, Duncan.</i> | |
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| <i>Moynihan, Michael.</i> | <i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Shane.</i> | <i>Wall, Mark.</i> | |
| <i>Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Ward, Charles.</i> | |
| <i>Murphy, Michael.</i> | <i>Ward, Mark.</i> | |
| <i>Neville, Joe.</i> | <i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</i> | |
| <i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i> | | |
| <i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i> | | |
| <i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i> | | |
| <i>O'Connor, James.</i> | | |
| <i>O'Dea, Willie.</i> | | |
| <i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i> | | |
| <i>O'Donoghue, Richard.</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 Muirí, Naoise.</i> | | |
| <i>Roche, Peter.</i> | | |
| <i>Scanlon, Eamon.</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 Darren O'Rourke and Aengus Ó Snodaigh.

Question declared carried.

Seanad amendments reported.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Agreement to the Seanad amendments is reported to the House. A message will now be sent to Seanad Éireann acquainting it accordingly.

7 o'clock

Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2025: Committee and Remaining Stages

Sections 1 to 3, inclusive, agreed to.

SECTION 4

Deputy Rory Hearne: I move amendment No. 1:

In page 4, between lines 31 and 32, to insert the following:

“The written statement referred to in subsection (2) shall allow for the zoning of land for the particular use of providing affordable housing as defined in Parts 2 and 3 of the Affordable Housing Act 2021.”.

My party colleague Deputy Cian O’Callaghan and I put forward this amendment. It is related to the approach of zoning affordable housing. It is done in Vienna to very good effect and we feel this should be introduced as a possibility for local authorities to perpetually ensure housing is affordable in certain areas.

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy James Browne): Amendment No. 1 seeks to provide for the zoning of land for the particular use of affordable housing. The amendment itself appears to amend a wrong section of the Bill, as section 4 of the Bill amends section 45 of the principal Act, which deals with the implementation and monitoring of regional spatial and economic strategies. In any event, I cannot accept this amendment as zoning requirements are already adequately dealt with in the Act of 2024. Section 43 of the Act of 2024 outlines the content requirements of development plans. Section 43(6) of the Act provides that the written statement for the integrated overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area included in a development plan shall include zoning objectives for the zoning of land for a particular use or mixture of uses. Prior to making a development plan a planning authority shall prepare a housing strategy under Part 7 of the Act of 2024 for the purpose of ensuring that the corresponding housing development strategy makes adequate provision for the housing of the existing and future population of the area of the development plan in accordance with proper planning and sustainable development of the area. The housing strategy shall take account of the existing and likely future need for affordable housing, including for the purposes of the provision of social housing, while section 242(10) of the Act of 2024 provides that up to 20% of land used for residential purposes, including land that is not

zoned for residential use or for a mixture of residential and other uses but in respect of which permission for the development for houses is granted, must be provided for social, affordable or cost-rental housing. Therefore, I am satisfied that the provisions regarding affordable housing under the Act of 2024 are appropriate and, therefore, I cannot accept this amendment.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Section 4 agreed to.

SECTION 5

Question proposed: "That section 5 stand part of the Bill."

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Can I briefly comment?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Yes.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I apologise to the Minister. I meant to say this on section 2. At some point during the Minister's responses to any of the clusters of amendments or the sections, it would be only right if he was able to give us any additional detail he has about the amendments he is intending to submit in the Seanad, that is, both the additional transitional amendments as well as the so-called permitted alterations. The first reason is just to give us some information - we got some from a Minister of State yesterday - but he might also let us know when those amendments are going to be published because we are very keen to see them. Perhaps we in the Oireachtas committee could get a briefing from the Minister's officials on Monday. I raised that with the Minister of State, Deputy Cummins, yesterday. Crucially, the Minister might give us a commitment that appropriate time will be made available in the Dáil when the Bill comes back from the Seanad to deal with those amendments because some of them are very substantive. I am not saying we need hours and hours, but we do need some time to go through those.

Deputy James Browne: Obviously, the amount of time given will be up to the Business Committee, but I have no difficulty with substantial time being given for it.

Question put and agreed to.

Sections 6 to 12, inclusive, agreed to.

NEW SECTION

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendment No. 2 is in the name of Deputy Sheehan. Amendments Nos. 2 and 9 are related and will be discussed together.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I move amendment No. 2:

In page 9, between lines 14 and 15, to insert the following:

"Amendment of section 177 of Principal Act

13. Section 177 of the Principal Act ("Duration of permission granted under Part") is amended by the substitution of "3 years" for "5 years" in each place where it occurs."

This was submitted as one amendment, but it has been split in two because the 2024 Act has been passed but not enacted. What we are attempting here is to amend both the 2000 and 2004 Acts with regard to duration of planning permission. I will come back in again after the

Minister's response.

Deputy James Browne: I will address amendments Nos. 2 and 9 as tabled. Amendment No. 2 seeks to reduce the standard duration of a permission in the Act of 2024 from five years down to three years, while amendment No. 9 seeks to make the same amendment in respect of the 2000 Act. I cannot accept these amendments. The purpose of having a specified period for a planning permission to act upon is to balance the operational and practical aspects of construction with the need to bring certainty to the development process. The period for permission, which is generally five years, is well-established and in general strikes an appropriate balance between the length of period necessary for construction and the length of period a permission may be acted upon. There is capacity under the existing legislation and the 2024 Act for longer timeframes to be granted in view of matters such as the size and complexity of a particular proposed development. For these reasons, unfortunately, I am not in a position to accept these amendments.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I brought forward these amendments because they relate to the whole issue of use it or lose it, namely, the issue of duration of planning permissions. While I accept what the Minister is doing in terms of existing planning permissions that have commenced, I believe we need a tighter regime around duration of planning. We are seeking to reduce the normal duration of a planning permission from five to three years. Five years is too long, and three years seems a reasonable period. The purpose is to incentivise the commencement of active planning permissions to reduce the likelihood of speculation or abuse on sites that have active planning. The point is that throughout the country there is a huge issue with uncommenced planning permissions. There are between 80,000 and 100,000 nationally. It is extraordinary to see this level of uncommenced planning. While there are multiple reasons, including viability as to the delay, we believe land speculation remains a key issue. We continue to perpetuate. We have a system in this country where we have a lengthy period within which developers can hoard land. We have seen sites with planning being on again and again, and we believe the planning permission should not be used as a means to increase the value of land for sale. We believe that it is essential for our planning and housing systems that speculative planning should be reduced and land should not be left sitting idle.

Deputy Michael Collins: Reducing the length of time with regard to a planning permission might be okay with the large developments but I would be very concerned about the one-off housing. A lot of people might apply for planning but may not have the money to get started, especially with the price of materials at the moment. I refer to one-off housing in rural Ireland. I have often met people, as we all do in our constituencies, who ask for another five years and, on that basis, thankfully, they get it across the line. They may not have the money to finish, or they might just have the foundation put down or whatever. I am careful in that regard. I would accept it maybe for large developers but, certainly, I would be a little bit more cautious about reducing that to three years for one-off planning in a rural community because a lot of people are finding it very difficult. They are finding it difficult with regard to wastewater.

We have a situation in Union Hall at present. Councillor Daniel Sexton told me there was no water there last weekend, and people are in an awful state. Businesses are losing money left, right and centre. People had to hand back money in respect of their bed and breakfast accommodation businesses. These are areas where people are losing money at present. Certainly, that is a crisis that Irish Water needs to look into. It is not looking into a lot of other issues in west Cork as I have mentioned here before.

I agree with the amendment if it is with regard to larger developments, but I would be more cautious in relation to one-off housing. I am not objecting here for the sake of objecting. I would just add that word of caution that people genuinely look for planning and hope to get something off the ground but then all of a sudden, the money is not there, the banks will not backing them and it takes a period of time for them to build up their finances again to get the house built. It could pass the three-year period. I would just be a bit cautious on that.

Deputy James Browne: I thank the Deputies for their contributions. I understand where both Deputies are coming from. Having examined it, there are some challenges around shortening the period. I understand the Deputies' intention. However, when we look at the necessity for bigger projects to secure finance, deal with compliance and complete the development, the five-year period is a more balanced approach to this. Then, obviously, with single one-off houses, those families need time to be able to complete those houses. In my view, the five years is appropriate. I can confirm for Deputy Ó Broin that the amendments will be published on Friday morning.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is Deputy Sheehan pressing the amendment?

Deputy Conor Sheehan: Yes.

Amendment put:

| <i>The Committee divided: Tá, 20; Níl, 131; 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>Connolly, Catherine.</i> | <i>Bennett, Cathy.</i> | |
| <i>Cummins, Jen.</i> | <i>Boland, Grace.</i> | |
| <i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i> | <i>Brabazon, Tom.</i> | |
| <i>Gannon, Gary.</i> | <i>Brady, John.</i> | |
| <i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i> | <i>Brennan, Brian.</i> | |
| <i>Hearne, Rory.</i> | <i>Brennan, Shay.</i> | |
| <i>Kelly, Alan.</i> | <i>Brophy, Colm.</i> | |
| <i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i> | <i>Browne, James.</i> | |
| <i>Nash, Ged.</i> | <i>Buckley, Pat.</i> | |
| <i>O'Callaghan, Cian.</i> | <i>Burke, Colm.</i> | |
| <i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</i> | <i>Burke, Peter.</i> | |
| <i>Quaide, Liam.</i> | <i>Butler, Mary.</i> | |
| <i>Rice, Pádraig.</i> | <i>Butterly, Paula.</i> | |
| <i>Sheehan, Conor.</i> | <i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i> | |
| <i>Sherlock, Marie.</i> | <i>Byrne, Joanna.</i> | |
| <i>Smith, Duncan.</i> | <i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i> | |
| <i>Wall, Mark.</i> | <i>Byrne, Thomas.</i> | |
| <i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Cahill, Michael.</i> | |
| | <i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i> | |
| | <i>Calleary, Dara.</i> | |
| | <i>Canney, Seán.</i> | |

9 July 2025

| | | |
|--|------------------------------------|--|
| | <i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i> | |
| | <i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i> | |
| | <i>Carthy, Matt.</i> | |
| | <i>Chambers, Jack.</i> | |
| | <i>Clendennen, John.</i> | |
| | <i>Collins, Michael.</i> | |
| | <i>Collins, Niall.</i> | |
| | <i>Connolly, John.</i> | |
| | <i>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i> | |
| | <i>Cooney, Joe.</i> | |
| | <i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i> | |
| | <i>Cronin, Réada.</i> | |
| | <i>Crowe, Cathal.</i> | |
| | <i>Crowe, Seán.</i> | |
| | <i>Cullinane, David.</i> | |
| | <i>Cummins, John.</i> | |
| | <i>Currie, Emer.</i> | |
| | <i>Daly, Martin.</i> | |
| | <i>Daly, Pa.</i> | |
| | <i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i> | |
| | <i>Devine, Máire.</i> | |
| | <i>Devlin, Cormac.</i> | |
| | <i>Doherty, Pearse.</i> | |
| | <i>Dolan, Albert.</i> | |
| | <i>Donnelly, Paul.</i> | |
| | <i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i> | |
| | <i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i> | |
| | <i>Feighan, Frankie.</i> | |
| | <i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i> | |
| | <i>Fleming, Seán.</i> | |
| | <i>Foley, Norma.</i> | |
| | <i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i> | |
| | <i>Geoghegan, James.</i> | |
| | <i>Gould, Thomas.</i> | |
| | <i>Graves, Ann.</i> | |
| | <i>Grealish, Noel.</i> | |
| | <i>Guirke, Johnny.</i> | |
| | <i>Harkin, Marian.</i> | |
| | <i>Harris, Simon.</i> | |
| | <i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i> | |
| | <i>Healy, Seamus.</i> | |
| | <i>Heneghan, Barry.</i> | |
| | <i>Heydon, Martin.</i> | |

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|--|------------------------------------|--|
| | <i>Higgins, Emer.</i> | |
| | <i>Kenny, Martin.</i> | |
| | <i>Keogh, Keira.</i> | |
| | <i>Kerrane, Claire.</i> | |
| | <i>Lahart, John.</i> | |
| | <i>Lawless, James.</i> | |
| | <i>Lawless, Paul.</i> | |
| | <i>Lowry, Michael.</i> | |
| | <i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i> | |
| | <i>Martin, Micheál.</i> | |
| | <i>Maxwell, David.</i> | |
| | <i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i> | |
| | <i>McCarthy, Noel.</i> | |
| | <i>McCormack, Tony.</i> | |
| | <i>McEntee, Helen.</i> | |
| | <i>McGettigan, Donna.</i> | |
| | <i>McGrath, Mattie.</i> | |
| | <i>McGrath, Séamus.</i> | |
| | <i>McGreehan, Erin.</i> | |
| | <i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i> | |
| | <i>Mitchell, Denise.</i> | |
| | <i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i> | |
| | <i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i> | |
| | <i>Moynihan, Michael.</i> | |
| | <i>Moynihan, Shane.</i> | |
| | <i>Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.</i> | |
| | <i>Murphy, Michael.</i> | |
| | <i>Murphy, Paul.</i> | |
| | <i>Mythen, Johnny.</i> | |
| | <i>Neville, Joe.</i> | |
| | <i>Newsome Drennan, Natasha.</i> | |
| | <i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Connor, James.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Dea, Willie.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Donoghue, Richard.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Hara, Louis.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Meara, Ryan.</i> | |

9 July 2025

| | | |
|--|----------------------------------|--|
| | <i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Shea, John Paul.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Sullivan, Christopher.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Sullivan, Pádraig.</i> | |
| | <i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i> | |
| | <i>Ó Cearúil, Naoise.</i> | |
| | <i>Ó Fearghail, Seán.</i> | |
| | <i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i> | |
| | <i>Ó Muirí, Naoise.</i> | |
| | <i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i> | |
| | <i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i> | |
| | <i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i> | |
| | <i>Roche, Peter.</i> | |
| | <i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i> | |
| | <i>Smith, Brendan.</i> | |
| | <i>Smyth, Niamh.</i> | |
| | <i>Stanley, Brian.</i> | |
| | <i>Timmins, Edward.</i> | |
| | <i>Toole, Gillian.</i> | |
| | <i>Troy, Robert.</i> | |
| | <i>Ward, Barry.</i> | |
| | <i>Ward, Charles.</i> | |
| | <i>Ward, Mark.</i> | |

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Conor Sheehan and Duncan Smith; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Amendment declared lost.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendment No. 3 is out of order.

Amendment No. 3 not moved.

SECTION 13

Deputy Rory Hearne: I move amendment No. 4:

In page 10, between lines 15 and 16, to insert the following:

“(d) A contractor must publish an annual profit and loss account, an auditor’s report, and a balance sheet in order to qualify to provide dwellings for the purchase of which funds may be made available by the special purpose vehicle.”.

The amendment seeks transparency in relation to developers and builders who are going to benefit from an extension of planning permission. We need to see open books for developers and contractors because we do not know what is going on in terms of profit-taking. In the development of the property sector, there are major issues regarding the lack of awareness, knowledge and understanding of the level of profit-making that is going on. In particular, in making changes that will enhance the profits of landowners and developers, we at least need to see the accounts of those who are developing land made public.

Deputy James Browne: The amendment seeks to amend section 13, which amends section 180 of the Act of 2024. In relation to the suspension of the duration of permission while a judicial review is ongoing, the current provisions provide that where a person is seeking a suspension of duration in respect of a concluded judicial review, they must submit a declaration that the development did not substantially commence before the conclusion of these proceedings. The amendment proposed by the Deputy seeks to provide that, in addition to that obligation, a contractor must publish an annual profit and loss account, an auditor's report and a balance sheet to qualify to provide dwellings for the purchase of which funds may be made available by the special purpose vehicle.

Section 180 deals exclusively with suspending the duration of a permission and puts obligations on a person seeking a suspension. As the section does not contain provisions relating to funding, and there is no other reference to or mention of a special purpose vehicle within the Act of 2024, I cannot accept the amendment. It would not be appropriate to seek account information as part of a request to suspend the duration of a permission. A test for whether a suspension of a duration is appropriate is already set out in legislation, as follows: was the development subject to a judicial review? Is the permission still active, that is, not expired? Were works carried out while the judicial review was ongoing? I am satisfied that these criteria are entirely appropriate and, therefore, for these reasons, I cannot accept the amendment.

Amendment put and declared lost.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 5, 15 and 19 are related and may be discussed together. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I move amendment No. 5:

In page 11, between lines 19 and 20, to insert the following:

“(e) The Minister may, by way of regulations, provide for third party observations for consideration by the planning authority to ensure compliance with the State's obligations under the Aarhus Convention and the principles of good planning and development.”.

I want to make a couple of general points on the planned legislation and I will then speak to each of the amendments. There will be many occasions where we are arguing from completely opposing sides, whether on policy or legislation. However, there will also be times when people on this side of the House are not opposed to the principle of what the Minister is trying to do but, through long and difficult experience of dealing with planning legislation, we are going to raise points of concern with what is being proposed or how it is being dealt with. When we do that, we are raising it because we are sincere in the comments we are making and we want the Minister and his colleagues in government to take that into account. This Bill is a case in point.

This is my tenth year as a Member of the Oireachtas and my tenth year as a spokesperson on housing and planning. The vast majority of the legislation we have dealt with during that period is planning legislation. Paul Hogan and I were much younger looking and had far less grey hair when we started this, with both of us leaving South Dublin County Council at the time.

There have been far too many occasions when complex, technical changes to planning legislation were brought in at the end of a Dáil term without adequate opportunity for Oireachtas Members to hear from planning professionals and the representative bodies to ensure we got the legislation right. I have often been of the view that the Government puts far too much pressure on hard-working officials to work late into the night to produce these Bills and the amendments to them. Because they are working under such pressure and to such tight timelines, and because there is inadequate scrutiny, bad legislation is passed. That is not a criticism of the Minister's officials, and I want to make that very clear. We have had many occasions - substitute consent was probably one of the most controversial - where, at the end of a Dáil term, really bad, rushed legislation was passed, was wrong, was subsequently found to be problematic and had to be returned to.

I say that because, specifically with respect to the provisions of this Bill that aim to pause planning permission durations during a judicial review and the extension of durations, while I support that in principle, they need to be got right and that has not been achieved here. The first of these amendments deals with a request for some mechanism for public participation when the application to pause the planning duration during a judicial review is being undertaken. As the Minister will be aware, judicial reviews can take a year, two years, three years or four years. There are many planning considerations that need to be taken into account during that period. I am not at all suggesting that there should be the same level of formal public participation as one would have, for example, in a local authority planning application or with the board, but there needs to be some mechanism. The reason for that is twofold. First, it is in accordance with the principles of good planning and development because there may be third-party information pertinent to the development and the pausing of it that should be brought to the attention of the planning authority. Second, if this is not done, that leaves developers, public or private, who access these provisions potentially open to legal challenge for potential breaches of the Aarhus Convention and its working through EU legislation which, ultimately, of course, would cause a delay in the decisions and a delay in development.

I know the Minister will not accept the amendment. I will not labour the point but, with respect both to this and the other two amendments, we have a poor record of being fully Aarhus-compliant. We have a poor record of ensuring that where we have public participation, it is adequate and meaningful and, therefore, with respect to the judicial review pause, but also with the extension of duration, there needs to be some element of public participation.

It is probably an even stronger argument with respect to the extension of duration. I will explain why that is so. The first time we had legislation for the extension of duration was in 2010. I was not a Member at the time. Obviously, the Celtic tiger crash happened, people were not able to build out developments and as a consequence, for very different reasons, we were in a similar situation as we are in now. Vital planning permissions were at risk of collapsing. However, when the extension of durations was being considered, lots of things had changed. Sometimes ownership had changed, sometimes the reputation and activity of the developer on adjoining sites was materially relevant, and sometimes there were also changes in environmental or ecological factors surrounding the development. If there is no opportunity for any third party to bring additional information to the consideration of the planning authority, the exten-

sion of duration becomes a rubber-stamping exercise. That is what happened post-2010 and when the former Minister, Eoghan Murphy, introduced the second extension of durations in 2018, 2019 or 2020 it was the same. I am not at all suggesting there should be some elongated process, but the idea that one could extend a planning permission for three years without giving anybody the opportunity to bring matters of important concern to the planning authority is a mistake. It is a mistake on good planning grounds and in terms of Aarhus compliance as well as de-risking the developers who seek access to this extension from possible litigation.

While I can anticipate the response and I am sure the Minister will read out what he has been given by his officials, this is something we will return to. I urge the Minister to accept these arguments, unlike his predecessors who I believe did not take their Aarhus compliance responsibilities seriously. This is a really big issue. In fact, many of the problems we have had in planning, and particularly the dramatic upsurge in litigation of residential developments from 2018 - thankfully, that has now receded - are often due to a failure to get the process right and, as a result, opportunities are created for people who may or may not have genuine intentions to seek appeal and, ultimately, litigation. Public participation is one of those.

An extension of duration of three years is significant. I believe it is necessary for the planning permissions the Minister is looking to save but I simply do not understand why there is no consideration for public participation in that as well.

The third amendment is a safety amendment in case either of the others was ruled out of order. It is a reporting mechanism, but it is really the first two amendments that are the substantive propositions.

Deputy James Browne: I will address amendments Nos. 5, 15 and 19 together. These amendments relate to the Bill's compliance with the Aarhus Convention.

Amendment No. 5 seeks to provide for third-party observations as part of the suspension of duration of a permission while it is subject to a judicial review by amending section 13. Amendment No. 15 seeks to make similar provisions for third-party observations as part of the extension of duration provisions in section 16.

The criteria for the suspension of the duration of a permission while it is subject to judicial review proceedings and the extension of a duration of a permission are clearly set out in legislation and does not involve a decision of the planning authority beyond whether the specified criteria are met. If the criteria set out in legislation are met, the planning authority shall grant a suspension or extension. For example, under section 180 of the Act of 2024, a planning authority is notified in writing of the date of the commencement of judicial review proceedings by the person who is carrying out or proposes to carry out the relevant development. A second notice is subsequently issued when the judicial review proceedings are finally concluded and that notice must include the date that the proceedings concluded. The planning authority's role in the process set out under section 180 is primarily to enter the relevant details in the planning register. At no point in the process does the role of the planning authority involve consideration or the making of a determination other than to ensure the notices provided to the planning authority are in accordance with section 180 and any associated regulations. It is for this reason I am not in a position to accept the proposed amendments.

As a decision of a planning authority, beyond whether the criteria are met, does not form part of the process under section 180, public participation is neither necessary nor appropriate. It

should be noted that the extensions of duration cannot be granted where the extension proposed would require an environmental impact assessment, EIA, or an appropriate assessment, AA. If an EIA or AA is required, under the Act of 2000 procedures, a new application for permission is required in respect of the development and thus any public notification or participation requirements are fulfilled. Under the Act of 2024, if an EIA or AA is required, there are procedures for a material extension of duration under Chapter 5 of Part 4 which include the public participation and notification procedures.

In relation to the publication of notices, section 42(5) of the Act of 2000 already provides that the details of any extension of duration is entered on the planning register. Similarly, section 180(6) of the Act of 2024 provides that the details of the suspension of duration of a permission due to judicial review shall also be entered on the planning register.

Amendment No. 19 seeks to provide that within three months of the passing of the enacted Bill, the Minister shall lay before the Houses of the Oireachtas a report on the compliance of all sections of this Act with the State's obligations under the Aarhus Convention and the environmental impact assessment directive. I am satisfied that the Bill is compliant with the Aarhus Convention and the EIA directive and, therefore, I cannot see the need to report on this matter in the manner suggested.

As I outlined, I am satisfied that these provisions are in compliance with all international obligations, including the Aarhus Convention, and, therefore, I cannot accept the proposed amendments.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: That is precisely the problem. If this change to planning legislation had been included in the Planning and Development Act which we spent two years passing through the House, as a committee we could have asked, for example, planning law experts, professional planners and legal experts who specialise in Aarhus Convention compliance their views on this. One of the points I made on Second Stage was that it is hard to understand why this provision was not proposed in the legislation from last year, given that future planning applications from the relevant sections were enacted.

The difficulty for us here is, of course, that while the Minister's predecessors told us that Bill was Aarhus-compliant, some important sections of that were found by the Aarhus Convention compliance committee not to be in compliance. The people whose job it is to independently assess whether a state's legislation is in compliance with the convention told us we were not. I accept these were specific sections of the legislation. Being expected to take the Government at its word when there has been a history of poor compliance or non-compliance is problematic and I will be pressing the amendment.

I am aware the Minister has a legal background. We will be coming back with more planning legislation. I suspect the that we have seen in previous years will be repeated and this issue will come back repeatedly. If it is found that legislation passes through here and it is not compliant or it undermines the important elements of public participation, all I will say is we warned and highlighted this here.

We do not want to see planning permissions delayed or have them fall foul of viability, but nor do we want to see good-quality planning applications for infrastructure or housing fall foul of legal challenge because of poorly drafted and enacted legislation or non-compliance with our European and international obligations. I state that not necessarily for a response but because

these are very serious issues. These are issues the Minister's predecessors did not get right despite the fact that they used some of the same language as the Minister has brought here today. I urge the Minister not to repeat their mistakes, so that we get the planning legislation right for the people who need it.

Amendment put:

| <i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 62; Níl, 92; 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>Connolly, Catherine.</i> | <i>Burke, Colm.</i> | |
| <i>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</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>Daly, Pa.</i> | <i>Byrne, Thomas.</i> | |
| <i>Devine, Máire.</i> | <i>Cahill, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Doherty, Pearse.</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>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i> | |
| <i>Gannon, Gary.</i> | <i>Chambers, Jack.</i> | |
| <i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i> | <i>Clendennen, John.</i> | |
| <i>Gould, Thomas.</i> | <i>Collins, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Graves, Ann.</i> | <i>Collins, Niall.</i> | |
| <i>Guirke, Johnny.</i> | <i>Connolly, John.</i> | |
| <i>Healy, Seamus.</i> | <i>Cooney, Joe.</i> | |
| <i>Hearne, Rory.</i> | <i>Crowe, Cathal.</i> | |
| <i>Kelly, Alan.</i> | <i>Cummins, John.</i> | |
| <i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i> | <i>Currie, Emer.</i> | |
| <i>Kenny, Martin.</i> | <i>Daly, Martin.</i> | |
| <i>Kerrane, Claire.</i> | <i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i> | |
| <i>Lawlor, George.</i> | <i>Devlin, Cormac.</i> | |
| <i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i> | <i>Dolan, Albert.</i> | |
| <i>McGettigan, Donna.</i> | <i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i> | |

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| <i>Mitchell, Denise.</i> | <i>Feighan, Frankie.</i> | |
| <i>Murphy, Paul.</i> | <i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Mythen, Johnny.</i> | <i>Fleming, Seán.</i> | |
| <i>Nash, Ged.</i> | <i>Foley, Norma.</i> | |
| <i>Newsome Drennan, Natasha.</i> | <i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i> | |
| <i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i> | <i>Geoghegan, James.</i> | |
| <i>Nolan, Carol.</i> | <i>Grealish, Noel.</i> | |
| <i>O'Callaghan, Cian.</i> | <i>Harkin, Marian.</i> | |
| <i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</i> | <i>Harris, Simon.</i> | |
| <i>O'Hara, Louis.</i> | <i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i> | <i>Heneghan, Barry.</i> | |
| <i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i> | <i>Heydon, Martin.</i> | |
| <i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i> | <i>Higgins, Emer.</i> | |
| <i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i> | <i>Keogh, Keira.</i> | |
| <i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i> | <i>Lahart, John.</i> | |
| <i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i> | <i>Lawless, James.</i> | |
| <i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i> | <i>Lawless, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Quaide, Liam.</i> | <i>Lowry, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Rice, Pádraig.</i> | <i>Martin, Micheál.</i> | |
| <i>Sheehan, Conor.</i> | <i>Maxwell, David.</i> | |
| <i>Sherlock, Marie.</i> | <i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Smith, Duncan.</i> | <i>McCarthy, Noel.</i> | |
| <i>Stanley, Brian.</i> | <i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i> | |
| <i>Wall, Mark.</i> | <i>McCormack, Tony.</i> | |
| <i>Ward, Charles.</i> | <i>McEntee, Helen.</i> | |
| <i>Ward, Mark.</i> | <i>McGrath, Mattie.</i> | |
| <i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</i> | <i>McGrath, Séamus.</i> | |
| | <i>McGreehan, Erin.</i> | |
| | <i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i> | |
| | <i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i> | |
| | <i>Moynihan, Michael.</i> | |
| | <i>Moynihan, Shane.</i> | |
| | <i>Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.</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'Connor, James.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Dea, Willie.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i> | |

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| | <i>O'Donoghue, Richard.</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>Roche, Peter.</i> | |
| | <i>Scanlon, Eamon.</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.

8 o'clock

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 6 and 18 are related and will be discussed together.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I move amendment No. 6:

In page 11, between lines 19 and 20, to insert the following:

“(e) The Minister may, in consultation with the Minister for Justice and with the approval of Cabinet, introduce regulations to place High Court good practice guidelines on a statutory footing in order to have legally binding statutory timelines for the hearing of Judicial Reviews and for the issuing of Court decisions on Judicial Review related to planning matters governed by the Principal Act.”.

Obviously, the principal challenge with the pausing of a permission during judicial review is the length of time it takes for the judicial review to be heard and then for the judgment to be written. While there has been an increase in the number of judges from one to three, the big experience is while getting the case to be heard is one thing, the judges then obviously move directly to another case and there is often a very long delay before they write up the judgment, which is very bad both for the applicant and the third party, irrespective of what one thinks of the case of the individual judicial review.

9 July 2025

I spent some time last year talking to legal experts and asked if there was some way for us to ensure that where judicial reviews are taken, they are expedited in a timely manner. I do not want to undermine in any way the quality of the legal judgments, but we want the decisions to be made in a reasonable time period. Three clear things need to be done. First, the number of judges on the Planning and Environment Court, a sub-panel of the High Court, needs to be increased. It has increased to three but I think it probably requires six.

There will also need to be better resourcing of the judges, both in terms of their capacity to hear the cases and write up the decisions but also because we have lots of conversations about statutory timelines for planning. While the Planning and Development Act 2024 has timelines for the board, unfortunately, it does not have timelines for preplanning or further information at local authority stage. However, there is a mechanism for applying statutory timelines to judicial reviews. As I am sure the Minister knows better than I do, the Master of the High Court issues good practice guidelines. It would be possible, following consultation with the Judiciary, to put those on a statutory basis, which would give everybody certainty. We all agree on the need for that.

Timelines in and of themselves are no use without the additional judges and resources. I know the Minister will not accept the amendment and I am sure he will find all sorts of technical reasons to argue the way I have drafted the amendment is not appropriate. This is an opportunity for me to urge the Minister, now that he has the responsibility, to look seriously at ensuring there is adequate resourcing through his negotiations and conversations with his colleague, the Minister for justice, and the Cabinet, and also to look at the issue of timelines.

Thankfully, the abandonment of the disastrous strategic housing developments and the unwinding of some of the very bad provisions of design guidelines introduced by the former Minister, Eoghan Murphy, have been removed and we have seen as a result a dramatic drop in the number of judicial reviews on residential developments, which is to be welcomed. However, there is still a significant flow of judicial reviews, particularly for infrastructure projects. I am interested in hearing the Minister's answer but, more important, I would be genuinely interested to see him to take this away and discuss it with officials and colleagues. Ultimately, we all want a planning system where everybody knows the timelines from start to finish. We want a planning system that makes good quality planning decisions. Where there are disputes over matters of law or fact, those issues can be dealt with in a timely manner because then, of course, we would not be dealing with these kinds of delays. This is an eminently sensible proposition in principle and I urge the Minister to look at something like this as part of wider reforms, along with the Minister for Justice, Deputy O'Callaghan.

Deputy James Browne: The rules and procedures of the High Court are set out in the rules of the superior courts and these are made by the Superior Courts Rules Committee in concurrence with the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration. If by good practice guidelines the Deputy is talking about practice directions, it is my understanding that these are issued by the President of the High Court under section 11 of the Civil Law and Criminal Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020. Regardless of my views on the matter, the regulation and the operation of the High Court is a matter for the Judiciary.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I accept the technical explanation but would just make one point. I ask the Minister to examine the principle behind this amendment and to discuss it with the Minister for justice and also, in the course of his work as Minister for housing, with the relevant members of the Judiciary. We need to fix this bit of the system too. There is little value in

having statutory timelines for decisions of the board, for example, if things then get judicially reviewed and are stuck in the courts for two or three years. I know that the Minister agrees with me on that. I accept that it is not primarily his responsibility but ultimately, the planning aspects of this are his and ours as a committee.. Therefore, while I accept that the Minister is not accepting the amendment, it is a proposal worthy of some consideration by the Government. All I ask the Minister to do is look at it. His personal opinions on this issue do matter, not necessarily for this amendment but in terms of the reforms that he decides to pursue as the Minister with responsibility, ultimately, for planning.

There are very considerable parts of the Planning and Development Act 2024 and the debates we had on it that specifically looked at reforms of the judicial review process but without this, many of those reforms will not result in any time savings or improved delivery times for much-needed infrastructure, including renewable energy or residential developments. It is a proposal that I urge the Minister to at least examine, if not in this context then in some other context.

Deputy James Browne: I am very strongly of the view that the operation and procedures of the superior courts is a matter for the Judiciary of the superior courts. It would be inappropriate for the Oireachtas to set down statutory timelines for the courts. The courts need to be able to manage their lists in the manner they see fit. That is my personal opinion and my position as an officeholder.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Section 13 agreed to.

Section 14 agreed to.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendment No. 7 is out of order.

Amendment No. 7 not moved.

Section 15 agreed to.

NEW SECTIONS

Deputy Rory Hearne: I move amendment No. 8:

In page 12, between lines 2 and 3, to insert the following:

“Construction within a specified timeframe

16. In line with a use it or lose it principle, development must begin construction within a specified timeframe after receiving planning permission. Penalties for non-compliance will include the withdrawal of permission for the development.”

This relates to the proposal in the Bill to extend planning permission for an additional three years. This is problematic because it could lead to a situation where someone who has had regular planning permission for five years and an additional five-year extension can now get a three-year extension on top of that. That is my understanding. Is that correct? My reading of it is that this is what the Bill could potentially enable. There are several problems with this. First, it potentially rewards speculative development, whereby developers, land speculators and real estate investors simply sit on land for ten years without any real intention to build and without

any penalty for not building. In many situations, we have land with planning permission on it which is essentially an asset that has a value. It can sit on real estate investors' or developers' books and be used as an asset. It can be used as leverage and then they sell it at a certain point, making a profit from the uplift on the value on it over time. If that is the case, then this is a giveaway to developers and speculators who have sat on land for a decade who now will get three more years. What happens in two years' time? Will there be another three-year extension? Is that possible? Are we going to just facilitate this ongoing speculative approach to land development in the real estate sector? We are absolutely naive if we think this is not going on.

The Government should introduce a serious use it or lose it clause that would have penalties and that would be set within a timeframe that is less than what is set out at the moment. This is a common-sense approach to avoid further delays. It would place an onus on developers to either get on with building or to sell the land to someone who would actually develop it rather than just sit on it.

Will we see a situation where someone who has planning permission for ten years, obtained under the old Part V provisions when there was only a 10% social housing requirement, will now get an extension of three years but will not fall under the current 20% social and affordable housing requirement? Is this essentially facilitating developers to get out of obligations that have been changed?

Deputy James Browne: Amendment No. 8 seeks to introduce a use it or lose it principle into the Act of 2024. The amendment itself does not appear to amend a specific section of the Act of 2024 or to outline any details or criteria concerning the timeframes to be specified for commencement or what penalties may be applied. While it is, of course, important that we encourage holders of permissions to commence development as soon as possible, I do not consider it appropriate to introduce a use it or lose it principle in this manner.

The extension of the duration of permissions proposed in this Bill are time limited and restricted in that the development must commence within 18 months of the commencement of the legislation or the extension will cease to have effect. Under the Act of 2024, development must have commenced before an extension of duration can be sought. This is to encourage holders of permission to commence development as soon as possible. In the event that a holder of a development does not commence before the end of the duration of the permission, the permission will expire and a new application for permission will need to be made. This is appropriate as there may be valid reasons that are sometimes entirely outside of the control of the holder of a permission as to why a development does not proceed as intended.

The Minister for Finance has already introduced legislation providing for the application of financial penalties for non-activation of zoned residential land. This is a more appropriate legislative code for such matters, rather than planning legislation for dealing with it on a use-it-or-lose-it-type basis. The residential zoned land tax, RZLT, applies to lands zoned for residential development or for mixed-use purposes including residential development, which is either vacant or idle and which, in both cases, also has the necessary services in place to support the development of housing. The tax was introduced in the Finance Act 2021 and came into effect on 1 February 2025. The aim of this tax is to increase the supply of land for building by activating land which has been zoned in a statutory land use plan adopted by a local authority and which is also serviced. The tax will be charged at 3% of the market value of the land every year. I am satisfied that the RZLT is a more appropriate measure than a use it or lose it principle. Therefore, I cannot accept the amendment.

Amendment put:

| <i>The Committee divided: Tá, 64; Níl, 86; Staon, 0.</i> | | |
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| <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>Connolly, Catherine.</i> | <i>Burke, Colm.</i> | |
| <i>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i> | <i>Burke, Peter.</i> | |
| <i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i> | <i>Butler, Mary.</i> | |
| <i>Cronin, Réada.</i> | <i>Butterly, Paula.</i> | |
| <i>Crowe, Seán.</i> | <i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i> | |
| <i>Cullinane, David.</i> | <i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i> | |
| <i>Cummins, Jen.</i> | <i>Byrne, Thomas.</i> | |
| <i>Daly, Pa.</i> | <i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i> | |
| <i>Devine, Máire.</i> | <i>Calleary, Dara.</i> | |
| <i>Donnelly, Paul.</i> | <i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i> | |
| <i>Ellis, Dessie.</i> | <i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i> | |
| <i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i> | <i>Clendennen, John.</i> | |
| <i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i> | <i>Collins, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Gannon, Gary.</i> | <i>Collins, Niall.</i> | |
| <i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i> | <i>Connolly, John.</i> | |
| <i>Gould, Thomas.</i> | <i>Cooney, Joe.</i> | |
| <i>Graves, Ann.</i> | <i>Crowe, Cathal.</i> | |
| <i>Guirke, Johnny.</i> | <i>Cummins, John.</i> | |
| <i>Hayes, Eoin.</i> | <i>Currie, Emer.</i> | |
| <i>Healy, Seamus.</i> | <i>Daly, Martin.</i> | |
| <i>Hearne, Rory.</i> | <i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i> | |
| <i>Kelly, Alan.</i> | <i>Devlin, Cormac.</i> | |
| <i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i> | <i>Dolan, Albert.</i> | |
| <i>Kenny, Martin.</i> | <i>Feighan, Frankie.</i> | |
| <i>Kerrane, Claire.</i> | <i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Lawlor, George.</i> | <i>Fleming, Seán.</i> | |
| <i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i> | <i>Foley, Norma.</i> | |
| <i>McGettigan, Donna.</i> | <i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i> | |
| <i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i> | <i>Geoghegan, James.</i> | |
| <i>Mitchell, Denise.</i> | <i>Grealish, Noel.</i> | |
| <i>Murphy, Paul.</i> | <i>Harkin, Marian.</i> | |

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| <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>O'Callaghan, Cian.</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>Lawless, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i> | <i>Lowry, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i> | <i>Maxwell, David.</i> | |
| <i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i> | <i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i> | <i>McCarthy, Noel.</i> | |
| <i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i> | <i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i> | |
| <i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i> | <i>McCormack, Tony.</i> | |
| <i>Quaide, Liam.</i> | <i>McEntee, Helen.</i> | |
| <i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i> | <i>McGrath, Mattie.</i> | |
| <i>Rice, Pádraig.</i> | <i>McGrath, Séamus.</i> | |
| <i>Sheehan, Conor.</i> | <i>McGreehan, Erin.</i> | |
| <i>Sherlock, Marie.</i> | <i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i> | |
| <i>Smith, Duncan.</i> | <i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i> | |
| <i>Stanley, Brian.</i> | <i>Moynihan, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Wall, Mark.</i> | <i>Moynihan, Shane.</i> | |
| <i>Ward, Charles.</i> | <i>Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.</i> | |
| <i>Ward, Mark.</i> | <i>Murphy, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Neville, Joe.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Connor, James.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Dea, Willie.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Donoghue, Richard.</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>Roche, Peter.</i> | |
| | <i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i> | |

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| | <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 Rory Hearne and Eoin Ó Broin; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Amendment declared lost.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I move amendment No. 9:

In page 12, between lines 4 and 5, to insert the following:

“Amendment of section 40 of Act of 2000

16. Section 40 of the Act of 2000 is amended, in subsection (3)(b), by the substitution of “the period of three years beginning on the date of the grant of permission” for “the period of five years beginning on the date of the grant of permission”.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

SECTION 16

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 10 to 14, inclusive, are related and may be discussed together.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I move amendment No. 10:

In page 12, line 18, to delete “2 years” and substitute “1 year”.

These amendments relate to the Minister’s proposals to enable an extension of three years for developments that have not yet commenced and have less than two years in the permission. I proposed these amendments because, while I believe a short extension may be necessary in extremely limited circumstances, it must be short and caveated to prevent land hoarding and speculation. We have huge problems with land hoarding and speculators sitting on planning permissions in this country while land increases in value. We believe a much tighter approach needs to be taken in terms of use or lose it. That is why we have moved these amendments to tighten the limit. I noticed before the vote that the Minister was talking about the residential zoned land tax. From our point of view, I welcome that is finally being collected, despite having been delayed until this year. The Minister said in his reply to Deputy Hearne that he believes the residential zoned land tax will deal with these issues and there is no need for a use it or lose it clause, but if the tax does not deal with this and we do not see the results of that over the coming period, will the Minister give us an idea if this is something he will look at revisiting?

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I will speak to my two amendments in this grouping. I said at the outset that we are not opposed in principle to a time-limited extension of duration. The challenge, however, is that there is no point giving somebody an extension of duration if they cannot demonstrate that something has changed and that what was previously unviable is now viable. I therefore think there needs to be some mechanism by which, when a public or private sector developer applies for the extension of duration, there is a requirement on them to present what I colloquially call a viability statement where they set out why they were not able to commence in the previous three years and what has changed. That could be something in their own circumstances, financing, some decision the Government has made, etc. The value of doing that allows the Minister or the planning authority to weed out those applications where it is likely they are going to commence and should therefore get the extension and those that simply are not. I think a rubber stamping exercise where everybody who applies for it gets it is not an efficient use of the procedure.

I also strongly support the sentiments of my colleagues here on land speculation. In the past 12 or 18 months the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service published an important report on land activation, so this is not the Opposition making this claim. This is an expert body within the Civil Service. It identified land speculation and land hoarding as one of the problems. It is not the only one. There are issues of access to finance. There are issues of getting access to sites. Therefore, an assessment like this would weed out the viable from the unviable but would also be one of two protections against speculation and speculative use of this procedure. I appreciate that the Minister has put in some caveats that there is a set period of time within which substantial commencement will have to take place for the developer, but 18 months is far too long. If something has changed and you are able to avail of or apply for the extension, you should have to substantially commence within at least six months. That is a reasonable period of time. Keep in mind that in many cases three years will have expired. Therefore, if they are going to commence, given that some of these could be large-scale developments, they could take between two and three years anyway. First, I urge the Minister to consider some form of viability assessment as set out in the first amendment of mine in this group. Second, 18 months is too long and we should return to it.

Deputy Thomas Gould: I support my colleague. We are talking about increasing timelines and giving extensions. I will provide an example. The Good Shepherd Convent in Cork was originally bought by UCC to be developed for, I think, about €4.5 million. It changed hands a couple of times. At the height of the Celtic tiger it was sold for €20 million. Afterwards, it was bought by a Drogheda-based company, Moneda. That company went for planning permission in December 2017, got planning permission and then flipped it. The site has still not had a blade of grass turned - nothing. It was complete speculation. This site in the heart of Cork city has for the last 20 years seen speculation after speculation, then the property crash and then back to speculation again. Now planning permission has finally been applied for and granted but there have been a number of fires on the site. Fire brigades have had to be called out and first responders put at risk because speculators only cared about maximising profits. The community around it in Blarney Street and Sunday's Well have had to put up with constant fires. If the Minister googles it, he will see. Every year, fire after fire. What was a protected building is now a shell; it had to be semi-demolished because it was a danger, all because speculators were allowed to get away with this.

This is not an isolated incident. We have seen this in other sites in Cork. The LDA has gone into the St. Kevin's site and is turning it into housing. For 20 years, that was left idle and left

to be destroyed. We have a site off Shandon Street, Gurranabraher, just behind where I live, the old Connie Donovan's pub site. It was bought, planning went in for it and it was flipped. They put up the metal beams and the foundation and it has been like that for 15 years. Speculators cannot be allowed to get away with profiteering and damn the community. We need timelines to make sure this does not happen. Eighteen months, as Deputy Ó Broin said, is too long.

Deputy James Browne: Amendments Nos. 10 and 12 to 14, inclusive, seek to amend the timelines in section 16, which amends section 42 of the Act of 2000. Amendments Nos. 10 and 12 seek to provide that applications for extension of duration of uncommenced housing developments may only be made in the last year of permission remaining, rather than the last two years, as set out in the Bill.

Existing planning regulations set out that an application for an extension of duration under section 42 of the 2000 Act may only be made in the final year as a development must have substantial works carried out. For uncommenced housing developments, it is appropriate to allow such applications in the final two years of a permission. Where a permission has two years or less remaining, there may be viability issues associated with the development in terms of putting the arrangements in place to commence and carry out substantial works in order to avail of a regular extension of duration. Allowing an application to be made when there is two years left of an uncommenced permission deals with these issues. Allowing applications for extension of duration for uncommenced housing developments in the final two years is appropriate as it will allow development sooner. If it were limited to the final year, the only option for developers at the moment would be to apply for a new permission if they could not meet the criteria for an extension.

Amendment No. 13 seeks to reduce the overall extension of duration period from five years to three. I cannot accept the amendment. The five-year period is well established and, in general, strikes an appropriate balance between the length of the necessary construction period and the length a permission may be acted upon. I am satisfied five years continues to be appropriate with regard to extended durations of permission.

Amendment No. 14 seeks to provide that development must commence within six months of the coming into operation of the provision on extension of permission, rather than the 18 months set out in the Bill. I cannot accept the amendment as it conflicts with the timeframe set out in the Bill. The Bill provides that applications for extension of duration may be sought within six months of the coming into operation of the provision. It is therefore not possible that developments should be commenced within six months of the coming into operation of the provision. The Bill sets out that the applications for extension of duration may only be made within six months of the coming into operation of the provision. Further works must commence within 18 months of that coming into operation; otherwise, the extension will cease to have effect. These time periods run concurrently; for example, if a person applies for and is granted an extension within the first month of the operation of the provision, they have 17 months to commence development before the extension ceases to have effect. If a person applies for and is granted an extension six months after these provisions come into effect, they will have only the remaining 12 months to commence work before the extension ceases to have effect. I am satisfied these timeframes are appropriate and therefore cannot accept these amendments.

Amendment No. 11 seeks to provide that, as part of an application for an extension of duration, the applicant shall submit a viability assessment and a detailed schedule of works. I cannot accept this amendment as there are already regulations associated with section 42 of the

2000 Act which deal with some of these issues. Article 42 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 provides that applications for extensions of duration should be accompanied by, among other things, particulars of the works which are proposed to be carried out pursuant to the permission during the period by which the permission is sought to be extended; the date or projected date of commencement of the development to which the permission relates; the period by which the permission is sought to be extended; and the date upon which the development is expected to be completed. I am satisfied that these requirements are sufficient and it is appropriate that such matters are set out in regulations rather than primary legislation. Prior to commencing this provision, these regulations will be reviewed and will be updated, if needed, to reflect this provision.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I thank the Minister for his response. I go back to what I asked about residential zoned land tax. When will we be able to quantify whether that tax is working to prevent land speculation and hoarding? Will the Minister come back and seriously look at this again? As I understand it, EY was tasked by the Department of housing to look at the issue of uncommenced planning and that report was pulled in 2023.

I will also speak to the amendment in the names of Deputies Ó Broin and Gould on the call for a viability assessment. I believe it is a prudent amendment. It makes sense that if a developer has not commenced a development within a set period, it should have to come back and tell the planning authority, if it is granted an extension, what has materially changed that would allow it to commence that development. This is done in other jurisdictions and it should be publicly available. The public should be able to see the schedule and construction costs so there is full transparency and accountability. This would mean someone could go for a planning extension because, for example, they need certainty in terms of financing but not because they know the longer they sit on the land, the more value it will accrue.

Deputy James Browne: The RZLT is resulting in more land transfers. I am very satisfied of that. It has a cumulative effect. As time goes on, we will see an increasing rate of transfers as a result of the 3% year on year. It only commenced its application this year and there is a review to be carried out each year.

In relation to the amendments, I am satisfied the timelines strike the necessary balance. On viability assessments, the planning and development regulations set out detailed requirements and I am satisfied they are sufficient.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I move amendment No. 11:

In page 12, between lines 23 and 24, to insert the following:

“(b) an explanation as to why the development has not yet commenced, a viability assessment setting out what has changed that would allow the development to commence if an extension of duration is granted, and a detailed schedule of works setting out when the various stages of development will occur.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I move amendment No. 12:

In page 13, line 3, to delete “2 years” and substitute “1 year”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I move amendment No. 13:

In page 13, line 11, to delete “5 years” and substitute “3 years”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I move amendment No. 14:

“In page 13, line 25, to delete “18 months” and substitute “6 months”.”

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I move amendment No. 15:

In page 13, between lines 30 and 31, to insert the following:

“(h) The Minister may, by way of regulations, provide for third party observations to the planning authority on any request for an extension of duration under this section. The regulations may include provision for:

(i) the publication of public notices, on site, in newspapers and on digital platforms, of any request for an extension of duration under this section;

(ii) the publication, on the planning authority website, of all documents relating to the request for an extension of duration;

(iii) an appropriate time period for the making of third-party submissions for consideration by the planning authority when considering the request for an extension of duration under this section;

(iv) any other matters which the Minister deems relevant in accordance with the obligations of the State under the Aarhus Convention and the principles of proper planning and development.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Section 16 agreed to.

Section 17 agreed to.

NEW SECTIONS

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 16 and 17 are related and will be discussed together.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I move amendment No. 16:

In page 14, after line 18, to insert the following:

“Report on planning permissions and residential units

18. Within three months of the passing of this Act, the Minister shall lay before the Houses of the Oireachtas a report detailing the number of planning permissions and

residential units to which *section 14* of this Act may apply and making recommendations on how to ensure that extensions of duration of planning permissions are only granted where the development is likely to commence and not where the extension is being sought for speculative purposes.”.

For the sake of time, I want to deal specifically with the request for the report on the extensions. The Minister has heard a lot from this side of the House this evening about the concern that, while some people will avail of the extension of duration for very valid reasons and build out their developments or infrastructure, others may not. There needs to be some reporting mechanism. As we know from the artificial spikes in commencement certificates in April and September last year to avail of the development levy and water connection waiver, commencement notices are not in and of themselves sufficient and, therefore, amendment No. 17 seeks to place a reporting requirement on the Minister and his officials to produce a report every six months to list the number of developments that have sought and secured the extension but also to track a substantial commencement and completion.

While I appreciate the Minister will not accept the amendment, we need a reporting mechanism. We need some mechanism for the Minister to ensure this facility, which is a very significant one, is utilised for the intended purpose. For the purposes of transparency, not only for the Oireachtas but for the wider public and the planning system, some reporting mechanism will be required. While I do not expect the Minister to support the amendment, I ask him to talk to his officials to see whether there is some mechanism by which he could report and publish on the website something that allows us to track this so that the very genuine concerns we have around misuse of this provision can be addressed. If there is no abuse, then everybody is happy and the system is working well. However, if there clearly is some evidence of abuse, then action can be taken to address it.

Deputy Rory Hearne: I am very conscious of time. I want to support this amendment and reiterate the deep concern we have been highlighting around the speculative development that is happening. It is very clear to anyone who studies the real estate and property market that there are actors in it who are not just about building homes. A part of real estate development is accumulating sites and planning permission in order to sell that on. That is a part of the real estate market internationally and it is very problematic because it does not give an indication, as was set out by Deputy Ó Broin, of whether planning permissions actually lead to the delivery and building of homes. In particular, the concern is that it will not tell us whether there will be homes built as a result of planning permission where this extension applies. I back up what Deputy Ó Broin has said and ask the Minister to take this on board and give us detail in this regard in the coming years so we can understand what is going on in our housing system.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I support this amendment. It is extremely important because we know that, with the development levy waivers that lapsed last year, a lot of the commencement data we have at the moment is very unreliable. That is why this amendment is important.

Deputy Thomas Gould: Reporting mechanisms, collection of data, transparency and knowing what is happening are at the heart of this motion. We have to ensure that genuine actors who want to develop and deliver units - houses and apartments - can do that with support, but we also have to prevent people coming in to speculate. By collecting this data, we will all know what is happening, as will the public. That is why it is an important amendment. The Minister might not take it on but he certainly could look at it.

Deputy James Browne: In regard to ensuring the extensions are not sought for speculative purposes, the extension of duration provisions are time-bound and cease to have effect if the development has not commenced within 18 months of the coming into operation of the provision. The fact the extension ceases to have operation or effect if the development is not commenced should deter speculative applications.

In regard to detailing the numbers who avail of such an extension, section 42(5) of the 2000 Act already provides that the details of any extension of duration are entered onto the planning register. In the circumstances, I am not minded to accept the amendments.

Deputy Rory Hearne: In terms of the 18-month period, how will local authorities enforce that?

Deputy James Browne: Local authorities are very experienced in enforcement.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: There is no enforcement of commencements. I understand the Minister's officials in the Department are liaising with local authorities with respect to determining whether developments that are availing of the development levy waiver and the water utility connection waiver are having a look at this. Local authorities do planning enforcement, but many do not even have the staff to do building control enforcement. There is no system for enforcing this.

While I understand the Minister is not accepting the amendments, there is a requirement for them. Granting somebody a three-year extension of planning is quite a big issue. Therefore, it is reasonable for members of this side to ask the Minister, if he is not willing to accept the amendments we have tabled, to find some way to ensure that the extension of duration he is granting is not abused. I am not suggesting the abuses we are concerned about will be widespread or occur in the majority of developments, but instead of just saying that local authorities are very experienced at enforcement, we need to ward against anybody who intends to avail of this for a reason other than commencing. There is no enforcement of commencements; it does not exist. Therefore, that is something that is certainly worthy of being looked at, particularly in the context of this issue.

Deputy James Browne: We will always keep these things under review and monitored. In relation to this, I do not see any risk of speculation. There are strict time-bound limits in there. I think those are sufficient to ensure commencements are carried out.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I move amendment No. 17:

In page 14, after line 18, to insert the following:

“Report on extensions

18. Every six months after the passing of this Act, the Minister shall lay before the Houses of the Oireachtas a report on the operation of the extension of duration detailing the number of developments that have availed of the extensions, the number of units granted extension that have commenced and the number of units that have been completed.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

9 o'clock

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I move amendment No. 18:

In page 14, after line 18, to insert the following:

“Report on impact of Judicial Reviews

18. Within three months of the passing of this Act, the Minister shall lay before the Houses of the Oireachtas a report on the impact of Judicial Reviews on development including, critical infrastructure, renewable energy, public transport and residential development and setting out options for increasing the resources of the courts to deal with Judicial Reviews in a timely manner, and options for the introduction of statutory good practice timelines for Judicial Reviews in a manner that is consistent with the principles of good planning and development.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I move amendment No. 19:

In page 14, after line 18, to insert the following:

“Report on compliance

18. Within three months of the passing of this Act, the Minister shall lay before the Houses of the Oireachtas a report on the compliance of all sections of this Act with the State’s obligations under the Aarhus Convention and the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Title agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment, received for final consideration and passed.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will now send the Bill to the Seanad.

Estimates for Public Services 2025: Message from Select Committee

An Ceann Comhairle: The Select Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation, and Taoiseach has completed its consideration of the following Revised Estimates for public services for the service of the year ending on 31 December 2025: Vote 1 – President’s Establishment; Vote 2 – Department of the Taoiseach; Vote 3 – Office of the Attorney General; Vote 4 – Central Statistics Office; Vote 5 – Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions; and Vote 6 – Office of the Chief State Solicitor.

European Union Regulations on International and Temporary Protection: Motions (Resumed)

Debate resumed on the following motion:

That Dáil Éireann approves the exercise by the State of the option or discretion under Protocol No. 21 on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the area of freedom, security and justice annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, to take part in the adoption and application of the following proposed measure:

Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2024/1348 as regards the establishment of a list of safe countries of origin at Union level,

a copy of which was laid before Dáil Éireann on 16th May, 2025.

- (Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the motion regarding proposed approval by Dáil Éireann for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2024/1348 as regards the establishment of a list of safe countries of origin at Union level. On Thursday, 3 July 2025, on the question, “That the motion be agreed to”, a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Question put: “That the motion be agreed to.”

| <i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 86; Níl, 69; Staon, 0.</i> | | |
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| <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>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i> | |
| <i>Butterly, Paula.</i> | <i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i> | |
| <i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i> | <i>Cronin, Réada.</i> | |
| <i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i> | <i>Crowe, Seán.</i> | |
| <i>Byrne, Thomas.</i> | <i>Cullinane, David.</i> | |
| <i>Cahill, Michael.</i> | <i>Cummins, Jen.</i> | |
| <i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i> | <i>Daly, Pa.</i> | |
| <i>Calleary, Dara.</i> | <i>Devine, Máire.</i> | |

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| <i>Canney, Seán.</i> | <i>Doherty, Pearse.</i> | |
| <i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i> | <i>Donnelly, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Ellis, Dessie.</i> | |
| <i>Chambers, Jack.</i> | <i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i> | |
| <i>Clendennen, John.</i> | <i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i> | |
| <i>Collins, Niall.</i> | <i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Connolly, John.</i> | <i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i> | |
| <i>Cooney, Joe.</i> | <i>Gould, Thomas.</i> | |
| <i>Crowe, Cathal.</i> | <i>Graves, Ann.</i> | |
| <i>Cummins, John.</i> | <i>Guirke, Johnny.</i> | |
| <i>Currie, Emer.</i> | <i>Hayes, Eoin.</i> | |
| <i>Daly, Martin.</i> | <i>Healy, Seamus.</i> | |
| <i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i> | <i>Hearne, Rory.</i> | |
| <i>Devlin, Cormac.</i> | <i>Kelly, Alan.</i> | |
| <i>Dolan, Albert.</i> | <i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i> | |
| <i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i> | <i>Kenny, Martin.</i> | |
| <i>Feighan, Frankie.</i> | <i>Kerrane, Claire.</i> | |
| <i>Fleming, Seán.</i> | <i>Lawless, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Foley, Norma.</i> | <i>Lawlor, George.</i> | |
| <i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i> | <i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i> | |
| <i>Geoghegan, James.</i> | <i>McGettigan, Donna.</i> | |
| <i>Grealish, Noel.</i> | <i>McGrath, Mattie.</i> | |
| <i>Harkin, Marian.</i> | <i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i> | |
| <i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i> | <i>Mitchell, Denise.</i> | |
| <i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i> | <i>Murphy, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Heneghan, Barry.</i> | <i>Mythen, Johnny.</i> | |
| <i>Heydon, Martin.</i> | <i>Nash, Ged.</i> | |
| <i>Higgins, Emer.</i> | <i>Newsome Drennan, Nata-sha.</i> | |
| <i>Keogh, Keira.</i> | <i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i> | |
| <i>Lahart, John.</i> | <i>Nolan, Carol.</i> | |
| <i>Lawless, James.</i> | <i>O'Callaghan, Cian.</i> | |
| <i>Lowry, Michael.</i> | <i>O'Donoghue, Richard.</i> | |
| <i>Maxwell, David.</i> | <i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</i> | |
| <i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i> | <i>O'Hara, Louis.</i> | |
| <i>McCarthy, Noel.</i> | <i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i> | |
| <i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i> | <i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i> | |
| <i>McCormack, Tony.</i> | <i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i> | |
| <i>McEntee, Helen.</i> | <i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i> | |
| <i>McGrath, Séamus.</i> | <i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i> | |
| <i>McGreehan, Erin.</i> | <i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i> | |
| <i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i> | <i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i> | <i>Quaide, Liam.</i> | |

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| <i>Moynihán, Michael.</i> | <i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihán, Shane.</i> | <i>Rice, Pádraig.</i> | |
| <i>Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Sheehan, Conor.</i> | |
| <i>Murphy, Michael.</i> | <i>Sherlock, Marie.</i> | |
| <i>Neville, Joe.</i> | <i>Smith, Duncan.</i> | |
| <i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i> | <i>Stanley, Brian.</i> | |
| <i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i> | <i>Wall, Mark.</i> | |
| <i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i> | <i>Ward, Charles.</i> | |
| <i>O'Connor, James.</i> | <i>Ward, Mark.</i> | |
| <i>O'Dea, Willie.</i> | | |
| <i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</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>Roche, Peter.</i> | | |
| <i>Scanlon, Eamon.</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 Mattie McGrath.

Question declared carried.

Debate resumed on the following motion:

That Dáil Éireann approves the exercise by the State of the option or discretion under Protocol No. 21 on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the area of freedom, security and justice annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, to take part in the adoption and application of the following proposed measure:

9 July 2025

Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2024/1348 as regards the application of the “safe third country” concept,

a copy of which was laid before Dáil Éireann on 13th June, 2025.

- (Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, Deputy Colm Brophy)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the motion regarding proposed approval by Dáil Éireann for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2024/1348 as regards the application of the safe third country concept. On Thursday, 3 July 2025, on the question, “That the motion be agreed to”, a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Question put: “That the motion be agreed to.”

| <i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 87; Níl, 70; 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>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i> | |
| <i>Butterly, Paula.</i> | <i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i> | |
| <i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i> | <i>Cronin, Réada.</i> | |
| <i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i> | <i>Crowe, Seán.</i> | |
| <i>Byrne, Thomas.</i> | <i>Cullinane, David.</i> | |
| <i>Cahill, Michael.</i> | <i>Cummins, Jen.</i> | |
| <i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i> | <i>Daly, Pa.</i> | |
| <i>Calleary, Dara.</i> | <i>Devine, Máire.</i> | |
| <i>Canney, Seán.</i> | <i>Doherty, Pearse.</i> | |
| <i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i> | <i>Donnelly, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Ellis, Dessie.</i> | |
| <i>Chambers, Jack.</i> | <i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i> | |
| <i>Clendennen, John.</i> | <i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i> | |
| <i>Collins, Niall.</i> | <i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Connolly, John.</i> | <i>Gannon, Gary.</i> | |
| <i>Cooney, Joe.</i> | <i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i> | |
| <i>Crowe, Cathal.</i> | <i>Gould, Thomas.</i> | |

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| <i>Cummins, John.</i> | <i>Graves, Ann.</i> | |
| <i>Currie, Emer.</i> | <i>Guirke, Johnny.</i> | |
| <i>Daly, Martin.</i> | <i>Hayes, Eoin.</i> | |
| <i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i> | <i>Healy, Seamus.</i> | |
| <i>Devlin, Cormac.</i> | <i>Hearne, Rory.</i> | |
| <i>Dolan, Albert.</i> | <i>Kelly, Alan.</i> | |
| <i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i> | <i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i> | |
| <i>Feighan, Frankie.</i> | <i>Kenny, Martin.</i> | |
| <i>Fleming, Seán.</i> | <i>Kerrane, Claire.</i> | |
| <i>Foley, Norma.</i> | <i>Lawless, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i> | <i>Lawlor, George.</i> | |
| <i>Geoghegan, James.</i> | <i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i> | |
| <i>Grealish, Noel.</i> | <i>McGettigan, Donna.</i> | |
| <i>Harkin, Marian.</i> | <i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i> | |
| <i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i> | <i>Mitchell, Denise.</i> | |
| <i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i> | <i>Murphy, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Heneghan, Barry.</i> | <i>Mythen, Johnny.</i> | |
| <i>Heydon, Martin.</i> | <i>Nash, Ged.</i> | |
| <i>Higgins, Emer.</i> | <i>Newsome Drennan, Nata- sha.</i> | |
| <i>Keogh, Keira.</i> | <i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i> | |
| <i>Lahart, John.</i> | <i>Nolan, Carol.</i> | |
| <i>Lawless, James.</i> | <i>O'Callaghan, Cian.</i> | |
| <i>Lowry, Michael.</i> | <i>O'Donoghue, Richard.</i> | |
| <i>Maxwell, David.</i> | <i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</i> | |
| <i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i> | <i>O'Hara, Louis.</i> | |
| <i>McCarthy, Noel.</i> | <i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i> | |
| <i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i> | <i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i> | |
| <i>McCormack, Tony.</i> | <i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i> | |
| <i>McEntee, Helen.</i> | <i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i> | |
| <i>McGrath, Mattie.</i> | <i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i> | |
| <i>McGrath, Séamus.</i> | <i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i> | |
| <i>McGreehan, Erin.</i> | <i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i> | |
| <i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i> | <i>Quaide, Liam.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i> | <i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Michael.</i> | <i>Rice, Pádraig.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Shane.</i> | <i>Sheehan, Conor.</i> | |
| <i>Murnane O'Connor, Jen- nifer.</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>Wall, Mark.</i> | |
| <i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i> | <i>Ward, Charles.</i> | |

9 July 2025

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| <i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i> | <i>Ward, Mark.</i> | |
| <i>O'Connor, James.</i> | <i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</i> | |
| <i>O'Dea, Willie.</i> | | |
| <i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</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>Roche, Peter.</i> | | |
| <i>Scanlon, Eamon.</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.

Question declared carried.

Debate resumed on the following motion:

That Dáil Éireann approves the exercise by the State of the option or discretion under Protocol No. 21 on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the area of freedom, security and justice annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, to take part in the adoption and application of the following proposed measure:

Council Recommendation on a coordinated approach to the transition out of temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine,

a copy of which was laid before Dáil Éireann on 26th June, 2025.

- (Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, Deputy Colm Brophy)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the motion regarding proposed approval by Dáil Éireann for a European Council recommendation on a

co-ordinated approach to the transition out of temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine. On Thursday, 3 July 2025, on the question, “That the motion be agreed to”, a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Question put: “That the motion be agreed to.”

| <i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 86; Níl, 71; 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>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i> | |
| <i>Butterly, Paula.</i> | <i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i> | |
| <i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i> | <i>Cronin, Réada.</i> | |
| <i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i> | <i>Crowe, Seán.</i> | |
| <i>Byrne, Thomas.</i> | <i>Cullinane, David.</i> | |
| <i>Cahill, Michael.</i> | <i>Cummins, Jen.</i> | |
| <i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i> | <i>Daly, Pa.</i> | |
| <i>Calleary, Dara.</i> | <i>Devine, Máire.</i> | |
| <i>Canney, Seán.</i> | <i>Doherty, Pearse.</i> | |
| <i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i> | <i>Donnelly, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Ellis, Dessie.</i> | |
| <i>Chambers, Jack.</i> | <i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i> | |
| <i>Clendennen, John.</i> | <i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i> | |
| <i>Collins, Niall.</i> | <i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Connolly, John.</i> | <i>Gannon, Gary.</i> | |
| <i>Cooney, Joe.</i> | <i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i> | |
| <i>Crowe, Cathal.</i> | <i>Gould, Thomas.</i> | |
| <i>Cummins, John.</i> | <i>Graves, Ann.</i> | |
| <i>Currie, Emer.</i> | <i>Guirke, Johnny.</i> | |
| <i>Daly, Martin.</i> | <i>Hayes, Eoin.</i> | |
| <i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i> | <i>Healy, Seamus.</i> | |
| <i>Devlin, Cormac.</i> | <i>Hearne, Rory.</i> | |
| <i>Dolan, Albert.</i> | <i>Kelly, Alan.</i> | |
| <i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i> | <i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i> | |
| <i>Feighan, Frankie.</i> | <i>Kenny, Martin.</i> | |
| <i>Fleming, Seán.</i> | <i>Kerrane, Claire.</i> | |

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| <i>Foley, Norma.</i> | <i>Lawless, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i> | <i>Lawlor, George.</i> | |
| <i>Geoghegan, James.</i> | <i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i> | |
| <i>Grealish, Noel.</i> | <i>McGettigan, Donna.</i> | |
| <i>Harkin, Marian.</i> | <i>McGrath, Mattie.</i> | |
| <i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i> | <i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i> | |
| <i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i> | <i>Mitchell, Denise.</i> | |
| <i>Heneghan, Barry.</i> | <i>Murphy, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Heydon, Martin.</i> | <i>Mythen, Johnny.</i> | |
| <i>Higgins, Emer.</i> | <i>Nash, Ged.</i> | |
| <i>Keogh, Keira.</i> | <i>Newsome Drennan, Nata-sha.</i> | |
| <i>Lahart, John.</i> | <i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i> | |
| <i>Lawless, James.</i> | <i>Nolan, Carol.</i> | |
| <i>Lowry, Michael.</i> | <i>O'Callaghan, Cian.</i> | |
| <i>Maxwell, David.</i> | <i>O'Donoghue, Richard.</i> | |
| <i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i> | <i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</i> | |
| <i>McCarthy, Noel.</i> | <i>O'Hara, Louis.</i> | |
| <i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i> | <i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i> | |
| <i>McCormack, Tony.</i> | <i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i> | |
| <i>McEntee, Helen.</i> | <i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i> | |
| <i>McGrath, Séamus.</i> | <i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i> | |
| <i>McGreehan, Erin.</i> | <i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i> | |
| <i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i> | <i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i> | <i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Michael.</i> | <i>Quaide, Liam.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Shane.</i> | <i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i> | |
| <i>Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Rice, Pádraig.</i> | |
| <i>Murphy, Michael.</i> | <i>Sheehan, Conor.</i> | |
| <i>Neville, Joe.</i> | <i>Sherlock, Marie.</i> | |
| <i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i> | <i>Smith, Duncan.</i> | |
| <i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i> | <i>Stanley, Brian.</i> | |
| <i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i> | <i>Wall, Mark.</i> | |
| <i>O'Connor, James.</i> | <i>Ward, Charles.</i> | |
| <i>O'Dea, Willie.</i> | <i>Ward, Mark.</i> | |
| <i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i> | <i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</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> | | |

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| <i>Ó Muirí, Naoise.</i> | | |
| <i>Roche, Peter.</i> | | |
| <i>Scanlon, Eamon.</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 Mattie McGrath.

Question declared carried.

Ministers and Secretaries (Attorney General) Bill 2023: Second Stage (Resumed) [Private Members]

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to Second Stage of the Ministers and Secretaries (Attorney General) Bill 2023, taken on Thursday, 3 July 2025. On the question, “That the Bill be now read a Second Time”, a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Question put: “That the Bill be now read a Second Time.”

| <i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 69; 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> | |

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| <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>Daly, Pa.</i> | <i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i> | |
| <i>Devine, Máire.</i> | <i>Calleary, Dara.</i> | |
| <i>Doherty, Pearse.</i> | <i>Canney, Seán.</i> | |
| <i>Donnelly, Paul.</i> | <i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i> | |
| <i>Ellis, Dessie.</i> | <i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i> | |
| <i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i> | <i>Chambers, Jack.</i> | |
| <i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i> | <i>Clendennen, John.</i> | |
| <i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i> | <i>Collins, Niall.</i> | |
| <i>Gannon, Gary.</i> | <i>Connolly, John.</i> | |
| <i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i> | <i>Cooney, Joe.</i> | |
| <i>Gould, Thomas.</i> | <i>Crowe, Cathal.</i> | |
| <i>Graves, Ann.</i> | <i>Cummins, John.</i> | |
| <i>Guirke, Johnny.</i> | <i>Currie, Emer.</i> | |
| <i>Hayes, Eoin.</i> | <i>Daly, Martin.</i> | |
| <i>Healy, Seamus.</i> | <i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i> | |
| <i>Hearne, Rory.</i> | <i>Devlin, Cormac.</i> | |
| <i>Kelly, Alan.</i> | <i>Dolan, Albert.</i> | |
| <i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i> | <i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i> | |
| <i>Kenny, Martin.</i> | <i>Feighan, Frankie.</i> | |
| <i>Kerrane, Claire.</i> | <i>Fleming, Seán.</i> | |
| <i>Lawless, Paul.</i> | <i>Foley, Norma.</i> | |
| <i>Lawlor, George.</i> | <i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i> | |
| <i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i> | <i>Geoghegan, James.</i> | |
| <i>McGettigan, Donna.</i> | <i>Grealish, Noel.</i> | |
| <i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i> | <i>Harkin, Marian.</i> | |
| <i>Mitchell, Denise.</i> | <i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i> | |
| <i>Murphy, Paul.</i> | <i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Mythen, Johnny.</i> | <i>Heydon, Martin.</i> | |
| <i>Nash, Ged.</i> | <i>Higgins, Emer.</i> | |
| <i>Newsome Drennan, Nata-sha.</i> | <i>Keogh, Keira.</i> | |
| <i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i> | <i>Lahart, John.</i> | |
| <i>O'Callaghan, Cian.</i> | <i>Lawless, James.</i> | |
| <i>O'Donoghue, Richard.</i> | <i>Lowry, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</i> | <i>Maxwell, David.</i> | |
| <i>O'Hara, Louis.</i> | <i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i> | <i>McCarthy, Noel.</i> | |
| <i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i> | <i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i> | |

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| <i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i> | <i>McCormack, Tony.</i> | |
| <i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i> | <i>McEntee, Helen.</i> | |
| <i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i> | <i>McGrath, Mattie.</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>Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.</i> | |
| <i>Smith, Duncan.</i> | <i>Murphy, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Stanley, Brian.</i> | <i>Neville, Joe.</i> | |
| <i>Wall, Mark.</i> | <i>Nolan, Carol.</i> | |
| <i>Ward, Charles.</i> | <i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i> | |
| <i>Ward, Mark.</i> | <i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i> | |
| <i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</i> | <i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Connor, James.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Dea, Willie.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</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>Roche, Peter.</i> | |
| | <i>Scanlon, Eamon.</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 Duncan Smith and Ged Nash; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Question declared lost.

9 July 2025

An Ceann Comhairle: The question is lost and the Bill is defeated.

Student Fees: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Donna McGettigan on Tuesday, 8 July 2025:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes:

— comments by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science James Lawless T.D. on RTÉ where he indicated that in the absence of a cost of living package this year student fees will rise; and

— the Minister's statement coupled with the refusal of Government to provide a cost-of-living package this year means student fees this coming September will be €3,000 which is €1,000 higher than they were last year;

further notes:

— students will be disproportionately impacted by the ability of landlords to reset rents to market rates between tenancies as most students only rent for nine months of the year;

— Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, James Browne T.D. has made clear that it will not be possible to provide a specific protection for students in the mainstream private rental sector which is where a majority of students rent;

— it is also not clear what protections, if any, will actually be provided for students in Student Specific Accommodation as this issue was not addressed in the Government's initial proposal and is only now being considered on foot of concerns raised by Sinn Féin, students' unions and others; and

— the cost of living is impacting on every aspect of student life and this increase to fees will heap further financial pressure on young people and their parents; and

calls on the Government to:

— introduce a cost-of-living package which cancels the scheduled €1,000 fee hike and reduces fees by a further €500, meaning the maximum fee this September would be €1,500 instead of €3,000; and

— permanently abolish student fees within two years.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after "Dáil Éireann" and substitute the following:

"recognises that:

— the Government is committed to easing the burden for students and their families;

— the Government will progress its Programme for Government commitments to improve supports for students by increasing maintenance grants, reducing the student contribution fee throughout its term, and developing a multi-annual plan to deliver new student accommodation; and

— stable, predictable policy making should be grounded in the annual budget process cycle, which is currently underway, this is in keeping with decisions on student contribution fees over the past three years;

acknowledges:

— the transformative impact the expansion of third-level and higher education has had on generations of Irish people, our society and our economic success;

— that Ireland leads the way internationally in education, outperforming the European Union (EU)-27 average in third-level educational attainment across all age groups, and in all but one age group, Ireland exceeds the EU average by more than 20 percentage points;

— the step change in research funding since 1997, through the Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions and Research Ireland building the foundations of our economic success with major research institutes across our higher education network; and

— the unlocking of a €1.5 billion funding package through new National Training Fund legislation in the coming months that will include increased core funding for higher education and capital funding to help build on that economic and social progress;

welcomes:

— that the Government will advance measures that will permanently reduce student contribution fees in an equitable manner, moving away from reliance on temporary subventions;

— that the Government has already approved the major changes to the Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) grant, with expanded eligibility from September 2025, with the special rate maintenance threshold rising to €27,400 in line with social welfare increases, all other maintenance and contribution thresholds will increase by 15 per cent, and thresholds for postgraduate and part-time fee support will also be raised;

— the unprecedented rise in the SUSI income threshold to €115,000, the highest level ever, broadening access to supports including the student contribution grant;

— this means that 80 per cent of Irish households are now eligible for full or partial supports towards the cost of higher education;

— that only 20 per cent of households may be liable to pay the full student con-

tribution fee; and

— ahead of Budget 2026, an options paper will be published, which will identify costs and potential impacts of various policy options aimed at reducing the cost of tertiary education, this paper will help inform decision-making ahead of Budget 2026;

commends:

— the Short-Term Activation Programme for driving the development of student accommodation, with 116 beds nearing completion at Maynooth University, and proposals for a further 493 beds at University College Dublin and 405 beds at Dublin City University currently at tender evaluation stage, this progress builds on the delivery of additional units across several other universities;

— the promotional campaigns that have significantly boosted the supply of student accommodation through the Rent-a-Room Relief scheme, which enables homeowners to earn up to €14,000 per annum by renting vacant bedrooms thanks to these efforts, approximately 4,000 bedrooms are available to rent throughout the country;

— the introduction of the Rent Tax Credit to ease accommodation costs that was launched at €500 in 2023 and doubled to €1,000 in 2025, this credit is available to students in purpose-built student accommodation, private rentals, and digs, and can also be claimed by parents on behalf of their student children for eligible rents paid since 2022;

— the Programme for Government commitment to further progressively increase the Rent Tax Credit which will directly benefit students and their parents; and

— the allocation of funding from the Dormant Accounts Fund to support students from Traveller and Roma communities, as well as those with experience of the care system, with the cost of accommodation when living independently while attending third-level education;

notes that:

— almost all full-time undergraduate students benefit from full coverage of their third level tuition fees through the State's Free Fees Initiative, and that almost half of all students receive full or partial State support for their student contribution fee.

— while free-fees eligible students are responsible for the base rate of the student contribution fee, many receive full or partial support through SUSI grants based on their eligibility;

— recent years have seen significant enhancements to the SUSI grant scheme, including the introduction of the €500 Student Contribution Grant, which permanently reduces the student contribution for eligible students, alongside a range of additional supports available through SUSI;

— the Minister for Further and Higher Education Research Innovation and Science will bring a long-term student accommodation strategy to Government later this year with the explicit objective of increasing supply and reducing the reliance on the

private rental market;

— engagement with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage is ongoing to address the impact on students of the proposed rental reforms; and

— engagement with the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitisation is ongoing regarding National Development Plan funding for student accommodation; and

further notes that options for revising student supports, including adjustments to the student contribution fee rate and SUSI student contribution supports, will be considered as part of Budget 2026.

- (Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the motion regarding student fees. On Tuesday, 8 July 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, 85; Níl, 71; 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>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i> | |
| <i>Butterly, Paula.</i> | <i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i> | |
| <i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i> | <i>Cronin, Réada.</i> | |
| <i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i> | <i>Crowe, Seán.</i> | |
| <i>Byrne, Thomas.</i> | <i>Cullinane, David.</i> | |
| <i>Cahill, Michael.</i> | <i>Cummins, Jen.</i> | |
| <i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i> | <i>Daly, Pa.</i> | |
| <i>Calleary, Dara.</i> | <i>Devine, Máire.</i> | |
| <i>Canney, Seán.</i> | <i>Doherty, Pearse.</i> | |
| <i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i> | <i>Donnelly, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Ellis, Dessie.</i> | |
| <i>Chambers, Jack.</i> | <i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i> | |
| <i>Clendennen, John.</i> | <i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i> | |

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| <i>Collins, Niall.</i> | <i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Connolly, John.</i> | <i>Gannon, Gary.</i> | |
| <i>Cooney, Joe.</i> | <i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i> | |
| <i>Crowe, Cathal.</i> | <i>Gould, Thomas.</i> | |
| <i>Cummins, John.</i> | <i>Graves, Ann.</i> | |
| <i>Currie, Emer.</i> | <i>Guirke, Johnny.</i> | |
| <i>Daly, Martin.</i> | <i>Hayes, Eoin.</i> | |
| <i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i> | <i>Healy, Seamus.</i> | |
| <i>Devlin, Cormac.</i> | <i>Hearne, Rory.</i> | |
| <i>Dolan, Albert.</i> | <i>Kelly, Alan.</i> | |
| <i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i> | <i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i> | |
| <i>Feighan, Frankie.</i> | <i>Kenny, Martin.</i> | |
| <i>Fleming, Seán.</i> | <i>Kerrane, Claire.</i> | |
| <i>Foley, Norma.</i> | <i>Lawless, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i> | <i>Lawlor, George.</i> | |
| <i>Geoghegan, James.</i> | <i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i> | |
| <i>Grealish, Noel.</i> | <i>McGettigan, Donna.</i> | |
| <i>Harkin, Marian.</i> | <i>McGrath, Mattie.</i> | |
| <i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i> | <i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i> | |
| <i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i> | <i>Mitchell, Denise.</i> | |
| <i>Heydon, Martin.</i> | <i>Murphy, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Higgins, Emer.</i> | <i>Mythen, Johnny.</i> | |
| <i>Keogh, Keira.</i> | <i>Nash, Ged.</i> | |
| <i>Lahart, John.</i> | <i>Newsome Drennan, Nata-sha.</i> | |
| <i>Lawless, James.</i> | <i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i> | |
| <i>Lowry, Michael.</i> | <i>Nolan, Carol.</i> | |
| <i>Maxwell, David.</i> | <i>O'Callaghan, Cian.</i> | |
| <i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i> | <i>O'Donoghue, Richard.</i> | |
| <i>McCarthy, Noel.</i> | <i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</i> | |
| <i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i> | <i>O'Hara, Louis.</i> | |
| <i>McCormack, Tony.</i> | <i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i> | |
| <i>McEntee, Helen.</i> | <i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i> | |
| <i>McGrath, Séamus.</i> | <i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i> | |
| <i>McGreehan, Erin.</i> | <i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i> | |
| <i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i> | <i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i> | <i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Michael.</i> | <i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Shane.</i> | <i>Quaide, Liam.</i> | |
| <i>Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i> | |
| <i>Murphy, Michael.</i> | <i>Rice, Pádraig.</i> | |
| <i>Neville, Joe.</i> | <i>Sheehan, Conor.</i> | |

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| <i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i> | <i>Sherlock, Marie.</i> | |
| <i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i> | <i>Smith, Duncan.</i> | |
| <i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i> | <i>Stanley, Brian.</i> | |
| <i>O'Connor, James.</i> | <i>Wall, Mark.</i> | |
| <i>O'Dea, Willie.</i> | <i>Ward, Charles.</i> | |
| <i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i> | <i>Ward, Mark.</i> | |
| <i>O'Meara, Ryan.</i> | <i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</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>Roche, Peter.</i> | | |
| <i>Scanlon, Eamon.</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.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

| <i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 85; Níl, 71; 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> | |

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| <i>Burke, Peter.</i> | <i>Connolly, Catherine.</i> | |
| <i>Butler, Mary.</i> | <i>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i> | |
| <i>Butterly, Paula.</i> | <i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i> | |
| <i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i> | <i>Cronin, Réada.</i> | |
| <i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i> | <i>Crowe, Seán.</i> | |
| <i>Byrne, Thomas.</i> | <i>Cullinane, David.</i> | |
| <i>Cahill, Michael.</i> | <i>Cummins, Jen.</i> | |
| <i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i> | <i>Daly, Pa.</i> | |
| <i>Calleary, Dara.</i> | <i>Devine, Máire.</i> | |
| <i>Canney, Seán.</i> | <i>Doherty, Pearse.</i> | |
| <i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i> | <i>Donnelly, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Ellis, Dessie.</i> | |
| <i>Chambers, Jack.</i> | <i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i> | |
| <i>Clendennen, John.</i> | <i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i> | |
| <i>Collins, Niall.</i> | <i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Connolly, John.</i> | <i>Gannon, Gary.</i> | |
| <i>Cooney, Joe.</i> | <i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i> | |
| <i>Crowe, Cathal.</i> | <i>Gould, Thomas.</i> | |
| <i>Cummins, John.</i> | <i>Graves, Ann.</i> | |
| <i>Currie, Emer.</i> | <i>Guirke, Johnny.</i> | |
| <i>Daly, Martin.</i> | <i>Hayes, Eoin.</i> | |
| <i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i> | <i>Healy, Seamus.</i> | |
| <i>Devlin, Cormac.</i> | <i>Hearne, Rory.</i> | |
| <i>Dolan, Albert.</i> | <i>Kelly, Alan.</i> | |
| <i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i> | <i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i> | |
| <i>Feighan, Frankie.</i> | <i>Kenny, Martin.</i> | |
| <i>Fleming, Seán.</i> | <i>Kerrane, Claire.</i> | |
| <i>Foley, Norma.</i> | <i>Lawless, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i> | <i>Lawlor, George.</i> | |
| <i>Geoghegan, James.</i> | <i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i> | |
| <i>Grealish, Noel.</i> | <i>McGettigan, Donna.</i> | |
| <i>Harkin, Marian.</i> | <i>McGrath, Mattie.</i> | |
| <i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i> | <i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i> | |
| <i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i> | <i>Mitchell, Denise.</i> | |
| <i>Heydon, Martin.</i> | <i>Murphy, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Higgins, Emer.</i> | <i>Mythen, Johnny.</i> | |
| <i>Keogh, Keira.</i> | <i>Nash, Ged.</i> | |
| <i>Lahart, John.</i> | <i>Newsome Drennan, Nata-sha.</i> | |
| <i>Lawless, James.</i> | <i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i> | |
| <i>Lowry, Michael.</i> | <i>Nolan, Carol.</i> | |
| <i>Maxwell, David.</i> | <i>O'Callaghan, Cian.</i> | |
| <i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i> | <i>O'Donoghue, Richard.</i> | |

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| <i>McCarthy, Noel.</i> | <i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</i> | |
| <i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i> | <i>O'Hara, Louis.</i> | |
| <i>McCormack, Tony.</i> | <i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i> | |
| <i>McEntee, Helen.</i> | <i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i> | |
| <i>McGrath, Séamus.</i> | <i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i> | |
| <i>McGreehan, Erin.</i> | <i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i> | |
| <i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i> | <i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i> | <i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Michael.</i> | <i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Shane.</i> | <i>Quaide, Liam.</i> | |
| <i>Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i> | |
| <i>Murphy, Michael.</i> | <i>Rice, Pádraig.</i> | |
| <i>Neville, Joe.</i> | <i>Sheehan, Conor.</i> | |
| <i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i> | <i>Sherlock, Marie.</i> | |
| <i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i> | <i>Smith, Duncan.</i> | |
| <i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i> | <i>Stanley, Brian.</i> | |
| <i>O'Connor, James.</i> | <i>Wall, Mark.</i> | |
| <i>O'Dea, Willie.</i> | <i>Ward, Charles.</i> | |
| <i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i> | <i>Ward, Mark.</i> | |
| <i>O'Meara, Ryan.</i> | <i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</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>Roche, Peter.</i> | | |
| <i>Scanlon, Eamon.</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.

Question declared carried.

Transparency for Supermarket Profits: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Jennifer Whitmore on Wednesday, 9 July 2025:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

— households across the country are struggling to make ends meet as the cost of living soars;

— more than 70 per cent of people in Ireland are either, “extremely” or “very” concerned about the cost of groceries, according to the recent PwC’s Voice of the Consumer Survey 2025;

— many families are now spending €3,000 more a year on groceries than they were in 2021;

— grocery prices have increased by nearly 40 per cent in the past four years, while the increase in the Consumer Price Index, over the same period, is 21 per cent;

— grocery prices have increased at three times the rate of general inflation over the past year alone;

— sky-rocketing grocery prices have been coupled with huge increases in other household costs, like energy and rent, and are putting a huge strain on low- and middle-income families;

— according to a recent Credit Union Consumer Sentiment survey, 15 per cent of Irish consumers would be unable to cope with a financial emergency costing €1,000;

— the number of children living in consistent poverty nearly doubled, to more than 100,000, in 2024; and

— the Children’s Rights Alliance Chief Executive Officer, Tanya Ward, has described the cumulative impact of continued rising costs as “a landslide effect” for low-income families, meaning that basic necessities, such as nutritious food or a warm home have become increasingly difficult;

further notes that:

— on 10th May, 2023, then Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Neale Richmond T.D. convened a supermarket summit, an emergency meeting of the retail forum;

— Minister of State Richmond gave supermarkets six weeks to bring down the cost of groceries, but failed to ask them to reveal their profits;

— the meeting was a failure and in the more than two years since that meeting,

prices have continued to soar; and

— there is a commitment in the Programme for Government to “strengthen competition by promoting price transparency in all sectors”;

believes that:

— there is a lack of transparency around supermarket profits that is not acceptable given sustained and soaring prices;

— it is also unclear how much profit goes to producers, processors, and retailers in the chain;

— consumers have a right to know whether surging grocery prices reflect genuine input cost increases or price gouging; and

— accounting transparency by large grocery retailers is essential to protect household budgets, restore consumer trust, and ensure fairness in one of the most critical markets for Irish consumers; and

calls on the Government to:

— introduce legislation requiring all grocery retailers operating in Ireland with annual turnover above €10 million to publish full audited annual financial accounts;

— ensure that this requirement applies to all operators, whether Irish-incorporated or foreign branches, ensuring no retailer can claim foreign registration to evade transparency obligations;

— monitor and publish regular reports on the impact of this transparency initiative on grocery price inflation and competition in the retail sector;

— grant the Agri-Food Regulator the powers it needs to “compel the provision of necessary price and market information from relevant businesses in the agri-food supply chain, in order to fulfil its price and market data analysis function”, as requested of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine by the Chairperson of the Regulator’s Board in September 2024; and

— amend the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014 to grant the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission statutory authority to compel the disclosure of information when carrying out market studies in line with powers already available in the United Kingdom and other jurisdictions.

The following amendment No. 1 was moved by the Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, Deputy Niamh Smyth:

To delete all words after “Dáil Éireann” and substitute the following:

“notes that the Government;

— recognises concerns with regards to the rising cost of groceries and the financial pressure on households;

— shares the commitment to ensuring fairness, transparency, and competition in

9 July 2025

the retail sector; and

— are actively progressing a range of targeted measures to support consumers and strengthen regulatory oversight;

in this context, notes that the Government proposes the following targeted actions, to strengthen transparency and protect consumers:

— with regards to strengthening the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC's) powers, and in line with the Programme for Government, progress legislative reforms to enhance the CCPC's enforcement powers, including the ability to impose stronger sanctions for breaches of consumer protection law, and this will ensure that anti-consumer or exploitative practices can be tackled more effectively;

— with regards to leveraging the CCPC's State of Competition Analysis, the CCPC's ongoing State of Competition work provides a robust evidence base to assess market dynamics in all sectors and identify where policy interventions may be required, and the Government will continue to engage with the CCPC on the potential for further analysis of pricing and margin trends, where appropriate;

— with regards to the CCPC's 2023 High-Level Analysis of the Irish Grocery Retail Sector, has sought an update to the findings, which found no evidence of market failure or excessive pricing, and highlighted that food inflation in Ireland has been among the lowest in the European Union, and this is expected in the coming weeks; and

— with regards to Consumer Empowerment Measures, will continue to support public awareness campaigns and digital tools to help consumers compare prices and make informed choices.”.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1 to amendment No. 1:

After “compare prices and make informed choices” to insert:

“calls on the Government to:

— commit to passing the Competition and Consumer Protection (Unfair Prices) Bill 2023; and

— instead of using over €700 million to cut the rate of Value Added Tax on hospitality in Budget 2026, to use these hundreds of millions to reduce child poverty with a targeted second tier of child benefit, and other measures to provide income supports to households.”.

- (Deputy Ged Nash)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to amendment No. 1 to Government amendment No. 1. On Wednesday, 9 July 2025, on the question, “That the amendment to the amendment be made”, 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, 29; Níl, 89; Staon, 37.</i> | | |
|--|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Tá</i> | <i>Níl</i> | <i>Staon</i> |
| <i>Ahern, Ciarán.</i> | <i>Aird, William.</i> | <i>Bennett, Cathy.</i> |
| <i>Bacik, Ivana.</i> | <i>Ardagh, Catherine.</i> | <i>Brady, John.</i> |
| <i>Connolly, Catherine.</i> | <i>Boland, Grace.</i> | <i>Buckley, Pat.</i> |
| <i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i> | <i>Brabazon, Tom.</i> | <i>Byrne, Joanna.</i> |
| <i>Cummins, Jen.</i> | <i>Brennan, Brian.</i> | <i>Clarke, Sorca.</i> |
| <i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i> | <i>Brennan, Shay.</i> | <i>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i> |
| <i>Gannon, Gary.</i> | <i>Brophy, Colm.</i> | <i>Cronin, Réada.</i> |
| <i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i> | <i>Browne, James.</i> | <i>Crowe, Seán.</i> |
| <i>Hayes, Eoin.</i> | <i>Burke, Colm.</i> | <i>Cullinane, David.</i> |
| <i>Healy, Seamus.</i> | <i>Burke, Peter.</i> | <i>Daly, Pa.</i> |
| <i>Hearne, Rory.</i> | <i>Butler, Mary.</i> | <i>Devine, Máire.</i> |
| <i>Kelly, Alan.</i> | <i>Butterly, Paula.</i> | <i>Doherty, Pearse.</i> |
| <i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i> | <i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i> | <i>Donnelly, Paul.</i> |
| <i>Lawlor, George.</i> | <i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i> | <i>Ellis, Dessie.</i> |
| <i>McGrath, Mattie.</i> | <i>Byrne, Thomas.</i> | <i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i> |
| <i>Murphy, Paul.</i> | <i>Cahill, Michael.</i> | <i>Gould, Thomas.</i> |
| <i>Nash, Ged.</i> | <i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i> | <i>Graves, Ann.</i> |
| <i>Nolan, Carol.</i> | <i>Calleary, Dara.</i> | <i>Guirke, Johnny.</i> |
| <i>O'Callaghan, Cian.</i> | <i>Canney, Seán.</i> | <i>Kenny, Martin.</i> |
| <i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</i> | <i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i> | <i>Kerrane, Claire.</i> |
| <i>Quaide, Liam.</i> | <i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i> |
| <i>Rice, Pádraig.</i> | <i>Chambers, Jack.</i> | <i>McGettigan, Donna.</i> |
| <i>Sheehan, Conor.</i> | <i>Clendennen, John.</i> | <i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i> |
| <i>Sherlock, Marie.</i> | <i>Collins, Michael.</i> | <i>Mitchell, Denise.</i> |
| <i>Smith, Duncan.</i> | <i>Collins, Niall.</i> | <i>Mythen, Johnny.</i> |
| <i>Stanley, Brian.</i> | <i>Connolly, John.</i> | <i>Newsome Drennan, Nata-sha.</i> |
| <i>Wall, Mark.</i> | <i>Cooney, Joe.</i> | <i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i> |
| <i>Ward, Charles.</i> | <i>Crowe, Cathal.</i> | <i>O'Hara, Louis.</i> |
| <i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Cummins, John.</i> | <i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i> |
| | <i>Currie, Emer.</i> | <i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i> |
| | <i>Daly, Martin.</i> | <i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i> |
| | <i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i> | <i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i> |
| | <i>Devlin, Cormac.</i> | <i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i> |
| | <i>Dolan, Albert.</i> | <i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i> |
| | <i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i> | <i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i> |
| | <i>Feighan, Frankie.</i> | <i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i> |
| | <i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i> | <i>Ward, Mark.</i> |
| | <i>Fleming, Seán.</i> | |
| | <i>Foley, Norma.</i> | |
| | <i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i> | |

9 July 2025

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| | <i>Geoghegan, James.</i> | |
| | <i>Grealish, Noel.</i> | |
| | <i>Harkin, Marian.</i> | |
| | <i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i> | |
| | <i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i> | |
| | <i>Heydon, Martin.</i> | |
| | <i>Higgins, Emer.</i> | |
| | <i>Keogh, Keira.</i> | |
| | <i>Lahart, John.</i> | |
| | <i>Lawless, James.</i> | |
| | <i>Lawless, Paul.</i> | |
| | <i>Lowry, Michael.</i> | |
| | <i>Maxwell, David.</i> | |
| | <i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i> | |
| | <i>McCarthy, Noel.</i> | |
| | <i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i> | |
| | <i>McCormack, Tony.</i> | |
| | <i>McEntee, Helen.</i> | |
| | <i>McGrath, Séamus.</i> | |
| | <i>McGreehan, Erin.</i> | |
| | <i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i> | |
| | <i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i> | |
| | <i>Moynihan, Michael.</i> | |
| | <i>Moynihan, Shane.</i> | |
| | <i>Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.</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'Connor, James.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Dea, Willie.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i> | |
| | <i>O'Donoghue, Richard.</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>Roche, Peter.</i> | |

Dáil Éireann

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| | <i>Scanlon, Eamon.</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 Duncan Smith and Ged Nash; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Amendment declared lost.

Amendment put:

| <i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 85; Níl, 71; 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>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i> | |
| <i>Butterly, Paula.</i> | <i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i> | |
| <i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i> | <i>Cronin, Réada.</i> | |
| <i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i> | <i>Crowe, Seán.</i> | |
| <i>Byrne, Thomas.</i> | <i>Cullinane, David.</i> | |
| <i>Cahill, Michael.</i> | <i>Cummins, Jen.</i> | |
| <i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i> | <i>Daly, Pa.</i> | |
| <i>Calleary, Dara.</i> | <i>Devine, Máire.</i> | |
| <i>Canney, Seán.</i> | <i>Doherty, Pearse.</i> | |
| <i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i> | <i>Donnelly, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Ellis, Dessie.</i> | |
| <i>Chambers, Jack.</i> | <i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i> | |
| <i>Clendennen, John.</i> | <i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i> | |

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| <i>Collins, Niall.</i> | <i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Connolly, John.</i> | <i>Gannon, Gary.</i> | |
| <i>Cooney, Joe.</i> | <i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i> | |
| <i>Crowe, Cathal.</i> | <i>Gould, Thomas.</i> | |
| <i>Cummins, John.</i> | <i>Graves, Ann.</i> | |
| <i>Currie, Emer.</i> | <i>Guirke, Johnny.</i> | |
| <i>Daly, Martin.</i> | <i>Hayes, Eoin.</i> | |
| <i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i> | <i>Healy, Seamus.</i> | |
| <i>Devlin, Cormac.</i> | <i>Hearne, Rory.</i> | |
| <i>Dolan, Albert.</i> | <i>Kelly, Alan.</i> | |
| <i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i> | <i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i> | |
| <i>Feighan, Frankie.</i> | <i>Kenny, Martin.</i> | |
| <i>Fleming, Seán.</i> | <i>Kerrane, Claire.</i> | |
| <i>Foley, Norma.</i> | <i>Lawless, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i> | <i>Lawlor, George.</i> | |
| <i>Geoghegan, James.</i> | <i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i> | |
| <i>Grealish, Noel.</i> | <i>McGettigan, Donna.</i> | |
| <i>Harkin, Marian.</i> | <i>McGrath, Mattie.</i> | |
| <i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i> | <i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i> | |
| <i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i> | <i>Mitchell, Denise.</i> | |
| <i>Heydon, Martin.</i> | <i>Murphy, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Higgins, Emer.</i> | <i>Mythen, Johnny.</i> | |
| <i>Keogh, Keira.</i> | <i>Nash, Ged.</i> | |
| <i>Lahart, John.</i> | <i>Newsome Drennan, Nata-sha.</i> | |
| <i>Lawless, James.</i> | <i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i> | |
| <i>Lowry, Michael.</i> | <i>Nolan, Carol.</i> | |
| <i>Maxwell, David.</i> | <i>O'Callaghan, Cian.</i> | |
| <i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i> | <i>O'Donoghue, Richard.</i> | |
| <i>McCarthy, Noel.</i> | <i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</i> | |
| <i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i> | <i>O'Hara, Louis.</i> | |
| <i>McCormack, Tony.</i> | <i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i> | |
| <i>McEntee, Helen.</i> | <i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i> | |
| <i>McGrath, Séamus.</i> | <i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i> | |
| <i>McGreehan, Erin.</i> | <i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i> | |
| <i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i> | <i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i> | <i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Michael.</i> | <i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Shane.</i> | <i>Quaide, Liam.</i> | |
| <i>Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i> | |
| <i>Murphy, Michael.</i> | <i>Rice, Pádraig.</i> | |
| <i>Neville, Joe.</i> | <i>Sheehan, Conor.</i> | |

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| <i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i> | <i>Sherlock, Marie.</i> | |
| <i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i> | <i>Smith, Duncan.</i> | |
| <i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i> | <i>Stanley, Brian.</i> | |
| <i>O'Connor, James.</i> | <i>Wall, Mark.</i> | |
| <i>O'Dea, Willie.</i> | <i>Ward, Charles.</i> | |
| <i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i> | <i>Ward, Mark.</i> | |
| <i>O'Meara, Ryan.</i> | <i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</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>Roche, Peter.</i> | | |
| <i>Scanlon, Eamon.</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 Sinéad Gibney and Jennifer Whitmore.

Amendment declared carried.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

| <i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 85; Níl, 71; 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> | |

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| <i>Burke, Peter.</i> | <i>Connolly, Catherine.</i> | |
| <i>Butler, Mary.</i> | <i>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i> | |
| <i>Butterly, Paula.</i> | <i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i> | |
| <i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i> | <i>Cronin, Réada.</i> | |
| <i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i> | <i>Crowe, Seán.</i> | |
| <i>Byrne, Thomas.</i> | <i>Cullinane, David.</i> | |
| <i>Cahill, Michael.</i> | <i>Cummins, Jen.</i> | |
| <i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i> | <i>Daly, Pa.</i> | |
| <i>Calleary, Dara.</i> | <i>Devine, Máire.</i> | |
| <i>Canney, Seán.</i> | <i>Doherty, Pearse.</i> | |
| <i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i> | <i>Donnelly, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Ellis, Dessie.</i> | |
| <i>Chambers, Jack.</i> | <i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i> | |
| <i>Clendennen, John.</i> | <i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i> | |
| <i>Collins, Niall.</i> | <i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i> | |
| <i>Connolly, John.</i> | <i>Gannon, Gary.</i> | |
| <i>Cooney, Joe.</i> | <i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i> | |
| <i>Crowe, Cathal.</i> | <i>Gould, Thomas.</i> | |
| <i>Cummins, John.</i> | <i>Graves, Ann.</i> | |
| <i>Currie, Emer.</i> | <i>Guirke, Johnny.</i> | |
| <i>Daly, Martin.</i> | <i>Hayes, Eoin.</i> | |
| <i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i> | <i>Healy, Seamus.</i> | |
| <i>Devlin, Cormac.</i> | <i>Hearne, Rory.</i> | |
| <i>Dolan, Albert.</i> | <i>Kelly, Alan.</i> | |
| <i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i> | <i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i> | |
| <i>Feighan, Frankie.</i> | <i>Kenny, Martin.</i> | |
| <i>Fleming, Seán.</i> | <i>Kerrane, Claire.</i> | |
| <i>Foley, Norma.</i> | <i>Lawless, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i> | <i>Lawlor, George.</i> | |
| <i>Geoghegan, James.</i> | <i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i> | |
| <i>Grealish, Noel.</i> | <i>McGettigan, Donna.</i> | |
| <i>Harkin, Marian.</i> | <i>McGrath, Mattie.</i> | |
| <i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i> | <i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i> | |
| <i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i> | <i>Mitchell, Denise.</i> | |
| <i>Heydon, Martin.</i> | <i>Murphy, Paul.</i> | |
| <i>Higgins, Emer.</i> | <i>Mythen, Johnny.</i> | |
| <i>Keogh, Keira.</i> | <i>Nash, Ged.</i> | |
| <i>Lahart, John.</i> | <i>Newsome Drennan, Nata-sha.</i> | |
| <i>Lawless, James.</i> | <i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i> | |
| <i>Lowry, Michael.</i> | <i>Nolan, Carol.</i> | |
| <i>Maxwell, David.</i> | <i>O'Callaghan, Cian.</i> | |
| <i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i> | <i>O'Donoghue, Richard.</i> | |

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| <i>McCarthy, Noel.</i> | <i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</i> | |
| <i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i> | <i>O'Hara, Louis.</i> | |
| <i>McCormack, Tony.</i> | <i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i> | |
| <i>McEntee, Helen.</i> | <i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i> | |
| <i>McGrath, Séamus.</i> | <i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i> | |
| <i>McGreehan, Erin.</i> | <i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i> | |
| <i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i> | <i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i> | <i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Michael.</i> | <i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i> | |
| <i>Moynihan, Shane.</i> | <i>Quaide, Liam.</i> | |
| <i>Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.</i> | <i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i> | |
| <i>Murphy, Michael.</i> | <i>Rice, Pádraig.</i> | |
| <i>Neville, Joe.</i> | <i>Sheehan, Conor.</i> | |
| <i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i> | <i>Sherlock, Marie.</i> | |
| <i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i> | <i>Smith, Duncan.</i> | |
| <i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i> | <i>Stanley, Brian.</i> | |
| <i>O'Connor, James.</i> | <i>Wall, Mark.</i> | |
| <i>O'Dea, Willie.</i> | <i>Ward, Charles.</i> | |
| <i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i> | <i>Ward, Mark.</i> | |
| <i>O'Meara, Ryan.</i> | <i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</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>Roche, Peter.</i> | | |
| <i>Scanlon, Eamon.</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 Sinéad Gibney and Jennifer Whitmore.

Question declared carried.

9 July 2025

Cuireadh an Dáil ar athló ar 10.06 p.m. go dtí 8.47 a.m., Déardaoin, an 10 Iúil 2025.

The Dáil adjourned at 10.06 p.m. until 8.47 a.m. on Thursday, 10 July 2025.