



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—Neamhcheartaithe
(OFFICIAL REPORT—Unrevised)

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 6 Bealtaine 2026

Wednesday, 6 May 2026

Chuaigh an Ceann Comhairle i gceannas ar 2 p.m.

Paidir agus Machnamh.

Prayer and Reflection.

Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions

An Ceann Comhairle: I welcome the public in the Gallery to our session. I will now take Leaders' Questions under Standing Order 38. I call Deputy Mary Lou McDonald.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The urgent need for an emergency budget grows by the day. In the past week, we have had report after report all saying the same thing: this crisis is getting worse. This morning, we heard that rising prices hit the average household by close to €2,000 a year. Families are under huge pressure to keep up with the cost of groceries, fuel, insurance and energy bills, and €2,000 is a lot of money for those working families. For many, it is the difference between staying afloat or going under.

The big question everyone is asking is: what is the Taoiseach waiting for? How bad do things have to get before he wakes up and acts? What happened on Friday last should be a loud wake-up call for his Government. PrepayPower, Ireland's largest pay-as-you-go energy provider, announced sharp hikes in its electricity and gas prices. Nearly 250,000 customers will see their average yearly bill shoot up by almost €300 and that is only the start. More increases are on the way.

We already have the highest electricity prices in Europe, which was confirmed by Eurostat today. We pay €480 a year more compared to the EU average. Other suppliers will hike their prices in coming weeks, and why would they not? The big energy companies have nothing to fear from the Government. It has not laid a glove on them. It has taken no action to get prices down and its gutless, *carte blanche* approach and refusal to rein in these companies has left us with the highest electricity bills in Europe, bills that are landing now and have pushed more than 300,000 households into arrears. People are sick of the Government standing back as they take hit after hit. It will not take on the energy companies to get the prices down. It will not provide energy credits to help households with bills and it pushes back against the immediate need for an emergency budget. We have a do-nothing Government led by a do-nothing Taoiseach.

As prices go through the roof, the Government leaves people in desperate situations - stress, worry, cutting back, going without and working hard but still struggling for the basics - but it has the resources to act. The surplus provides room to help but the Government's message to the working people of Ireland is to struggle on, make do and wait for next year's budget as the bills pile up. This is not just a bad political choice; this is, in fact, a dereliction of the Taoiseach's duty to the people who keep this country going. Tá tuilleadh arduithe ar phraghsanna leictreachais os ár gcomhair amach, ach tá Fianna Fáil agus Fine Gael fós sásta suí siar agus faic a dhéanamh. Tá cáinaisnéis éigeandála agus creidmheasanna fuinnimh ag teastáil láithreach.

The time for lame excuses is over and the time for action is now. An emergency budget is not just another call from Sinn Féin. It is essential to help prevent households from going to the wall. Energy credits are vital to help families cope with runaway electricity prices. It boils down to this. The Taoiseach can either deliver an emergency budget, provide the energy credits, give households the lifeline they desperately need, or he can stand back and continue to do nothing.

The Taoiseach: Ní aontaím in aon chor leis an Teachta. Tá an-chuid déanta ag an Rialtas go dtí seo, idir an cháinaisnéis a bhí againn agus an pacáiste a d'fhoilsigh muid coicís ó shin, chun an brú atá gan dabht ar theaghlaigh agus ar mhuintir na hÉireann a ísliú agus a laghdú. Mar aon leis sin, tá an-chuid infheistíochta curtha isteach againn i seirbhísí oideachais, sláinte agus i go leor seirbhísí eile.

I just want to say at the outset that the Government from the budget onwards has focused on investment in services and alleviating pressures on families, and will continue to do so. We acknowledge that there are significant pressures on people because of a range of issues, not least the impact on fuel prices arising from the Middle Eastern war, which follows the tariff issue and which follows the situation with the invasion in Ukraine, and the post-Covid inflationary cycle that occurred then, which was at 10%. One of the challenges here is how to respond properly, sensitively and in a targeted way that also maintains economic balance and proportion. What I mean by that is that if we were to take the Sinn Féin budgetary package that it put forward at the last budget, and if we were to add the €3 billion and more, we would be looking at inflation rates of about 5% or 6% in our economy. That is the reality of it. You have got to be careful. You can keep spending more and more money every month but it will have an inflationary impact and we will be chasing inflation. That will not alleviate pressures on working families because when inflation gets higher, it is those on the lowest incomes who will suffer the most. We have to be extremely targeted in how we do things, both sectorally and in terms of low-income groups. Remember we have reduced VAT already in terms of electricity charges down to 9% and we are going to maintain that out to 2030. That just gets ignored when the Deputy lists everything.

We announced a €755 million to €770 million package recently to alleviate the pressures on the public and, indeed, on crucial sectors around food production and around haulage, and on many thousands of workers working in those sectors. Also, as we were doing that, we have increased expenditure on education by €646 million additional to the budget. We have choices here. You cannot have it each way and every way. We are keeping a focus-----

Deputy Ged Nash: The sums are wrong in the budget.

The Taoiseach: -----on those services. If you keep spending billions now, you will not have the money for education, special education, childcare reductions and health services. You will not have the funding for all of that at the next budget or, indeed, for next year.

On what we have done so far, we extended and increased the fuel allowance and we expanded it in terms of the number of people it covers, particularly those on the working family payment. The minimum wage has increased significantly. We have deferred the carbon tax increases and we have a variety of packages for a range of sectors. Our social welfare payments went up €10 in the last budget. It has come under huge pressure since then, and I acknowledge that. We also put in record increases to child income support payments - the highest on record. That was a really significant and targeted message. The way the Deputy wants it is that she wants not to do that. She wants us to move away from that sort of targeting approach.

Then, in the context of the October budget, we will have available to us other mechanisms like tax and other measures that we can introduce that can benefit people to get them over the winter period, which is going to be a crucial period for all.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Taoiseach acknowledges on the one hand go bhfuil daoine is teaghlaigh faoi bhrú, that people are under pressure. He acknowledges the stress that people are living with daily.

I am sure the Taoiseach accepts the figures and facts presented to him of over 300,000 households in arrears, of energy prices, including gas and electricity, rising again and of people here already spending more than anyone else across Europe on their electricity costs. He acknowledges all of that but then when the obvious question is asked of him, which is what will the Government do to respond now in May, not next October or January, as these bills are landing and as families are under this level of pressure, the Taoiseach comes up blank. All he offers is spoof and distraction. Nobody is going to buy that because people have to live with the realities of the here and now.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: When will the Taoiseach intervene? He really is a do-nothing Taoiseach-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: -----or else he is just so incredibly indifferent-----

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

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: -----to the reality of people's lives.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach will respond.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Does he listen to people?

An Ceann Comhairle: I call the Taoiseach.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Does he hear what people are living with?

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

The Taoiseach: No disrespect to the Deputy and her party but she is the personification of spoof and bluster.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: If we had introduced the measures she advocates from last October, we would be looking at an inflation rate of close to 5%. That is by any yardstick or formula. That is the reality. We have already acted and the Deputy knows that. Some €750 million is not spoof; it is real funding that we have budgeted for and allocated in terms of the food production sector, farmers, contractors and the haulage industry. We have hundreds of thousands of people working in all of those sectors. It might be spoof to the Deputy because she is a Johnny-come-lately when it comes to the farming world-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Pardon me?

The Taoiseach: -----but it is not spoof to the people benefiting from it.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Says farmer Micheál.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please.

The Taoiseach: In terms of the people who are going to benefit from it-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Silage, manure and cow dung. Was the Taoiseach out cutting the silage?

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, Deputy McDonald.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Go away out of that.

The Taoiseach: Exactly, the Deputy does not want to listen to anybody because she is incapable of listening to the truth.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach. I call Deputy Bacik.

The Taoiseach: The bottom line is-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The bottom line is time is up.

The Taoiseach: -----the Deputy's approach all along on this-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Did the Taoiseach come in on his tractor?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Bacik is on her feet.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: Rising costs are blowing a €2,000 hole in average household budgets this year. That is in today's *Irish Independent*. The cost of food, health insurance and energy are all soaring. Ireland has the highest household electricity prices in the EU, as Eurostat has confirmed. The Government's words of sympathy for struggling families are meaningless because it is failing to take action to cut energy costs. It is hunting with the hounds and running with the hare and the hare has got its brains too, it seems. We saw a hare-brained notion from Deputy James O'Connor that nuclear power somehow represents a solution to the crushing cost of energy here but as the Deputy has not acknowledged, in countries with a planning system that actually works, nuclear still takes 15 years to come on stream at a minimum. The stakes for hard-pressed households and PAYE workers are just too high for this sort of public brainstorming exercise from Fianna Fáil TDs.

We in the Labour Party welcome national conversations about energy security but not at the expense of actual delivery. Let us look at delivery. In Ireland, we are still at best four years away from delivering any offshore wind energy. That delay is due to lack of Government ambition and government focus. It is deeply regrettable because unlike nuclear, wind power offers feasible, scalable projects. Other countries have led the way on renewables. Let us take Spain, a European leader. More than half of Spanish electricity is generated from renewables. Its government, a labour government, saw which way the proverbial wind was blowing four years ago when Russia mounted its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Spain rapidly ramped up renewable energy capacity, achieving 75% low-carbon electricity generation last year. Solar and wind power are significantly lowering energy bills in Spain. Why are we not doing the same? Our climate boasts plenty of wind but without turbines it is going to waste. As a result, people here are wasting hard-earned money filling the coffers of oil and gas giants. Households here pay €500 more per year for electricity than the EU average. Why does the Government not focus on rapid delivery of renewables? Instead of delivery, it seems that Fianna Fáil are the Don Quixote of Irish politics; it is frightened of windmills. What else can explain the delay? There is so much more we could do. It is not just wind energy; there is also plug-in solar and enhanced battery capacity. Renewables can drastically reduce household bills. We need them to cut emissions and meet climate goals too.

The Government is failing to insulate people from the cost of energy now and failing to ensure the future of our younger generations. Its go-to solution for energy shocks is subsidies for fossil fuels and energy companies are reaping windfall gains. Where is the windfall tax that could fund targeted energy credits, as Labour has sought and where is the climate action plan for 2026? It was due in January and still has not appeared. When will we see the Government take action on renewables to cut costs for struggling households?

The Taoiseach: The Deputy mentioned that Spain was at 50% renewables for electricity generation. Last February, 50% of our electricity generation was renewable. I believe the Deputy is misleading the House in her political characterisation of the Government in respect of renewables. We have been driving renewables for quite some time over successive Governments. In terms of offshore wind, I established a clearing house in my Department that meets with the industry, Departments and regulators to remove systemic potential barriers to offshore wind delivery. We have had a series of auctions. We have a number of offshore wind farms in the planning process. Surely the Deputy must know that. While she exaggerates and makes silly statements about Don Quixote and all that nonsense, it is far too serious for that. She says she is interested in national conversations and then lambastes Deputy O'Connor for initiating a national conversation. Where is the consistency in that approach or the logic in what she is saying?

France is a good example where there is a combination of sources, with nuclear being one. It will take time but we have to have these serious conversations and examinations. I made it very clear last weekend that our main focus was on offshore wind, and we have made substantial progress on onshore wind. The reason for the high cost of electricity in Ireland is, yes, an isolated grid with a lack of interconnection. We have two gas interconnectors to Britain and we are on the cusp of completing an interconnector with France. We have also initiated discussions with Spain about an interconnector with it because Europe needs a comprehensive grids package to reduce our historic dependence on imported fossil fuels. We rely substantially on imported gas, which increases and exacerbates the price situation in Ireland *vis-à-vis* other countries. In purchasing power parity in the European Union, we are the fifth highest, which is too high. Structural reform is the way to deal with that but that will take time. There is no point in pretending it will not. We have our offshore wind targets to 2030 and 2040 of up to 20 GW and I believe we can achieve that. If the Deputy talks to those in the industry, they acknowledge that Government is engaging proactively on that topic. However, we also have to alleviate pressure. The Deputy scoffed at the idea of subsidies for fossil fuels. At the moment, people need supports. I am surprised. Is the Deputy now against what we did in subsidising the costs for people out there motoring or involved in our trade, or in farming and agricultural matters?

Deputy Ivana Bacik: Things are serious. They are serious for the many thousands of families and households in arrears on their energy bills. They are far too serious to be toying around with distractions about nuclear power when we know the solution lies in the scalable projects of renewables. The Taoiseach speaks about a Government focus on renewables, but it is clearly evident, particularly since the Green Party left government, how there has been a slowdown in Government commitments on climate and on renewables. Last week almost 60 countries met in Colombia for intensive talks to forge a roadmap to phase out fossil fuels. Ireland's decision to send a senior civil servant rather than the climate Minister speaks volumes. The Government is not taking this seriously. I used Spain as the example. Let us look at the Eurostat figures. Last year, Irish electricity cost 40.42 cent per kWh. That is 40% over the European average and well above the Spanish cost of 24 cent. The figures speak for themselves. The figures for the households in arrears speak for themselves and we know the answer. In opposition, we supported the MARA legislation, but there is still no urgency on rolling out renewables to help struggling households.

The Taoiseach: It is a big political untruth to suggest that since the Greens left, we somehow reduced our commitment to renewables.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: It is evident.

The Taoiseach: It is a deliberate misrepresentation for political purposes, and that is all, but it is false and it is untrue.

Since this Government was formed we have established a clearing house, which my good colleague, the former Minister Eamon Ryan, refused to do, although industry wanted to engage. The one difference we have made here is to facilitate the engagement of industry to stop the them-and-us approach and work systemically on the barriers to successfully deploying offshore wind farms. We are making progress. There are significant challenges globally in that respect, with supply chain issues and the United States approach to wind. We are in a good position in terms of the auctions we have already held and the submissions to An Coimisiún Pleanála that have already occurred. We have had engagements with MARA and with An Coimisiún Pleanála. The Critical Infrastructure Bill will be very significant in enabling us to prioritise---

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An Ceann Comhairle: The time is up. Thank you, Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: -----what is a critical issue for the country-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Holly Cairns. The time is up. Thank you, Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: -----namely, the development of offshore wind.

An Ceann Comhairle: I have called Deputy Cairns.

Deputy Holly Cairns: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. There is a constant dread that is now hanging over people's lives. It is a quiet, growing panic about whether they can make it to the next payday. We have more evidence today of the huge cost-of-living pressures people are under. A new survey in the *Irish Independent* confirms what we already know, which is that costs have soared again. Households are now spending on average an extra €2,000 per year just to get by. People who could never afford luxuries now cannot afford the basics. Everything they earn is swallowed up by skyrocketing rents, childcare fees, mortgage payments, and energy and grocery bills. As those people desperately tread water, this Government refuses to throw them a lifeline. Even when Eurostat tells us that electricity prices here are the highest in the EU, at nearly 40% above the average, the Government is still telling people to wait until the budget in October, or maybe even next January, to get any support. Does the Taoiseach realise how crushing that is to hear if you are already at breaking point? The Government has the resources to act; it is just choosing not to do so.

The Social Democrats have a comprehensive plan that could be adopted now, with targeted measures to support low- and middle-income workers who are now under enormous pressure, including a €400 energy credit targeted at households earning up to €70,000, a supplementary

mileage scheme for essential workers like nurses and carers, and a €400 emergency cost-of-disability payment. As the Taoiseach knows, disabled people were struggling long before this energy crisis. Disability was meant to be a priority for this Government. What will it take for disabled people to be heard?

We need emergency supports today and solutions for tomorrow to protect households from future energy shocks. That is why we have proposed a "solar for all" plan that could be rolled out rapidly and would bring down costs instantly. It includes making solar panels free for the homes most at risk of energy poverty, doubling grants to €3,600, a new grant for battery storage and finally rolling out plug-in solar, which this Government has delayed for far too long. Imagine the difference it would make to people's lives if they could simply plug in solar panels from their balconies and watch their bills fall. These measures are practical and achievable, and would make a real difference, so why is the Government not doing any of this? The Taoiseach says he supports targeted measures and says this is an unprecedented crisis, so why will his Government not act like it and deliver the targeted support people need now?

The Taoiseach: First of all, the Government has provided targeted support. The evidence is there in terms of the free school books at primary and secondary levels. That is a significant measure we have brought in, which this year again will assist many families with what was a major cost for those with children attending primary and secondary school. We have expanded the free hot school meals programme. We have expanded childcare and we need to do more on the childcare front. We have the €280 new baby grant, for example. Hospital inpatient charges were abolished. We have expanded free GP care significantly, particularly for children. In the most recent package, we have significantly provided for a reduction in diesel and petrol that will affect ordinary people.

That is immediate and that is happening. If it was not, their costs would be significantly higher. We have also provided packages for the transport sector of about €40 million per month. There is a €100 million worth of a fuel scheme for farmers, contractors and fishers. Of course, the diesel rebate increased to 12 cent per litre.

We expanded the fuel allowance and increased it to €38 per week. We expanded eligibility and brought in those on the working family payment. Now about 470,000 households benefit from that. The Deputy cannot ignore all that. She does not get to choose which measures Government has introduced to ignore, and just articulate a banal assertion that Government has done nothing. Just because the Deputy keeps saying Government has done nothing does not mean that is true. Clearly, Government has done a lot.

The reality is we have a budget in October. We do not know where this crisis is going or, indeed, the more medium-term consequences of it. We need to hold some resources in reserve for the winter period, at a minimum, and work out how best to systemically cushion the lowest income groups and those who need our support the most.

I support the Deputy's broad principle of targeting. I have challenged others in the House who do not support it but I do. In the budget, we have a far better range of measures so we can arrive at a balanced approach where we can give working people relief but where we can also target measures. We did that in the previous budget with child support payments, which were the highest on record, in terms of what we did there to try to eat into the issue of child poverty. We want to do that consistently over time. We also want to make sure we can reduce the cost

of childcare and look again at what we can do in healthcare. Can we add to measures we have taken previously with HRT, free contraception and so on?

If the Deputy wants to blow everything today and spend €2 billion or €3 billion now, she might come back in July and say let us spend another €2 billion. By the time we get to October, there will be €5 billion or €6 billion spent. That is no way to run a country either.

Deputy Holly Cairns: This is not about ignoring certain measures the Government has introduced but when I ask the Taoiseach about targeted supports for people who cannot pay their bills, in the context of an energy crisis and rising costs of 70% in a month for home heating oil, it is not that I have no regard for the free book scheme. For somebody watching, who is struggling to pay their bills, when the Taoiseach is asked about targeted energy supports for people who cannot pay their bills and he talks about the school book scheme, they despair.

In the context of these rising energy costs, the Taoiseach understands there is an energy crisis, understands we have energy costs that are 40% higher than the European average and understands how much people are struggling. How does he expect people to wait until October? We already had hundreds of thousands of people in arrears on their energy bills before this crisis. We already had disabled people out on the street protesting for an emergency disability payment. Even before that, we knew that one in five disabled people is living in poverty but the Taoiseach will not bring in any measures between now and the budget for these people who need help.

The Taoiseach: We invested an additional 20%, up to €500 million extra, in disability services. That is systemic, sustainable and something that will happen year on year. We increased the domiciliary care allowance for a second year in a row by an additional €20. We will do more in the forthcoming budget. If you look at the changes we have made to the fuel allowance scheme, a two adult household will benefit by about €2,300 per annum as a result of that. A lone parent family will benefit by up to €1,800. These are significant measures we are taking. We extended it because of the impact of the war in the Middle East, which has undoubtedly created huge pressures all round. The biggest issue is uncertainty about how long this crisis will last and the direction it will take in terms of the impact on fuel prices, which will then impact everything else.

We have to be very careful too of the inflationary impact of Government spending. If Government just allocates another €4 billion or €5 billion, that sounds great but it simply brings us to a 5% or 6% inflation rate, which would not be sustainable.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: In yesterday's *Irish Independent* newspaper, a headline read Ireland should seriously look at the option of nuclear power, says the Taoiseach. He said in Yerevan, and I quote the Taoiseach directly, "we certainly should look at and examine options like nuclear power seriously." I asked the Taoiseach the exact same question in the Chamber two weeks ago.

His answer was that "the direction of travel has to be in the renewables area". He dismissed the Barryroe oil field. He defended the 2021 ban on oil and gas exploration. He cited the enormous costs on nuclear energy - that is the record - as a reason for caution. That position is on the record of this House in response to my question. Which is it? Is it the answer that the

Taoiseach gave this Chamber two weeks ago or the answer that he gave the cameras in Armenia?

The contradiction continues. The Minister for Finance and Tánaiste, Deputy Harris, says that nuclear energy should be considered with an open mind. The Minister for public expenditure, Deputy Chambers, has said that there is an argument for nuclear energy, that the argument is decades old and that we are now living in a different world. Billy Kelleher MEP, the President that would be, says that he would back a motion to overturn the 1999 ban at the Fianna Fáil Ard-Fheis later this month. The Taoiseach's Ministers, MEPs and backbenchers are all moving in one direction, yet the 1999 ban remains law, the 2021 oil and gas exploration ban remains law and the Government has not introduced legislation to lift the nuclear prohibitions and does not have plans to reverse the exploration ban.

I made the point to the Taoiseach in this Chamber two weeks ago - it is on the record of the House that he did not deny it - that Ireland bans nuclear energy at home while it imports nuclear-generated energy directly from France through the Celtic interconnector. That is not climate leadership but policy contradiction, which is sitting unanswered on the record of this House. Ireland imports 86% of its energy, one of the highest dependence rates in Europe. Norway and the United Kingdom face the same markets - and the same pressures, indeed - but they produce energy; we import it. They have options; we have none, because of Government policy that has closed every door and dressed it up as Government policy.

Will the Taoiseach today in this House, on the record, commit to bringing forward Government legislation to lift the 1999 nuclear ban? Will he reverse the 2021 gas and oil exploration ban to allow Barryroe to be excavated? Will Irish families continue to pay the highest prices in Europe? Will the Taoiseach save his real answers for foreign summits?

The Taoiseach: When the Deputy asked that question last month, I stressed the importance of renewable energy. In Armenia, I made it very clear that our immediate focus is on offshore wind. I pointed out the very significant progress we have made in respect of onshore wind and, indeed, solar. Solar is moving at pace in Ireland and I trust the Deputy is supportive of that. Deputy James O'Connor is introducing legislation which the Government will examine, along with the question of a legislative response in respect of nuclear, but we understand that it will take time. It is not going to immediately alleviate the pressures that people are under. One of the reasons we announced investment in a strategic reserve of liquefied natural gas, LNG, for example, was to deal with the security issue of energy supply. If anything were to happen to gas interconnectors through malign third-party actors, we would need a fallback. That got attacked as an anti-climate measure-----

Deputy Conor Sheehan: It is.

The Taoiseach: -----or was somehow portrayed as rowing back when, in fact, it was the very strong advice in the Department in respect of our vulnerability to anything happening to those gas interconnectors.

We are not connected yet to France so we are not yet importing nuclear. That has been delayed a bit, through no fault of the Government or anything like that. I take the Deputy's point that once that connection happens, we will, to all intents and purposes, be importing

energy generated through France's nuclear capacity. If we connect to Spain in the fullness of time, it would more likely be renewable of one sort or another, given the prevalence of renewable in the Iberian Peninsula.

I believe we should have a serious examination of nuclear because we need to work out costs and timelines. There have been advances in technology in the smaller reactors and so on, and I am all for that.

Barryroe has been around a long time.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: So has the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: Not quite as long as Barryroe, although I do travel the length and breadth of the Barryroe parish.

The oil issue has been around for a long time. Successive companies - this is the only point I will make in respect of it - did not feel the capacity was there or were not in a position to bring it to the surface and so on. It did not appear at any stage to be economical through its a long history. I am not an expert on that. We are very clearly focused on the renewable agenda and have made huge progress in this country. If we are honest, fossil fuels have impacted negatively on the world for a long time.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: I thank the Taoiseach. What he has done in this Chamber is exactly what he did in Armenia, namely he said a great deal while committing to nothing. Within the past hour, the Taoiseach has twice referenced renewables and connecting to Spain. It is worth putting this on the record of the House because people hold up Spain as the great renewable energy country. Renewable energy in Spain is at 21% while its nuclear energy is at 20%. If we connect to Spain, which is the Taoiseach's plan, we will take nuclear energy from it. We have to admit there is a policy deficit here. We are looking at taking nuclear energy from a foreign body but there is a ban in the Government's legislation on such energy.

We have spoken about Barryroe. We have been back and forth on it. Deputy Collins has been brilliant in speaking about Barryroe. Lift the ban, let them drill and let them decide. Let them see if there are 1.6 billion barrels of oil in that oil field. Let us take that because we realise we will be stuck with that type of energy for the next decade.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for his commentary. I am consistent. We should examine the issue of the potential of nuclear power given the changing technologies and how technology has advanced. However, our first priority in the here and now is renewables, including wind, solar and anaerobic digestion. We have made a lot of progress on those fronts, in particular solar latterly. Industry, in particular, has adopted solar, be it rooftop or in farms adjacent to major factories. There has been a very successful outcome.

On the accelerated EU proposals for greater EU level co-ordination, the EU grids package is key. That means connecting to Europe more and more and Europe developing strong grid connection to give it energy security and independence. The biggest negative impact on Europe is this energy question. We have had numerous crises going back over five decades and we need to make sure the next five decades are not similar.

Ceisteanna ó na Comhaltaí Eile - Other Members' Questions

Deputy Mattie McGrath: With the permission of the Ceann Comhairle, I welcome the members of Rotary Club of Clonmel to the Gallery, along with Councillor Richie Molloy.

Yesterday, along with Councillor Niall Dennehy and Councillor Máirín McGrath, I met the new superintendent in Clonmel, James Hallahan. There is a deep sense of frustration at the ongoing neglect of County Tipperary regarding Garda numbers and Garda presence. We discussed all of the concerns, and he was forthright and we spoke the truth. The numbers are scary. It is not possible to operate a safe policing presence with the numbers we have. This has been going on for a number of years. So far this year, Clonmel in the Tipperary-Clare division, which was a disastrous move, got only one new Garda recruit while at the same time we lost one of the recruits from last year who did not stay in the job, which is okay as people might want to leave. Our message was clear. We need a Garda presence, Garda visibility and a timely Garda response when people need it.

No police force in the world can police without the support of the public, and we have that here. I always support An Garda Síochána. It is clear that we do not have the numbers to provide responses. Without additional gardaí, there cannot be a response. Gardaí in Cahir, Tipperary town, Carrick-on-Suir, Cashel and Clonmel do not have the numbers to send out a squad car. It is scary and it is not good enough. The public deserve and expect resources.

On a dark night last November, a convoy of four vehicles came from a neighbouring county and proceeded to rob numerous houses and businesses. One businessman frightened them off and followed them. That was his mistake. He was on the road and was on to the Garda station for 45 minutes but received no assistance.

He said he would drive to Cashel town Garda station and he was advised not to as there were no members there. He was then advised to drive to the Circle K for safety, light and visibility and where there are CCTV cameras. This is not good enough. What is the Taoiseach going to do to increase the numbers because they are not there? The gardaí are doing a good job and I salute them and support them but they need proper numbers. It is not safe for them.

The last Garda Commissioner under this Government and previous governments really did a lot of damage to An Garda Síochána. I had great hopes for the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, but his behaviour during the peaceful protests recently - and the Taoiseach's own - in wanting to put the gardaí in a situation with the riot police and everything else against ordinary decent people, did not help the morale of the public and in supporting the Garda. They support the Garda always and want to, and these people will and do. The heavy-handed tactics reminded me of the heavy-handed tactics of Fine Gael back in 1973 to 1977. It was shocking the way they were treated. We need extra numbers in Tipperary and in Clonmel especially. The antisocial behaviour is out of hand there.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising what is a very important issue. The Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, and the Government are very strong in terms of increasing the number of gardaí. We have committed very substantial resources and we want to maintain those resources to continue to increase the number of gardaí going into Templemore for training. The cohorts

of over 200 trainees are now entering Templemore regularly. In the first intake of this year, 215 recruits entered Templemore and 209 trainees entered the college on Monday, 4 May 2026. As of the end of March, there is a total of nearly 14,500 thousand gardaí across the State. That is up 13% since 2015. The numbers are coming in. I understand the Deputy's concern in terms of those numbers then translating into County Tipperary, and into Clonmel, but we will get around. Quite substantial numbers have gone into cities and they have made a big difference. It is the intention of the Commissioner to substantially increase the number of gardaí in given towns like Clonmel and elsewhere as the gardaí continue to come through. People were talking earlier about Government expenditure and so on. To keep this at a very high level, we need to maintain and ring-fence the expenditure for that. I think that is something everybody wants.

Operation Thor, which is dealing with rural crime, has been operating since 2015, and I understand burglaries have come down 75% since 2016. An Garda Síochána is making a lot of progress and does enjoy the confidence of the public. I agree we need more numbers in Tipperary and we will allocate as soon as numbers come out of Templemore in line with the operational and strategic planning of the Garda Commissioner. We have also been working on freeing up gardaí. There has been a significant increase in Garda civilian staff, which has freed up about 900 gardaí for front-line duties as a result of that particular initiative. We will continue to work with communities, the chambers of commerce across the country and business groups with a view to supporting them in protecting their goods and their services from crime, and also in working collectively with communities on what is the best overall planning approach to reducing crime and protecting people.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: When will the Government have a measurable number of gardaí to put into rural towns and counties - I am talking about Tipperary here - and will he commit today to a specific plan to restore Garda numbers to Tipperary? I am not sure about this calling 999. Every person now is being told, and I heard this in my meeting yesterday, to ring 999. There is no replacement for connectivity with the local Garda, the garda on the beat and community gardaí. I salute Garda Fiona Gleeson in Clonmel and her other three colleagues, and Sergeant O'Leary in the community policing section. That is badly needed. They do a great job but they do not have enough of them. They are pulled off the community unit every other time there is an issue and shortages. An amount of time is wasted in courts and on other situations that they should not be dealing with. We have to move on here and get the gardaí out on the beat meeting the people and standing with the people, and they will stand with the gardaí. However, at the moment we do not have the supports and there is antisocial behaviour. Sulky races are another huge problem. There was a march about it on Saturday in Clonmel. It is a huge problem. We must have more resources for our gardaí.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank Deputy McGrath. Time is up. The Taoiseach to respond.

The Taoiseach: We are providing very substantial resources to An Garda Síochána. There has been substantial change in terms of the recruitment processes. We have increased recruitment age and training allowance, shortened recruitment timeframes, reform of the physical competency test and the introduction of the assessment-centred approach to elements of recruitment. We had two recruitment campaigns in 2025, and likewise again in 2026. The numbers are increasing, but they need to increase more. We need to be very consistent in the

allocation of resources to the Garda recruitment programme, but also more broadly in terms of equipment and supports to An Garda Síochána, which we are doing.

An tOrd Gnó - Order of Business

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Mary Butler): I move:

Wednesday 's business shall be:

- Motion *re* Proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Convention Establishing an International Claims Commission for Ukraine (*to conclude within 60 minutes*)
- Statements on the Scoping Exercise in response to requests from Dignity4Patients on behalf of victims and survivors of Michael Shine (*to conclude within 60 minutes*)

Wednesday 's private members' business shall be the Motion *re* Dublin City Flat Complex Retrofit and Regeneration, selected by Sinn Féin.

Thursday's business shall be:

- Statements to mark Europe Day (*to conclude within 2 hours and 25 minutes*)

Thursday 's private members' business shall be the Motion *re* Cost of Living Mini-Budget, selected by the Labour Party.

Proposed Arrangements for this week's business:

In relation to Wednesday's business, it is proposed that:

1. notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders:

(a) Parliamentary Questions to the Taoiseach pursuant to Standing Order 47(1) shall not be taken, and Government business shall commence at the time when Parliamentary Questions to the Taoiseach would normally be taken;

(b) private members business shall be taken following the Statements on the Scoping Exercise in response to requests from Dignity4Patients on behalf of victims and survivors of Michael Shine;

(c) Parliamentary Questions to a Minister pursuant to Standing Order 47(1) shall not be taken; and

(d) topical issues shall be taken on the conclusion of private members business;

2. the proceedings on the Motion *re* Proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Convention Establishing an International Claims Commission for Ukraine shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 60 minutes and the following arrangements shall apply thereto:

(a) the order of speaking and allocation of time shall be as follows:-

— opening speech by a Minister or Minister of State – 10 minutes;

— speeches by representatives of Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, Social Democrats, Independent and Parties Technical Group, and Independent Technical Group – 7.5 minutes per party or group;

— speeches by non-party/group members – 7.5 minutes in total;

— a speech in response by the Minister – 5 minutes; and

(b) members may share time; and

3. the Statements on the Scoping Exercise in response to requests from Dignity4Patients on behalf of victims and survivors of Michael Shine shall not exceed 60 minutes and the following arrangements shall apply:

(a) the order of speaking and allocation of time shall be as follows:-

— opening statement by a Minister or Minister of State – 10 minutes;

— statements by representatives of Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, Social Democrats, Independent and Parties Technical Group, and Independent Technical Group – 7.5 minutes per party or group;

— statements by non-party/group members – 7.5 minutes in total;

— a statement in response by the Minister – 5 minutes; and

(b) members may share time.

In relation to Thursday's business, it is proposed that:

1. notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders:

(a) no motion for a Committee report pursuant to Standing Order 111 or private member's Bill pursuant to Standing Order 169 shall be taken;

(b) private members' business pursuant to Standing Order 168(1) shall be taken for 2 hours on conclusion of the Statements to mark Europe Day; and

(c) topical issues shall be taken on the conclusion of private members' business, and the Dáil shall adjourn on the conclusion of topical issues; and

2. the Statements to mark Europe Day shall not exceed 2 hours and 25 minutes and the following arrangements shall apply:

(a) the statements, not including the Ministerial response, shall be in accordance with the sequence contained in the table immediately below (to be read across);

(b) following the statements, a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a statement in reply which shall not exceed 10 minutes; and

(c) members may share time.

	Gov	SF			
Mins	25	15	10	10	3
	SD	Gov	SF	IPTG	Gov

Mins	10	10	3	9	10
	SF	ITG	Gov	SF	OM
Mins	3	9	10	3	5
				Total:	2 hours 15 mins

An Ceann Comhairle: Are the arrangements agreed?

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Not agreed.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Mac Lochlainn.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Anybody watching the debate here in the Dáil today must be scratching their head when they hear the Taoiseach talk about wind and solar. Does the Taoiseach know that there are turbines turned off in wind farms across this country because the electricity grid is not there? Does he know that offshore renewable energy policy is just not there? There is no strategy there. It is not happening. That is the reality. People need help now. We need an emergency budget now. The Government cannot expect the Opposition to agree to a schedule when it just brushes aside our calls for an emergency budget with an intervention.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Duncan Smith.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: People need money in their pockets now with this crisis.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputies have 30 seconds each.

Deputy Duncan Smith: Now that Ireland is lamentably at the top of the list in terms of the highest cost of electricity, and people are pinned to their absolute collar, there has to be an emergency debate and discussion for a mini-budget this week. We cannot agree to the Order of Business on those grounds.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: Hear, hear.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Farrelly.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Today, Social Justice Ireland has launched its national social monitor painting a very damning picture for young people in this country aged 18 to 24. Rising youth homelessness and decades of underinvestment in mental health services are just some of the issues. I ask for statements on these issues facing young people aged 18 to 24.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy. I call Deputy Boyd Barrett.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: On May Day - International Workers' Day of all days - this Government betrayed hundreds of thousands of pensioners in this country and sabotaged the democracy of this House by refusing to issue the money message for the retired workers Bill, which had passed Second Stage and pre-legislative scrutiny and would give pensioners the right to have a say over the fact that their pensions were slashed and have never recovered from the austerity cuts to pensioners. They campaigned for this. The Government announced this on Friday of all days.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy. I call Deputy Michael Collins.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It is a disgrace. Those pensioners are furious. They are very angry. Will the Government at least explain to this House why it has done this to our pensioners?

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

Deputy Michael Collins: On 20 May, the people of this country doing short-term lets, Airbnb, etc., are supposed to sign up to a document. It is like a blank cheque. There is no legislation, despite being promised here for many years, never mind over the last number of months. I have been asking nearly every week for three months to bring the Minister before the Dáil to explain the situation. Do not expect people on 20 May to sign a blank cheque. Surely be to God, the Minister can come before the Dáil and explain what is going on.

Deputy Mary Butler: I noted all the comments and the Order of Business stands.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed?

Deputies: Not agreed.

Question put: "That the proposed arrangements for this week's business be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 80; Níl, 58; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Boland, Grace.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Brennan, Brian.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Shay.	Brady, John.	
Browne, James.	Buckley, Pat.	
Burke, Colm.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Burke, Peter.	Cairns, Holly.	
Butler, Mary.	Carthy, Matt.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Collins, Michael.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Cronin, Réada.	
Cahill, Michael.	Crowe, Seán.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Cullinane, David.	

Calleary, Dara.	Cummins, Jen.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Daly, Pa.	
Chambers, Jack.	Devine, Máire.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Clendennen, John.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Collins, Niall.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Connolly, John.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Currie, Emer.	Gould, Thomas.	
Daly, Martin.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Healy, Seamus.	
Dillon, Alan.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kelly, Alan.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kenny, Martin.	
Fleming, Sean.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Lawless, Paul.	
Geoghegan, James.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Grealish, Noel.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Harkin, Marian.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Harris, Simon.	Murphy, Paul.	
Heneghan, Barry.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Heydon, Martin.	Nash, Ged.	
Higgins, Emer.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Keogh, Keira.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Martin, Micheál.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
Maxwell, David.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
McCormack, Tony.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
McEntee, Helen.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
McGrath, Séamus.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
McGuinness, John.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Sheehan, Conor.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Sherlock, Marie.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Smith, Duncan.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Stanley, Brian.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
Murphy, Michael.	Wall, Mark.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Ward, Charles.	
Neville, Joe.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Brien, Darragh.		
O'Callaghan, Jim.		
O'Connell, Maeve.		
O'Connor, James.		

O'Dea, Willie.		
O'Donnell, Kieran.		
O'Donovan, Patrick.		
O'Meara, Ryan.		
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Duncan Smith.

Question declared carried.

3 o'clock

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: For decades, Dublin inner-city flat complexes like Oliver Bond flats have been failed by the State with families been forced to live in damp overcrowded flats and communities left to battle neglect, antisocial behaviour and organised crime alone. Dublin City Council agreed a regeneration plan to deliver safe modern homes for local families but yesterday, the Government pulled the plug. The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage blocked funding. Why? It was because some overcrowded flats were to be amalgamated to make them big enough for families to live in because the Government chooses to keep them in small overcrowded flats. Think about that. It is absurd, cruel and a betrayal of this community. The Taoiseach visited Oliver Bond flats in 2020, looked residents in the eye and promised regeneration. He must reverse this utterly disgraceful and disgusting decision and fully fund this project.

The Taoiseach: The Government is absolutely committed to supporting regeneration projects submitted by Dublin City Council, including deep retrofit remedial works at older flat complexes. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage is actively supporting viable regeneration proposals from Dublin City Council and will continue to do so. We are also continuing to invest heavily in regeneration across the capital city, particularly social housing flat complexes and estates, in a timely manner. I will raise the issue with the Minister as well.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Government pulled the plug on the Oliver Bond House project.

An Ceann Comhairle: If further engagement is required, it will not be here.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Taoiseach has misled the House.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Bacik.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: Today, parents from Ireland, including our Labour Councillor Ali Field, are travelling to Brussels to present a petition to the European Parliament and institutions asking them to investigate Ireland's failure to meet its legal obligations to children with additional needs. Under the Disability Act 2005, every child in Ireland is entitled to an assessment of need within six months. However, more than 21,700 children are now on waiting lists, overdue for assessments of need. The average wait time is two years and many parents, having battled for the assessments of need, are now battling for appropriate school places, therapies and supports.

The Government's record is abysmal. Families are being dragged through the courts, trying to have their children's basic needs met and there is the breaking of our own laws on this. It is a national embarrassment that families and parents have been forced to travel to the European institutions in Brussels today to present a petition on behalf of their children.

On behalf of Councillor Ali Field and the parents, what is the Government's response?

The Taoiseach: As the Deputy will know, there are a range of responses to this. Apart from the fact that about 6,000 assessment reports were completed in 2025, which was a 45% increase on the previous year, nonetheless, current waiting lists are too high. The model and framework governing this is also wrong. We need a legislative change, which we are going to do, and we need operational change, workforce reforms, increased capacity and recruitment of the therapists, and the development of the school-based multidisciplinary teams, which are now going into the special schools in the first instance. All of those are a more effective way of deploying the therapy resources we have within the HSE and our education system.

Deputy Jen Cummins: Six years ago, the Taoiseach visited Oliver Bond Street in my constituency. I can tell him the anger right now is palpable. The residents have been lied to and let down, and they live in homes that you would not put an animal in. There is damp, there is mould, there are windows rotting out of their frames and there are doors that are not able to close because they are so warped. There is antisocial behaviour that is not acceptable in any other part of the city. These families and the people who live in Oliver Bond House have been let down by the Government.

I am very disappointed. It beggars belief that it has even stated in response to Sinn Féin's Private Members' business today that it is going to work with Dublin City Council on Oliver Bond House, but it is not because it has just pulled the funding. There has just been a meeting

where people were told, but it was in the media before the residents who live there had been told. It is an absolute disgrace.

Is the Taoiseach going to apologise and reverse this decision?

The Taoiseach: First, I made a general statement that we are investing a huge amount of money on regeneration.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Government pulled the funding.

The Taoiseach: On the specifics of Oliver Bond House, the Deputy said just today something happened with communication between the Department and the residents or the city council. I will engage with the Minister for housing on the matter.

Deputy Charles Ward: Will the Taoiseach address the position confirmed in writing by the Government, the Housing Agency and Donegal County Council that homeowners in the defective concrete scheme are required to agree to a remediation determination for their home without first being provided with full engineering evidence, including petrographic and material testing, on which it is based?

The Housing Agency has confirmed it has no issue with sharing the engineer's report and stated it could be accessed through FOI or data protection processes. Donegal County Council confirmed the report is issued to the applicant once it receives it and made available on the portal. However, the Government's position is that the report is not provided to the homeowner at that point of the determination and the issue does not form part of the decision stage. Will the Taoiseach explain the arrangement that it can be conceived without informed consent, where homeowners must agree to a process before seeing the evidence for the determination, and why access to evidence is left to FOI and data protection processes after the decision is required?

The Taoiseach: Again, I will engage with the Minister for housing on that. I presume the Deputy has been engaging with the Minister, so he must have a fair idea as to what his and the Department's perspective is. I do not see any issue with sharing data or material evidence with the homeowner.

Deputy Peadar Kirby: Ireland is the most expensive country in Europe for electricity. A total of 320,000 families are currently in energy arrears. Energy is not a luxury good; it is a staple. People have no alternative but to use energy, and reports have shown today that already, the increases in energy costs have taken about €2,000 out of people's pockets so far this year and that is going to get worse because it is forecast that electricity prices are going to increase.

Last year, ESB made €636 million in profits. It is a semi-State organisation that operates under the policy guidance of the Government. How is it acceptable that the ESB would make supranormal profits at a time of energy crisis for people? The ESB is making €300 in profit per family in this country. If we break it down to those people in arrears, the ESB levied €96 million worth of profits on the third of a million people who are in energy arrears in this country.

How is that acceptable?

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Will the Taoiseach mandate the ESB to reduce the level of profit during the energy crisis?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy's time is up. The Taoiseach will respond. It is pointless talking over me; the Deputy needs to prepare in time.

The Taoiseach: First, as I discussed earlier, the Government did take measures in the budget to try to protect people from increasing prices. If we look at the core payments alone in social protection, the increase in core payments, child support payments and the fuel allowance, we are looking at about €2,300 additionally provided out of the budget to a two-adult household, or indeed €1,800 to a lone-parent family. People are definitely, without question, under pressure and we are going to do everything we can to try to continue, as we did in the recent package two weeks ago, which is on top of the budget, to alleviate pressure in terms of fuel costs, including diesel and petrol-----

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: What about the profits of the ESB?

The Taoiseach: -----and for agriculture, fishers and farmers.

In terms of the ESB, it obviously continues to invest in our energy system and so on but we will see what we can do. We can take back a dividend from the ESB and so on. It is open to Government to do that.

Deputy Peter 'Chap' Cleere: We hear a lot about teacher shortages, and the Government rightly says it wants to attract experienced teachers home from abroad but the reality on the ground can sometimes tell a different story. Teachers returning from abroad, including places like Dubai, are finding that years and sometimes decades of experience simply are not being recognised on the incremental salary scale. The justification given is that this work was done in private schools, even where those schools operated under rigorous inspection and accountability systems. Quite frankly, this does not add up. On the one hand, we are asking teachers to come home and, on the other, we are effectively telling them that their experience abroad does not count.

There also appears to be inconsistency in how these rules are applied, which again can only add to the sense of unfairness and frustration. At a time recruitment and retention are already under pressure, this approach is not just unfair; it is counterproductive. Does the Taoiseach accept that the current system is asking as a barrier to teachers returning home? Will he commit to a clear review of how overseas experience is recognised so that policy matches the Government's stated ambition?

The Taoiseach: To be fair to Government, we have invested hugely in teaching and the teacher training colleges. Numbers have increased exponentially over the past number of years

in teaching in Ireland. I understand the issue in terms of returning and not receiving incremental credit. On the other hand, the issue needs to be examined more but we do not want to create scenarios where we incentivise too many leaving the system immediately.

In education, we have, had a stronger position historically than we have had in health in terms of professionals staying within our system, generally speaking but I get the sense of unfairness if someone has taught for four or five years in the United Arab Emirates and then comes back and does not get any incremental credit. I will ask the Minister to examine that.

Deputy Catherine Callaghan: I am asking for increased State funding for supported care homes in my constituency of Carlow-Kilkenny. Supported care homes like Mount Carmel Supported Care Home, Callan, St. Fiacc's House, Graiguecullen and St. Lazerian's House, Bagenalstown, to name just three across the constituency that I have visited, provide a vital service to their communities, helping to prevent social isolation in elder years while maintaining an older person's independence. Without doubt, they truly are a home away from home.

Supported care homes, even though they are subject to Health Information and Quality Authority inspection and operate under HIQA standards, are, unlike nursing homes, deemed ineligible for funding through the previous residential safety improvement scheme and the current residential environmental enhancement, REE, scheme. They need to fundraise in the community to meet these costs. Can the Taoiseach review the eligibility for the current REE scheme so participation in the nursing homes support scheme ceases to be a requirement or introduce a separate funding scheme that supported care homes can avail of to help meet the financial costs of upgrades to their premises, improve resident comfort and meet regulatory standards?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. These are very significant centres and they do great work. About €3.5 million in recurrent funding is provided to about ten care homes in the south-east supported care homes. The Minister of State, Deputy Butler, enhanced that in 2024 with a €1.7 million increase in recurrent funding. A lot of work has been done in respect of it. We acknowledge the very significant role they play and, in fact, the role model they also represent in terms of different stages of care that people may require. We will keep that under review.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: The Taoiseach has been in the Dáil since before I was born and I am beginning to think he has become so out of touch that he does not see the hardship facing ordinary workers and families. Every single day in Galway, people tell me that the cost of living is too high and that the Government is doing too little. Then, today, we hear that we have the highest electricity prices in the EU, an outstanding 40% above the EU average. Why has the Taoiseach allowed this? Does he not meet people who cannot pay their electricity bills or afford home heating oil? Does he not speak to those people who struggle to fill their cars with petrol or diesel or to renters who can barely keep a roof over their heads? How can the Taoiseach stand over a situation where in a wealthy country with record surpluses, life is no longer affordable for ordinary people? What is he going to do about electricity prices?

Deputy Matt Carthy: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: I would not be here if I was out of touch.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: Gabh mo leithscéal-----

The Taoiseach: I would not be here as long as the Deputy suggested if I was out of touch.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: People are-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Le do thoil, a Theachta.

The Taoiseach: I ask the Deputy to please not be so arrogant and patronising-----

Deputy Mary Butler: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: -----and almost presenting the idea that she is the only person - or Sinn Féin Deputies are the only people - who have a monopoly on empathy and compassion.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: Show it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, the rules are the rules.

The Taoiseach: All of my life, I have been in touch with people.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: It does not seem like it.

The Taoiseach: I understand the pressures that are on people. I do not need the Deputy's lectures in that regard.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Then do something about it.

Deputy Matt Carthy: The Taoiseach should answer the question. What is he going to do?

Deputy Cathy Bennett: He never answered the question.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: Dublin Bus recently announced that it is going to introduce a bus tracking system to help it combat the issue of ghost buses. This will be really welcome because it will bring transparency and real-time information to bus users. Why is Go Ahead Ireland not required to implement a similar system? It would be incredibly useful. In my constituency of Wicklow, since Go Ahead Ireland was awarded contracts, we have had nothing but problems with buses not showing up, buses driving past people, buses not actually going on their required routes, or people with disabilities not being able to access the bus because the ramps do not work. It is problem after problem. I hear about this from people every week. It has not been resolved. I have spoken to Go Ahead Ireland about it. I have spoken to the

Minister for Transport and the National Transport Authority and we are just not seeing improvement in the service. Having some level of transparency such as a bus-tracking system would absolutely shine a light on the difficulties people in Wicklow are facing.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising that. That is an innovative approach and it is positive to develop a bus-tracking system. The Deputy is saying that not only should it be applied to Bus Éireann but to Go Ahead Ireland as well. I will speak to the Minister to ascertain from him the background to this and how it is going to evolve. I presume that, in the fullness of time, it will have to apply to all providers.

Deputy Rory Hearne: I raise the issue of IRES real estate investment trust, REIT. A number of renters from different complexes it has have been in touch with me. It is deeply alarming that IRES REIT, which is Ireland's largest vulture landlord, owning over 4,000 properties, is refusing tenants permission to replace a tenant who leaves in flat-share situation. The remaining tenant has been told they must pay the full rent. One tenant who is in touch with me is going from paying €1,000 per month to having to pay the entire apartment's rent of €2,000 per month. This is a new practice by IRES REIT to take advantage of the Government's new rental rules by getting around the no-fault eviction situation and it can let it out at full market rent. It is disgraceful, in a housing emergency, that our biggest landlords are allowing rooms to lie idle because they do not want them to be rented out so they can get all the tenants out the apartment and then bring in full market rents.

The Taoiseach said in the Dáil in February: "Existing tenancies will not be negatively impacted as a result of the changes in the rent rules." Here are existing tenants who are facing economic eviction as a result of the Government's new measures.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach to respond, Deputy Hearne. Prepare your question in time.

Deputy Rory Hearne: Will the Taoiseach intervene and stop IRES REIT engaging in this exploitation?

The Taoiseach: The Deputy will have to acknowledge that a very substantial part of those reforms was about protecting tenants. That should at least be acknowledged. I will speak to the Minister in respect of this practice, which was not intended in any shape or form, to see how we can deal with that.

Deputy Brian Stanley: I raise with the Taoiseach the situation in our prisons. Our overcrowded prisons are after reaching crisis point. I have complaints from prison staff going back over the past year or two on this issue. The situation in the Midlands Prison in Portlaoise is like a pressure cooker. It is unsafe for staff and vulnerable prisoners. It is vastly overcrowded, operating at over 120% capacity. It has capacity for 890 inmates but the number stands at just over 1,100. Prisoners are sleeping on bunks and mattresses on the floor. There are two prisoners in a cell with a toilet and no privacy.

This is leading to assaults on staff. There were 11 assaults on staff last year and 102 prisoner-to-prisoner assaults and 60 weapons seized. Assaults are up 23%. I have been told the job of staff is being made impossible and managing the situation is very difficult. There is a promise in the programme for Government for 1,500 additional places. When will we see those? When will we start using restorative justice more to divert people away from prisons and when will we see progress on those two issues?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising what is a very important issue. I know he will have a particular focus on Portlaoise as well as it is in his constituency. We do have a challenge with overcrowding in our prisons. There is very significant and good work going on in the areas of rehabilitation and youth justice programmes aimed at keeping people out of prison but the fact remains that some crimes must attract a prison sentence and some criminals need to go to jail. The Government and the Minister are acutely aware of the capacity constraints in our prisons and the resulting challenge faced by those who work and live in our prisons. The Minister is pursuing a dual approach to address the issue of capacity by increasing prison spaces and then pursuing further measures to support non-custodial sanctions. The Irish Prison Service is committed to preventing identified members of criminal gangs from conducting criminal activities while in custody and also to preventing them exerting inappropriate influence on other persons.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: Homelessness has doubled since June 2020 under the Taoiseach's watch. He will not ban no-fault evictions and we have the highest level of homelessness ever recorded. Today the residents of Oliver Bond flats are coming to terms with the Government's refusal to fund phase one of a long-promised regeneration project. This development has been beset for decades by damp, mould and severe antisocial behaviour. The Taoiseach visited it himself and committed to the regeneration. Now the Government and the Minister have pulled the plug. What in the name of God is going on? How can this be justified? Will the Taoiseach immediately go back and investigate this? If this regeneration is not carried out in the way that has been agreed with Dublin City Council, that development in Oliver Bond is not going to be able to be regenerated within, say, the next decade.

The Taoiseach: I will discuss this matter with the Minister for housing. I do not have the specifics in respect of the latest decision on the Oliver Bond complex. I will revert when I discuss it with the Minister.

Deputy Edward Timmins: I met with the NTA in April 2025 and I was advised that the 132 bus service would double from four to eight buses a day at the end of April 2025. Since then, nothing has happened. I still have no clear explanation as to why. Expanding the bus service is part of the programme for Government. I ask that the current service, the only public transport for most of west Wicklow, be at least reliable. It is regularly cancelled. Second, on the proposed 199 bus from Glendalough to Bray, I was told last autumn that it was planning for commencement shortly. I was told in January that the procurement process was complete. My colleague on Wicklow County Council, Councillor Shane Langrell, has been constantly raising the proposed 199 bus from Glendalough to Bray. We owe him and the people of Wicklow an answer and a solution.

The Taoiseach: Over the years there has been significant expansion of bus services. I will have to talk to the Minister. There could be a resourcing issue. There are set budgets for all Departments. That was agreed at budget time in terms of the degree of expansion that could be entered into across the board. I will check what the position is in terms of the 132 bus service and the 199.

Deputy Fionntán Ó Súilleabháin: I understand the Taoiseach is aware of the situation where Gorey Hill special school, which was put in on a temporary basis on the campus of Gaelscoil Moshíológ, where I worked prior to starting here, is now expanding across the remaining green areas of the Gaelscoil. It is basically a problem which has arisen due to the lack of forward planning by the Department and casual indifference. It is having a huge impact now on special education in north Wexford, as well as on Gaelscoil provision. There is a massive demand for both in north Wexford and south Wicklow. My school was happy to facilitate special education to cater for the huge demand, even giving up play areas, parking, storage, green spaces and full access to the hall. However, due to lack of forward planning the special school now needs to expand further and it will need to expand further in subsequent years, going by projections. There is a lot of concern in the area about this. Could the Taoiseach give a commitment that he or his Ministers will come down to Gorey to discuss this with all parties concerned and come to a conclusion that is suitable to both parties?

The Taoiseach: I think Deputy Malcolm Byrne would have been on about this as well as the Deputy. It is in Gorey. I do appreciate the work the Gaelscoil did in facilitating the location of the special school there. I certainly will talk to the Minister for education and see how we can progress this further. The Deputy is saying that the amenities and playing pitches the Gaelscoil has been enjoying are now under pressure because of the expansion of the special school. I presume there are plans afoot to provide a permanent premises for the special school. I will engage with the Minister in that regard.

Deputy Paul Lawless: Fresh statistics released to me regarding primary care services in Mayo are very concerning. Last year only 31 out of 150 Mayo children under five years of age received psychology support. During Covid, when the Taoiseach was Taoiseach, speech and language therapists across the country were redeployed to vaccination centres and for contact tracing. As a result of this, in Mayo in 2021, only 400 children were seen in primary care for speech and language therapy supports. To put that in context, generally there are thousands of children seen in Mayo. Does the Taoiseach accept in hindsight that this was a mistake? Does he accept that many children suffered during those years? Does he accept that there is still immense pressure in relation to primary care, CDNTs and children waiting for crucial therapies across Mayo and many other counties?

The Taoiseach: Covid was an emergency. Before we got vaccination, people were dying and the fundamental objective of Government was to protect life and then to protect livelihoods. That was it, and all the stops had to be pulled out to enable us to do that.

Deputy Paul Lawless: The children can wait.

The Taoiseach: I do not accept that five years on the Deputy can casually, at such remove, make such statements as he just made. If we did not get vaccination, and I presume the Deputy supports vaccination, we would have been in deep trouble and continuing trouble as a country, and more and more lives would have been lost.

Deputy Paul Lawless: And the children today?

Garda Síochána (Recording Devices) (Amendment) Bill 2026: First Stage

Deputy James Geoghegan: I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to amend the Garda Síochána (Recording Devices) Act 2023 to require that public bodies provide members of Garda personnel access to publicly operated CCTV systems, without a full new authorisation being required, for the prevention, investigation, detection or prosecution of criminal offences; to allow members of Garda personnel to install and operate CCTV in designated high-crime areas; to provide for the preparation of draft codes of practice in relation to Garda access to publicly operated CCTV systems, and for the Minister to declare them by order to be codes of practice.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on our Fine Gael Private Members' Bill, which seeks to amend the Garda Síochána (Recording Devices) Act 2023. At its core, the Bill has two clear objectives: to reduce the administrative burden faced by gardaí, and to better deter criminal activity in areas experiencing persistent crime, antisocial behaviour and vandalism. There is no village, town or city in Ireland that is untouched by crime. Every community has a fundamental right not only to be safe but to feel safe.

This Bill delivers on that in two important ways. First, it establishes a new, streamlined data-sharing framework between An Garda Síochána and public bodies in relation to CCTV footage. Under the current system, gardaí must seek authorisation on a case-by-case basis, often involving lengthy and cumbersome court processes. This Bill replaces that with approved data-sharing arrangements, allowing gardaí to access live or recorded footage for legitimate policing purposes in a far more efficient manner.

Second, the Bill introduces the concept of crime prevention zones. These are targeted, time-limited areas designated where there is a clear and evidenced pattern of repeat criminal activity. Importantly, these zones are not open-ended. They will be subject to strict proportionality tests, public notification requirements and regular review. They will automatically lapse after a defined period unless there is clear justification for renewal.

Crucially, this Bill also strengthens safeguards. It introduces a robust code of practice, including enhanced protections for areas primarily used by children. In such locations, there will be explicit obligations to minimise recording, limit operating hours and ensure that the privacy of young people is fully respected.

This will have significant importance in areas near playground for example. Recently in Dublin there has been a spate of vandalism. Some playgrounds have been set on fire, including one in my constituency in Seán Moore Park, which has been set on fire six times in the past

three years. It also explicitly prohibits the use of biometric analysis within crime prevention zones, a safeguard that is not currently provided for.

This Bill builds on the existing legislative framework but also highlights an important gap. Key elements of the 2023 Act remain uncommenced, most notably the code of practice governing the use of CCTV by An Garda Síochána which has yet to be published by the Minister. I welcome confirmation by the Minister for justice that public consultation on this code by An Garda Síochána concluded in February of this year and that it is now finalising a draft code for approval by the Minister. I look forward to working constructively with the Minister to advance that code, the investment in CCTV and the additional measures proposed in this legislation.

This legislation has been informed directly by engagement with gardaí on the ground as well as by examining best practice across other European jurisdictions. The message from An Garda Síochána is clear - it wants to be out policing communities and not tied up in unnecessary administrative processes. The message from the public is just as clear - they want Garda resources deployed effectively and stronger tools to tackle crime where it occurs most. A poll by opened by Journal.ie yesterday in respect of our legislation has seen almost 8,000 people respond so far demonstrating that approximately 80% of people who participated in the poll support this legislation and increased Garda-operated CCTV in areas where it is needed most. That reflects what all of us are hearing in our constituencies and communities. People want safer streets, visible policing and gardaí equipped to do their jobs. This Bill strikes a balance between reducing red tape, making communities safer and protecting people's privacy.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Bill opposed?

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Marian Harkin): 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 James Geoghegan: I move: "That the Bill be taken in Private Members' time."

Question put and agreed to.

Criminal Law (Adult Safeguarding) Bill 2026: First Stage

Deputy David Cullinane: I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to provide for offences committed against adults whose ability to guard themselves against violence, exploitation or abuse, whether physical, sexual or emotional, or against neglect by another person is significantly impaired; and to provide for related matters.

We have all heard the horror stories - Áras Attracta, Lees Cross, the treatment of Grace, failures in home care and care homes, and the indefensible failures in the Brandon case. A simple question is always asked: who is held accountable? Time and again devastating failures have been exposed in care facilities, at home and across society. They have been exposed not by the Government or at times by people in the HSE but by families, social workers, regulator, the media and whistleblowers, and yet the Government has failed to put proper adult safeguarding laws in place.

Families, social workers, advocates and Opposition TDs have been calling for a comprehensive adult safeguarding law for years. This Bill is a first step. The Bill was drafted by the Law Reform Commission following extensive and deep engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. The Bill would create stand-alone criminal offences for those who abuse, neglect, coerce or exploit adults. Similar protections were introduced for children more than ten years ago. In my view, they have worked. This legislation would protect older people, people in care facilities, people with disabilities and adults at risk in their own homes and communities - our friends, sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, cousins, colleagues and loved ones. The Bill would ensure perpetrators, those who cover up abuse and those who cut budgets or impose policies without regard for the consequences can face real criminal consequences. There is an urgent need for the Oireachtas to act against adult abuse, neglect, coercion and exploitation. This is about protecting people and accountability.

I ask the Ministers for Health and justice to engage with us and the experts on this Bill before Second Stage. My office will be in touch with their respective offices. I hope they will engage in a constructive manner and see if we can get the Bill supported and implemented. People at risk of harm cannot be left waiting any longer for legal protection. Every time there is one of these scandals, we end up having statements in this House. Sometimes there are crocodile tears and we all say this should never have happened, but it has happened again. We do not have the legislative framework to ensure that at an organisational level, people can be held to account whether in nursing homes or disability centres. For far too long, unfortunately, I have been raising these issues. It all comes back to the same failures. If the law does not exist, the protections are not in place. While these failures obviously rest with abusers or those responsible for neglect, there is also a responsibility on the State if we do not have the proper legal architecture. That is why we are introducing this Bill.

Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan: I could not think of a more fitting day to introduce this Bill on adult safeguarding. Today, I had the pleasure of welcoming to the Dáil people I used to support - Ciarán Wall, Ger Ryan, Liam Burke, Gerard Connolly, Peter Glendon, Vincent Anthony, Michael Fenton, Róisín Rockett and Billy Gear. They are some of the most amazing people I had the pleasure of working with as a carer for adults with disabilities. For almost two decades I worked as a carer with the Brothers of Charity, supporting adults with disabilities to live independent full lives - their best life. It was far more than just a job; we built real friendships with those we cared for. I am so happy to have been able to welcome them here today. It is for people just like them that we are introducing this safeguarding legislation. The harsh reality is that not every care home works to the highest standards, as we have seen time and again on TV. Enough is enough. We do not need to see such scenes any more. It is happening every day, right now. Time and again we have seen some of our most vulnerable citizens failed by those entrusted with their safety and well-being. It is damning that after all

these years with Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in power, they have failed to deliver adequate safeguarding legislation. Once again it has been left to us - the Opposition - to bring forward meaningful safeguards that will finally bring about real accountability. Does the Minister of State not think they need assurance and safeguarding legislation? They deserve it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Bill opposed?

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Marian Harkin): 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 David Cullinane: I move: "That the Bill be taken in Private Members' time."

Question put and agreed to.

Residential Tenancies (Temporary Prohibition of Termination Notices) Bill 2026: First Stage

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to make exceptional provision in the public interest for the prohibition of certain termination notices under the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 during the period of 3 years following the enactment of this Act, and to provide for related matters.

I introduce this Bill because we are in a housing and eviction emergency. Figures published by the RTB show that the number of terminations rose by 41% in the last three months of 2025 compared with the same period in 2024 and that there was a 21% increase for the year as a whole compared with the previous year. I introduce this Bill in the context of a housing market where rent has increased by more than 100% in the past ten years and by 50% since the onset of the Covid pandemic six years ago. Exceptional times call for exceptional measures in the public interest.

I believe these are needed to respond to the current dysfunctional nature of the residential tenancy market, much of which is a response to repeated legislative interventions that have been poorly designed and implemented. Since I was elected in November 2024, homelessness has risen from over 15,000 to 17,500 in March 2026, the highest figure ever recorded. This Bill seeks to give renters certainty over the medium term and give them breathing space from the daily fear of a notice of termination coming through the door. Since this Government has not met its own housing targets, it should at the very least do whatever it can to remove the fear of homelessness from renters, the most vulnerable people in the housing system. This Bill seeks a temporary moratorium on no-fault evictions to protect renters who, through no fault of their own, are being forced into a brutal housing market. It is for renters such as those in

Hazelwood estate, Wexford, where 37 households were initially given notices to terminate with little warning as the company that owned them wanted to sell. It is for renters in Ballybane, Galway, and renters in my constituency of Limerick city.

This Bill seeks to protect renters from having to look again for HAP accommodation, which is an uphill battle at the moment with a recent Simon Communities report saying that in 16 areas surveyed, there were only 14 properties available, and none in my constituency. This Bill seeks to protect the more than 80% of renters who were following their obligations in the final three months of the year but who, according to RTB data, were still given notices of termination.

This is well past the point of an emergency. The fact is there is no acceptable rate of homelessness. We have a situation in this country where the homeless figures are at record highs every single month of the year and have effectively become wallpaper. This is not acceptable. It should not be considered so, and it should not be considered normal. Homeless figures continue to surge again and again, as they did under the previous Government.

This Bill does not seek to reinvent the wheel. It is extending a ban on no-fault evictions that was in place during the Covid emergency and should be used again in this emergency. If this Government does not consider nearly 5,500 children in emergency accommodation to be an emergency, then what number of children in emergency accommodation counts as an emergency? This Bill seeks to give protections to renters who are following their rental obligations, to give them certainty for three years and give them an assurance that they will not be forced into homelessness, giving renters time until supply starts to improve and to give some breathing space. This Government needs to take stronger action on homelessness because we are at a stage where homelessness has almost become acceptable, and this Bill goes some of the way to achieving that.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Bill opposed?

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Marian Harkin): 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 Conor Sheehan: I move: "That the Bill be taken in Private Members' time."

Question put and agreed to.

Approval by Dáil Éireann of the Convention Establishing an International Claims Commission for Ukraine: Motion

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Helen McEntee): I move:

That Dáil Éireann, pursuant to Article 29.5.2° of Bunreacht na hÉireann, approves the terms of the Convention establishing an International Claims Commission for Ukraine, signed at The Hague on 16th December, 2025, a copy of which was laid before Dáil Éireann on 1st May, 2026.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss this motion today. The convention we seek to ratify is about establishing an international claims commission for Ukraine. It is about Ireland supporting and being part of the efforts of the international community to ensure justice and reparations for Ukraine. Above all, it is about ensuring accountability for the damage and destruction caused by Russia through its unprovoked and unjustified full-scale invasion of its neighbour.

Just a few months ago in December 2025 the Oireachtas heard directly from President Zelenskyy of Ukraine as he addressed Members in this Chamber during his visit to Ireland. He spoke passionately about the situation in his country, and he spoke eloquently about Ireland's support for Ukraine. He situated the invasion of his country in a wider context and stated that it takes a community of nations to make a truly lasting peace. He asked us to remember that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a criminal and unprovoked act of aggression, which cries out for justice. He said that it has happened for one reason only, which is "because Russia wants to treat Ukraine as its property and Ukrainians as if they belong in its backyard like livestock." In terms of accountability, he urged Members:

... to oppose any decision that weakens pressure on Russia for this war as long as war and occupation and the propaganda of hatred continue. All the pressure on Russia must remain in place, so that Russia does not believe it will be rewarded for this war with stolen Ukrainian land or thousands of kidnapped Ukrainian children ... [and that] Russian killers cannot freely travel the world as if they have done nothing wrong.

I visited Ukraine in April when I attended the foreign affairs Council in Kyiv. I stood in solidarity with the victims of the atrocities inflicted upon innocent civilians in Bucha by Russian forces in 2022. I saw first hand the devastating human cost of war. I witnessed for myself the hardship and tragedy still being caused by Russia's war of aggression more than four full years later. I saw the resilience and determination of the Ukrainian people and I took part in discussions about the measures we can take to ensure accountability for that aggression.

Ireland and this House has been firm in its support of Ukraine throughout the more than four years of this war. We have been firm in our support for accountability as a matter of principle in the same way as we have long stood firm on the importance of human rights, international law and multilateralism. We have supported initiatives through the Council of Europe to deliver accountability and in the coming weeks, we will vote in favour of a resolution at the Council of Europe ministerial meeting advancing the establishment of the special tribunal on the crime of aggression against Ukraine.

Today we have an opportunity to support Ireland's participation in the convention establishing an international claims commission to assess damages, loss or injury inflicted by Russia on Ukraine. The establishment of this claims commission is a key step towards delivering that accountability. It forms part of a broader international compensation mechanism, which the Council of Europe decided to establish in 2023 following the 2022 UN General Assembly resolution, "Furtherance of remedy and reparation for aggression against

Ukraine." It forms part of a system that seeks to ensure that Russia is held accountable for its actions and the destruction that it has caused.

In taking this step, it is important to note that the claims commission will not itself be responsible for paying out compensation directly. It will be an administrative body that examines claims of damage, loss or injury due to certain acts that have been committed by the Russian Federation in Ukraine or against Ukraine. It will determine whether compensation is due and how much, if any, is due. In this way, the claims commission will be the second of three components of a broader compensation mechanism.

The first component was the establishment of a register of damage caused by the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which was set up in 2023. This has already received over 80,000 claims. Its operation will transfer to the claims commission after it is established. The commission will review, assess and decide on claims it receives and determine the amount of compensation due. This forms the backdrop to the third possible part of that mechanism, which would be a compensation fund to meet these claims. This still needs to be put in place.

In terms of accountability, the finance needed to provide these funds should be contributed by Russia as reparations for its aggression against Ukraine. The convention expressly provides for the expectation that the Russian Federation will fund the compensation determined and awarded by the claims commission and that other commission members will not be required to fund the compensation. Ratifying the convention represents an important endorsement of the principle of accountability and sends a message to Russia that it cannot carry on as if nothing wrong has been done.

At this point too, the House should understand the financial cost to Ireland would be a proportionate annual contribution towards the administrative costs of the claims commission. It is too soon to say precisely what that will be, but we expect it will be less than €1 million per year. This contribution would only start once the convention has come into force. The convention will enter into force when 25 countries, or regional integration organisations, have ratified it and when the associated financial commitments are enough to support the work of the commission starting off. The convention opened for signature on 16 December last year. Some 35 states, including Ireland, as well as the European Union have signed it. Estonia and Iceland have now ratified the convention and a number of other states have said they intend to ratify it in the coming weeks and months. Today I seek Dáil Éireann's approval of the terms of the convention. In effect, I seek Members' approval for Ireland to support the important steps being taken by the Council of Europe towards holding Russia accountable for its actions.

A Cheann Comhairle, right now as Russia's war of aggression continues, Ireland, along with our fellow EU member states, is committed to making sure Ukraine gets the supports it needs to continue to defend itself and to put it in the strongest possible position in peace negotiations. We are continuing to provide political support, financial support, humanitarian support and non-lethal military support to Ukraine. Since February 2022 Ireland has contributed over €500 million in support of Ukraine. Last month, I announced a further €40 million in humanitarian and stabilisation supports for 2026. This winter, Ireland contributed €26 million to Ukraine's critical energy infrastructure. It is important to stress this is money that is going directly to communities that have been impacted by this devastating war for many years now. Ireland strongly supported the agreement at EU level of the €90 billion support loan in December and we welcome the recent unblocking of the decision to allow us to move forward with this loan.

Ireland has also welcomed over 120,000 Ukrainians under the temporary protection directive. There are still some 84,000 Ukrainians here. We know them, they are in our communities, they are in our schools and they are working in our businesses. We provided these supports even as Russia chose to continue targeting Ukraine's civilians and its critical infrastructure, even as Russia carried out reprehensible attacks on Ukrainian energy systems throughout the bitter winter and even as Russia launched over 6,800 long-range drones and missiles into Ukraine in April, making it the most intense month of long-range aerial attacks so far in the war.

In the meantime, we continue to welcome efforts to end the war of aggression against Ukraine and to achieve lasting and just peace and security. One day this brutal war of aggression will end. When it does, we must be ready to act and to hold Russia accountable for its brutal attacks and the unspeakable suffering and damage it has inflicted. Fundamentally under the convention, it is expected that the Russian Federation, once it becomes a member, will bear the full costs of the claims commission from the time the convention enters into force. Crucially, it is expected that the Russian Federation will be the one to fund the compensation determined and awarded by the commission under the convention. Until such a time as this happens it is incumbent upon us, together with our international partners, to make ready the system for this to happen. The register of damages has already begun recording the claims for compensation for damage, loss and injury inflicted by the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. There are, as I mentioned, over 80,000 claims to date, before the war has even ended. The claims commission will be the body that assesses and determines those claims. Establishing the claims commission is the next step in getting ready to ensure accountability for Russia's war of aggression. It is one Ireland should join.

I commend this motion to the House and trust Dáil Éireann will support the ratification of the convention. I look forward to engaging with colleagues on this.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Beimid ag tacú leis an rún. Tá sé tábhachtach go mbeidh cuntasacht ann agus go mbeidh pionós ar an Rúis de bharr na héagóra atá déanta i gcoinne na hÚcráine. We support this motion. We believe it is important for Ireland to continue to do what it can to support vulnerable people in Ukraine and elsewhere and to support the protection of human rights and international law globally.

It is important in this debate, which is framed very much in the context of international law, accountability and compensation, that the Government be clear and robust in its defence of the multilateral system. It is very explicit and clear in this area but in others it could have done with being more clear about breaches of international law. It is important that Ireland's position, as part of an independent foreign policy that has been prized by all parties and by people from every political perspective in this House, is that the Irish Government calls out breaches of human rights, whether they are by countries we have friendly relationships with or otherwise. That is crucially important. A multilateral system that has strength and mechanisms of accountability is in the interests of small countries, as far as Sinn Féin and I are concerned. It is important that there is accountability for crimes and wrongful acts under international law, whether those are crimes arising from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the genocide committed by the Israeli state, the illegal occupation of south Lebanon, or the multiple illegal wars that successive US Administrations have engaged in.

The objective of this convention is to hold the Russian Federation to account for damage, loss or injury caused by internationally recognised wrongful acts committed by it in or against Ukraine. This is something Sinn Féin fully supports. We are told that the commission will be an administrative body and will review, assess and decide on claims for compensation for damage, loss or injury caused by such acts, including the amounts of compensation, but will not be responsible for payment of compensation. Over four years ago Vladimir Putin and the Russian Federation engaged in an act of aggression and imperialist expansion against Ukraine and its people. We have since seen appalling atrocities at Bucha, Zaporizhzhia, Mariupol and other locations, attacks on civilian infrastructure, the direct targeting of civilians and the barbaric abduction of children. Sinn Féin and this House have been emphatic in our condemnation of this and the people of Ireland have responded commendably in supporting Ukrainian families and through contributions to various charitable causes. The past four years have seen the Ukrainian people suffer many hardships. The situation on the ground remains very severe and it is important to continue to support assistance for civilian, humanitarian and non-military purposes, especially the need that exists to bolster civilian infrastructure, with a particular emphasis on energy infrastructure. During the past winter we all saw and read terrible reports of Ukrainian energy workers collapsing from exhaustion as they worked in incredibly challenging circumstances to keep the Ukrainian energy system going in order to sustain the economy, to ensure healthcare continued to function and to serve the needs of the Ukrainian people. They must continue to be supported.

The issue of accountability is crucially important. As I said, the Irish Government should represent the people's desire that this accountability be exercised without fear or favour in relation to any particular country, but it is important in terms of the accountability piece that on an individual level justice is done. The Ukrainian ambassador has spoken with great passion and prioritised the issue of the abduction of children by the Russian Federation. Clearly, when we talk about accountability the only true accountability for those families is that their children are returned to them. The Government has been vocal on this but it needs to continue to make this a priority. We can only imagine the heartbreak those families are enduring due to these callous abductions. That is a crucial part of accountability.

Accountability cannot simply be about financial compensation - it must involve doing right by the families who are most directly affected. I believe the European Union will soon look at the 21st package of sanctions. In the context of the 20th package, which included an increased focus on aluminium, it is important we get clarity from the Government on what it intends to do in relation to aluminium to ensure it is effective. Clearly, it will have to ensure compliance with the sanctions. I have raised in the past the fact that while there have been a wide range of sanctions against Russian individuals and companies, despite the centrality of atomic energy to the Russian economy and war effort the Russian atomic agency, Rosatom, has not been sanctioned.

4 o'clock

I want to encourage the Minister to raise this issue at a European level and encourage actions. The issue of sanctions against the atomic agency is a very clear priority for the Ukrainian Government, as articulated by President Zelenskyy in mid-February. Mr. Zelenskyy was rightly critical of the reluctance of European governments to act to tackle to this and sanction the agency and the people who control Rosatom. Tá tuilleadh arduithe ar phraghsanna

leictreachais os ár gcomhair amach, ach tá Fianna Fáil agus Fine Gael fós sásta suí siar agus faic a dhéanamh. Tá cáinainéis éigeandála agus creidmheasanna fuinnimh ag teastáil láithreach.

Clearly, sanctions are agreed at a European level but there is no reason Ireland should not show leadership on the issue and should not specifically push this issue that would have a very clear political and diplomatic impact. Ministers in the past have said they support it but they have been coy as to whether they will make that a specific priority and vocally call for that at a European level. In order to ensure meaningful peace talks that can deliver a just, sustainable peace that respects Ukraine, it is clear that more international pressure on Vladimir Putin, particularly from Europe and the United States, is required. Sanctions on this particular energy company would be a key form of sanction to increase pressure. I urge the Minister to make a clear statement that she will make this a priority and build momentum for sanctions in this area of atomic energy in the next package.

We recognise and support the fact that Ukraine continues to require support politically and diplomatically. It is clear where the fault lies and who is the aggressor. It is Vladimir Putin and the Russian Federation. We should continue to offer political and diplomatic support and, where required, humanitarian and civilian support in practical ways that are consistent with our neutrality. Russia's military aggression cannot be rewarded. It is clear there needs to be accountability. The policy of the Irish Government in conflicts around the world has been to use means such as this to exert pressure on countries in flagrant breach of international law. We must again focus on these efforts and use our voice to increase diplomatic and political pressure, including sanctions. Clearly, mechanisms such as this are important to ensure appropriate compensation.

Deputy Duncan Smith: We, in the Labour Party, also welcome the International Claims Commission for Ukraine being established and the Irish support for the same. In a world where the international rules-based order is unravelling and disintegrating, it is instruments such as this that we need to support and hold firm with, along with many others. Of course, as stated by the Minister, the success of this instrument will be reliant upon the Russians themselves signing up and the Russians themselves funding the compensation as it is calculated towards Ukraine. At this point in time, that seems quite fanciful but given where we are in the world, it is these instruments which we need to bring forward that we need to support. For those of us who support a proper, international rules-based approach to conflict resolution, accountability, justice and resolution, it is instruments like this which we need to put our full support behind.

For Ireland, we have demonstrated real solidarity with Ukraine. It has been somewhat easy for us on a number of levels. For many decades, Russia, or formerly the Soviet Union, has been either a very real threat to Europe or, at best, an uneasy and not too trusted ally at times. However, for the past decade or so, and as we have seen in the Ukraine war of the past four and a bit years, Russia has become a very real threat and enemy to the stability of Europe. Ukraine has suffered up to 600,000 casualties, with as many as 140,000 deaths as a result of Russia's invasion and war of aggression. That is according to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies. There is no doubt in our minds that the actions Russia has carried out have resulted in death and destruction and damage to and destruction of infrastructure, schools and hospitals. It continues. As we heard in the Minister's statement, April of this year was the

most destructive month of the entire conflict when it comes to long-range missile attacks upon Ukraine.

While no conflict is black and white, this conflict is as close as we can get in the modern world. However, there is another conflict that is taking place which we also view as quite black and white, namely the US and Israel's war upon Iran. In any general terms, it was unprovoked. As despicable as the Iranian regime is and has been for many years, the US and Israel launched a war for which they have no logical outcome and which is causing death and destruction. While there is an uneasy peace at the moment, there is long-term economic damage. There is no sense that Ireland, the international community or Europe will act in such a way as to tackle the United States and Israel for their actions of unprovoked war and their actions of roguery the way we are with Russia, and rightly so with Russia. There is an inconsistency in our own approach, notwithstanding historic cultural links, contemporary economic links and all of the other things we have with the United States. What is being done is wrong. While we are unsure as to what the outcome will be in terms of the US, Israel or Iran, there is one winner early on from that conflict and that is Vladimir Putin, for whom Trump has "temporarily" lifted sanctions on Russian oil. That "temporary" lifting of sanctions has been extended by Trump and there is a sense in Kyiv that Trump is closer to Moscow than he is to Kyiv in how he is operating his international policy and affairs, inasmuch as anyone can account for them.

All of us present here in the Chamber have spoken how the old order has been absolutely obliterated and it is uncertain as to where we are at. The instruments that are being proposed are laudable. We need them and we need them to work. In the world that exists today without the bigger powers or without institutions like the European Union being fully behind them, it is very difficult to see how they will have an impact. We in Ireland have to do what we have been doing for the past four years and three or four months - standing shoulder to shoulder with the people of Ukraine. We must do that. I hope this convention comes into force and that Russia signs up to it. I hope Russia pays compensation to Ukraine. I do not think that will happen but that should not be a reason not support this and push it as hard as we can through the United Nations, the EU and any bilaterals we have.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: The Ukraine reparations commission that this Government proposes we join is a very welcome idea. It is a means of showing solidarity with Ukraine and I fully accept that but I believe we can go further than just showing solidarity. I want to speak to this concept of solidarity because it is so crucial. What does solidarity mean? It is real and serious action. It is acting with justice in mind and taking meaningful steps to help the people who we mean to help. We will always stand with and support Ukraine in its mission to preserve its sovereignty. This reparations commission will work over several years to evaluate the collective damage done by Russia to Ukraine throughout the invasion. This is welcome but I have concerns that it may be an expensive, academic exercise if we do not take more action.

The reparations commission will evaluate and produce a cost Russia is liable for but will Russia ever engage with its liability, other than to reject it outright? Russia is a rogue state that rejects any application of international law, so why would we expect it to suddenly accept a massive reparations bill? Russia will reject this commission's findings so we must ensure the rebuilding of Ukraine actually takes place through alternative means at the same time as the work of the commission continues. Instead of just drawing up a large bill for Russia, we need to ensure that our solidarity is felt by every day Ukrainians.

I have other concerns that this new commission may sideline the primacy of Ukraine in negotiations as the assessment of claims may differ from what is needed or desired by the Ukrainian state to build positively into the future. I hope the Minister of State accepts that I am putting these forward as concerns but it in no way undermines our support for the motion. Ireland must be a leader on this action to ensure Europe does not just signal intent and support but actually takes a meaningful role in supporting Ukrainians. There is currently massive co-operation between European countries and Ukraine in terms of arms deals and military support but there is huge further potential for humanitarian assistance and transitional support. In our own history, we have received a peace dividend in the aftermath of the Troubles, as did much of the rest of Europe in the wake of World War Two.

Ireland has also participated in international aid measures to countries across the globe and continues to do so. We need to remember this history, step up to the occasion and ensure that Europe is ready to assist when this war ends.

In a briefing circulated by the Government Whip, we are told that Ireland's contribution to the administrative costs of the commission will be less than €1 million per year. Currently, Irish institutions are in possession of roughly €2 billion in frozen Russian assets. The Government at the very least should be looking to use this money to finance the Irish contribution to the commission, which would ensure that further pressure is put on Russia to come to the table because of Putin's reliance on these oligarchs.

The nations of Europe in this initiative are coming together in a truly historic way. To rebuild a country and support a peace process of this scale is a real achievement. It must be built on to ensure that Europe is a force for peace in the world. This commission should lay the groundwork for a similar Palestinian reparations commission. When European governments freeze assets of one occupier but maintain preferential trade deals with another, it makes us all hypocrites. We need to support Ukraine and we need to use this model as a blueprint to ensure Trump and his board of ethnic cleansing do not get to pave over Palestine. A reparations commission should be formed to give real power to the establishment of a strong and secure Palestinian state and to end the illegal and despicable occupation of stolen land by Israel. The failure of European governments to uphold international law in Palestine needs to be corrected. The destruction of Ukraine and Palestine are fundamentally connected by regimes that seek to impose militarist powers through unilateral action. Europe, as a wealthy continent, should be a leader in the provision of post-war funding to build sustainable futures for Palestinians and Ukrainians. We need to recognise that peace and justice are a universal mission and the practical steps to achieving this should not be segregated by continent.

This proposal in its current form will not rebuild hospitals or schools, or fund widows' pensions. If we are to rebuild Ukraine, it must be a collective and international effort. We can legislate at the national and European levels to release seized Russian assets to Ukraine. We should use the estimated more than €200 billion of frozen Russian assets in the EU banks to give an immediate and serious peace dividend to Ukraine. The use of these assets would ensure that Russians complicit in the invasion of Ukraine, those oligarchs who sought to profit from war, will not be able to use their illegal acts for personal gain.

We must also learn from historical example that placing a massive reparation burden on a post-war state only sparks destabilisation and hatred. A nuclear-capable Russian state embroiled in domestic chaos is a fundamental danger to itself and the world. The nations of

the world, but particularly those in Europe, must ensure that the end of Putin's war and dictatorship allows for the Russian people to exercise their right to self-determination and to construct a new government based on human rights. We can make Russia pay for its crimes right now and ensure that it is not the average citizen, who opposes Putin's war and dictatorship, who pays Putin's bills but the cronies and criminals who oppress their own people.

The step to join this commission is, as I said, welcome, but there is so much more work to do. We can make Russians complicit in Putin's war and regime pay this bill. We can kick-start the rebuilding fund and then we must use the lessons learned from assessing reparations here to ensure that Palestinians get the justice they deserve by establishing a similar claims commission with justice and long-term security at its heart.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The idea that we should quantify the compensation for the damage done by Putin's brutal and illegal war against Ukraine and that the bill should be sent to Putin and the Russian regime is absolutely right and proper. It is an imperialist war being waged by Putin and has been from the outset. It is criminal and without justification. As well as the immense human damage done - probably in excess of 100,000 lives have been lost - there has also undoubtedly been huge damage done for which the Russian regime and the people who preside over it should have to pay the bill. I certainly would have no problem if the assets of the oligarchs and Putin's coterie of hangers-on had to pick up the bill and that those assets would be used to pay the bill due to ordinary Ukrainians who suffer the consequences of this terrible war. It is an entirely reasonable proposition.

However, I must say that when you see the determination with which the Irish Government and all the members of the European Union pursue the rightful demand for accountability for the Russian regime for the crimes it has committed against the Ukrainian people and yet see it fail, in the most brazen way, to do the same when it comes to Israel's crimes against the Palestinian people, you cannot help but be absolutely infuriated at the hypocrisy and the double standards of the European Union. You call into question whether they are even concerned about the crimes done to the Ukrainian people. If it is a crime to launch an illegal war against the people of Ukraine, which it is, and if it is a crime to occupy their lands and kill nearly 100,000 people, surely it is the same when Israel does it to the Palestinians. Such is the extent of the crimes that Israel has committed against the Palestinians that it is now in the dock for genocide, the greatest of all possible crimes, as well as for multiple breaches of international law, the commission of crimes against humanity, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, illegal occupation, the collective punishment of the Palestinian people, instigating yet another war against the people of Lebanon, bombing Iran and putting the entire region on fire to such a degree that even ordinary people in this country cannot pay their bills because of the crimes that Israel is committing. Yet, the same European Union that professes to be horrified by the crimes of the Putin regime not only does not impose sanctions on Israel for crimes that are as bad or worse but gives favoured trade status to the Israeli regime and gives economic privileges to the regime that is committing those crimes against the Palestinian people on an ongoing basis. The hypocrisy and double standards are staggering. They are beyond belief.

The Minister of State might be interested to know that I was just on the phone with an Irish citizen who is on the flotilla and who is very scared. He asked me to tell the Minister of State that he is scared. He is on the same boat as the sister of President Catherine Connolly. He said they are frightened about what is coming down the line. Two of the leaders of the Global

Sumud Flotilla are being kept in detention in an Israeli prison. We are talking about a regime where the wife of one of the Ministers gave him a cake in the shape of a noose to celebrate the idea that they are going to hang lots of Palestinians because they are Palestinians resisting the Israeli occupation. Think about the horrific nature of this regime. The man on the flotilla asked me to ask the Minister of State what the Government is doing about these violations of international maritime law, where there is kidnapping, piracy and so on, to add to all the crimes that Israel is committing. Yet, the European Union does not sanction Israel for it and does not seize its assets. Why are we not seizing its assets for those crimes against our citizens? We have often given money to Palestinians and then Israel blows to bits schools and all sorts of infrastructure into which European money has gone. However, we do not sanction Israel even though we are required to under the Genocide Convention. We continue to extend favoured trade status to Israel. It is absolutely unbelievable.

It makes me think that the motivation of the people who run the European Union has nothing to do with the things they say motivate them when they talk about how horrible the occupation of Ukraine is. It is horrible. It makes me think it is not morality that is driving them because if it were morality or concern for the innocent victims of war, illegal military aggression and crimes against humanity, surely it would extend to other people but it does not. Then you ask what is the real motivation here. Is it that Europe is only concerned with its sphere of influence and is guilty of exactly the same crime as Putin is guilty of and that it is now very obvious that Donald Trump is guilty of?

It has a policy of saying that it has the right to control South and Latin America, Cuba and Greenland because that is its sphere of influence and it will take out governments if necessary and threaten to attack people in its sphere of influence. Putin does it. Israel, a US ally and an ally of many in the European Union, is doing the bidding of certain European powers. Therefore, not only will we not sanction them, we will extend them favoured trade status. It is all hypocrisy.

All of the moral outrage expressed about Putin is actually nonsense because what is actually motivating the European powers is their own strategic self interest. It does not suit them to impose sanctions on Israel because in the twisted world they inhabit, they see Israel as essentially a colonial outpost. That is, of course, what it is and always has been. It is a colonial outpost to serve the interests of western powers and if the Palestinian people have to suffer genocide because of that sort of colonial project to control and dominate the region, so be it.

The people of Ukraine deserve compensation but so do all victims of the same crimes, including the Palestinians. It is very obvious that the European Union is not concerned or motivated by a humanitarian principle or moral principle. It is riddled with double standards and hypocrisy.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion. In August 2022, I travelled to Ukraine and I saw at first hand the damage caused by Russia's illegal invasion. I saw the suffering of ordinary families. I met people who had lost their homes, livelihoods and, in many cases, members of their family. I will not forget what I saw, and I will not stop saying that this war was unprovoked and is unjustified and wrong.

I support this motion, which authorises the establishment of an international claims commission for Ukraine. It puts the principle of accountability into a working compensation

system. It says clearly that the state responsible for the damage must pay for the damage. That is a basic point of justice, and Ireland should stand behind it.

The war has dragged on for more than four years. The fighting continues. Civilians are still being killed daily, including in a missile strike just two days ago. There are short symbolic ceasefires being declared this week around Russia's victory day commemorations.

They are welcome insofar as they spare lives but a 48-hour pause is not peace. Only serious negotiations will deliver a lasting settlement. I urge the Russian side to extend any pause in the fighting, to engage seriously and to come to the table in good faith.

The Ukrainian people have shown again and again that they want this war to end. They have made several gestures to the President of Russia as well as other intermediaries. Russia must show the same by being willing to engage and demonstrate that peace is possible.

Ireland has stood with Ukraine from the very start, bilaterally and through the European Union, and we should continue to do so. Signing this convention is a further step in that solidarity. As the Minister of State will be aware, the Taoiseach has been to the forefront in speaking to European colleagues and using Ireland's soft power to ensure Ukraine is kept to the forefront of the agenda as a candidate country in the European Union. As the Minister of State for European affairs is present, it is imperative that Ukraine is also included as much as possible in our Presidency of the European Commission. I commend the motion to the House.

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Thomas Byrne): Today, as we pursue a constitutional obligation to ratify an international agreement, we have an opportunity to say "No" by saying "Yes" and voting "Tá". We have an opportunity to say "No" to Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression, to death and destruction with impunity, to rewarding Russia for stealing Ukrainian land and the forcible removal of Ukrainian children and to inflicting unspeakable suffering and damage without consequence and to say "Yes" to justice, consequences, responsibility, reparation and, above all, accountability.

During my visit to Kyiv in March, I witnessed first hand the strength and endurance of Ukraine's leaders and people, as well the reality on the ground of a country at war, living with the relentless presence of war and Russian violence as part of everyday life. I saw the reality of living with constant fear, unpredictability and, of course, devastating loss. I saw the effects of Russian attacks on Ukraine's energy and civilian infrastructure in the middle of a brutal, bitter winter.

Russia fired over 6,800 long-range drones and missiles into Ukraine in April alone, more than nine attacks per hour, night and day, every day in April, leaving Ukraine, as a nation without sleep. Since the Russian Federation launched its full scale invasion in February 2022, more than 15,000 civilians have been killed, 41,000 have been injured, millions have been displaced and untold damage has been caused to civilian property and infrastructure.

I also witnessed the tenacity and commitment of the Ukrainian people. I was humbled by their ability to maintain a functioning state and administration in the face of invasion. It underlined for me the real potential for Ukraine to flourish when this terrible conflict ends. Of course, the people in Ukraine look to the day when peace returns and they can build a brighter future. When that day comes and the war finally ends, it will be vitally important that

preparations have been made and mechanisms put in place to ensure that Russia can be held to account for its actions.

The establishment of the claims commission is one clear step that we can take in preparation for that. It is a relatively small step from a practical perspective but politically it sends an important message. Ireland ratifying the convention is Ireland continuing to lend its unwavering support to Ukraine. It is Ireland continuing to support the principle of accountability and continuing to support the important steps being taken, by the Council of Europe, not the European Union, towards delivering accountability.

In the coming weeks, we will vote in favour of a resolution at the Council of Europe ministerial meeting in Chişinău to advance the establishment of the special tribunal on the crime of aggression against Ukraine. We now have the opportunity to ratify the convention establishing an international claims commission for Ukraine, an administrative body that will assess the damages, loss or injury inflicted by Russia on Ukraine.

It is worth reiterating that the claims commission will not be responsible for making any compensation payments. Instead, it will assess and determine claims for compensation. Ratifying the convention does not make Ireland liable for those costs. Russia should pay these costs through reparations. When the convention opened for signature in December of last year, Ireland was among the 36 states or bodies that signed it. Now, let us be among the first of the states to ratify it and take another step towards putting the principle of accountability into action.

It goes without saying that no award or amount of financial compensation will change or even make good the devastating damage and destruction inflicted on Ukraine, its people and its communities by the Russian Federation in the course of this war. Nonetheless, it is incumbent on us, along with our international partners, to put in place a system that can hold Russia to account when the time comes.

Question put and agreed to.

Scoping Exercise in Response to Requests from Dignity4Patients: Statements

Minister for Health (Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill): I welcome the opportunity to address the House on statements on Michael Shine, and much more importantly, his victims and survivors. The abuse of trust and attack on the dignity and the person of patients by Michael Shine was a terrible betrayal. I have the deepest sympathy and concern for all the victims. I acknowledge the many people affected, including several I have been fortunate enough to meet. Reports suggest that the total number of those impacted is in the high hundreds and it ranges across a huge age span. These individuals have demonstrated remarkable bravery as they continue their pursuit of justice for the serious wrongdoing they experienced. Those individuals who are not necessarily involved in that campaign and who have suffered in silence have also demonstrated great bravery in continuing their lives in remarkable ways, notwithstanding what has happened to them.

Michael Shine, a former surgeon, worked in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda from 1964 until 1995. In March 1995, the CEO of the hospital was made aware of a complaint

of abuse against him by the North Eastern Health Board. Michael Shine took leave while the complaint was addressed and subsequently retired in October 1995. By the time of his retirement, he was already the subject of multiple allegations of sexual abuse going back as far as the 1970s. In 1995, the matters in the hospital were the subject of an independent review chaired by Dr. Miriam Hederman O'Brien, which was reported in 1996. The review was established by the board of the hospital and its terms of reference included "to examine and report to the Hospital Management Board on the Hospital's response to the complaints of sexual abuse made against a consultant, formerly employed by the Hospital". Dr. Hederman O'Brien's report set out the chronology of events at the hospital, and recommendations on the prevention of sexual abuse and on procedures for handling complaints. Following the recommendations, the health service made substantial enhancements to its procedures for preventing and addressing claims of sexual abuse, and those included establishing clear practices and protocols to handle such concerns in such instances of horrendous abuse. In October 2009, on foot of requests from Dignity4Patients, the then Minister for Health and Children announced the establishment of an independent non-statutory review, the Drogheda review. The purpose of the review was to advise on whether a further investigation into the procedures and practices at the hospital during that period would be of significant public benefit in helping to improve best-practice guidelines and policies. That review was carried out by retired High Court judge, Mr. Justice T.C. Smyth, who submitted his report to the then Minister in September 2010. The report recommended that a further investigation should not be held and that, in order to avoid prejudicing current or future civil or criminal cases, the report should not be published.

Dignity4Patients has been campaigning on behalf of the victims for many years. It is an organisation that has long sought an inquiry into the sexual abuse of patients and in the past year has sought that in a more formal way. In April, I met with representatives of Dignity4Patients and as part of that engagement programme, I asked them to share with me their areas of concern and those areas they felt could best be addressed by further inquiries. In their response, they detailed their call for a statutory investigation, highlighted specific issues they felt were as yet unaddressed by other mechanisms, and sought an opportunity to have a space for the voice of victims and survivors. At that time, I committed to engaging with my Government colleagues on how to best provide answers to the issues raised by Dignity4Patients on behalf of the victims. I met with the group again on Monday, 24 November and I remain committed to the group and to identifying an appropriate and bespoke response to the issues raised and the needs identified by it. It is very important to say that we have - or I certainly hope we have - been working in great partnership with Dignity4Patients, a group for which I have enormous respect and regard, both as to the way in which it represents the advocates, survivors and victims but also the complete professionalism with which it approaches its work.

On 26 November, the Government agreed that a time-bound scoping exercise be undertaken by an independent person in response to requests from Dignity4Patients on behalf of victims and survivors of Michael Shine. For decades, victims and survivors of Michael-Shine have carried trauma and have sought recognition and accountability. Their strength and willingness to continue pressing for the truth will, I hope, be met with more compassion, seriousness and action. There is a substantial body of work involved, including examination of all previous reports, relevant court findings, hospital and institutional actions and the historical context of the abuse. I am glad we have had this very structured engagement with Dignity4Patients and

with victims and advocates to ensure their experiences, expectations and their needs are fully reflected and to try to work out what the outstanding issues are to which we can provide further answers, what information is held by the State in that regard, how we approach this in the most contained but impactful way, and how, within that, we give the appropriate voice for survivors.

I announced the appointment of Mr. Lorcan Staines SC as the independent facilitator to conduct this scoping exercise following engagement with the Attorney General. Mr. Staines commenced his work on 3 March and this scoping exercise will run for up to 16 weeks. He has been finalising the terms of reference for the scoping exercise in direct consultation with Dignity4Patients and with the Department for Health on the other side. Mr. Staines has two decades of experience of criminal, regulatory and administrative law and he is widely recognised for his specialist work with victims and vulnerable witnesses. It is also important to say that during the process, Dignity4Patients will have the support of expert advisers, including Maeve Lewis, former CEO of One in Four, and Professor Phil Scraton, a specialist in inquests and inquiry models, as well as their solicitor, Diarmuid Brecknell of Phoenix Law. Government has emphasised the need for the process to be survivor-centred and Mr. Staines will receive all necessary supports to ensure a victim-centred, trauma-informed, human-rights based approach underpins the scoping exercise and any subsequent statutory processes. I have asked that the well-being of victims and survivors remain central throughout this process. The final report and recommendations will be submitted to Government to guide the development of an appropriate and bespoke response to the issues raised and to the needs identified by Dignity4Patients.

I emphasise the paramount importance of the lived experiences of those affected by Mr. Staines's work. It is vitally important that he get the opportunity to engage with victims and survivors, for them to have their voices heard at this stage, and to create a process that enables their voice be heard in the future. In order for that stakeholder engagement to begin, a lawful basis to process personal data for these exercises was required in alignment with Article 6(1)(e), Article 9(2)(i) and Article 10 of the general data protection regulation, GDPR. In accordance with these articles, the making of regulations under the Data Protection Act 2018 was necessary to give domestic legal effect to this basis, to ensure legal certainty, foreseeability and to place appropriate safeguards on a statutory footing. No processing could commence until the necessary statutory framework was in place. On 24 March, the Houses approved the data protection regulations for this scoping exercise and I signed them on 9 April. Our commitment is to ensure a process that recognises the suffering experienced, honours the voices of victims and survivors, and seeks a path towards truth and healing. I again acknowledge the courage of victims and survivors, whose experiences have brought us to this point. Their voices must remain central as this work continues. This scoping exercise and the subsequent next steps will proceed with independence, compassion and a trauma-informed approach.

I really wish to pay tribute to the hundreds of men across counties Meath and Louth who have been impacted and who will be impacted yet again as we discuss this. I acknowledge their work and their dignity and I acknowledge the people who have provided a broad support network to them and the advocates who have brought us to this point. We are more than halfway through a facilitative process. I believe, and hope the House agrees with me, that this has been a process based on genuine collaboration and a real effort to try to find a mechanism to answer the questions that can possibly be answered. I hope through this process that we will find some measure of a voice for those issues that a resolution can be found for, though I always

worry that no matter what way we structure it or no matter what we do we will disappoint, or that some people will not find the justice they hope to seek throughout any process. However, we are here to try to facilitate this. We are here to try to give this voice, respect and dignity that has not been provided to date, certainly not in the original experience within the hospital or in the process since then. I do not think anybody would disagree with me on that point.

I thank the groups for their ongoing collaboration. I apologise to Members and to anybody watching as I cannot stay. A Cabinet meeting began at 4.30 p.m. It is now 4.40 p.m., and I have to attend. The Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell, is here with me and I assure Members that I will be reading back the contributions made by all of them. We have spoken about this in part in the past in this House and I have spoken with many of Members individually, but I wish to apologise to anybody who is watching that it is not possible for me to stay due to the Cabinet meeting. I thank the House for facilitating statements at this time. It is something we will continue to discuss. There is ongoing work that I am not in a position to discuss today because some of it has to go back to Cabinet. I cannot breach Cabinet confidentiality but I acknowledge that the work is continuing with the Dignity4Patients group and its representatives in the same collaborative way that has brought us to this point.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I welcome that a scoping exercise has been established. I reiterate the very clear and just demand that a full public inquiry be delivered and secured to allow the full truth to emerge. I wish to be very clear because the Minister said that people may or may not be satisfied at the end of the process. To ensure that as many people as possible are satisfied, we need to understand what it is they are looking for. We need to know at the end of this process precisely the details of the crimes that Michael Shine committed but we also need to know who knew, at what stage they knew and how in God's name this was allowed to continue for so long and that so many young lives were destroyed, and so many lives and innocence were taken away from people. It is very simple. That is what we need at the end of this process. I want to put on the record again my huge commendation and admiration for Dignity4Patients, and each and every one of those victims and survivors who told their stories and who often were not believed and ignored or dismissed. It was largely because they were young men, and they were dismissed out of hand. They persevered and deserve any credit that is going for the progress that has been made to date.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Just over a year ago, I had the privilege of hosting Dignity4Patients in Leinster House where five courageous survivors of convicted sexual abuser, Michael Shine, shared their testimonies with TDs, Senators and political staff. Survivors Larry, Cianan, Gerard, Peter and Ian spoke with one voice on behalf of the hundreds of known victims who had come forward. Their message was clear: truth matters and transparency matters. Complaints and reports of sexual abuse by Michael Shine were first made to hospital authorities as early as 1964 with more documented reports throughout the seventies and eighties. Victims have stated that this was an open secret at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda, but nobody batted an eyelid. In 1995, Bernadette Sullivan, a nurse, stepped forward and made a formal complaint. This was the beginning of Michael Shine's well overdue downfall and exposure as the most prolific paedophile in Europe. She has been called a whistleblower. She is, in fact, a hero.

The wheels of justice turned slowly and that is why in 2026 we are still looking for answers. I acknowledge the immense pain and trauma that survivors of Michael Shine have endured, the long and difficult path they have walked with Dignity4Patients in their fight for truth and justice, their positive engagement with the scoping inquiry and the ongoing campaign for a public inquiry. The Government must also support them to rebuild their lives. Through my own local engagement with survivors and their families, I know how important this support provided by Dignity4Patients is. The people of Drogheda and beyond rightly view this as a lifeline. While the scoping exercise was an important and welcome step, it also exposed the lack of capacity to support victims and survivors. Adequate funding and resources must be provided to Dignity4Patients by the Government ahead of any potential next steps that follow this exercise. It is mind-boggling that it has not been provided with funding for an advocacy worker, despite submitting a business case for this, particularly when it is supported over 400 vulnerable people and brave survivors with only two advocacy team members. The State has a duty of care to survivors like Larry, Cianan, Gerard, Peter, Ian and many more like them. I am proud to personally know these men. I am immensely proud of their bravery. I thank them for trusting me with their painful experience. I reassure anybody out who is watching today who has been affected similarly that Dignity4Patients has an ongoing helpline, Monday to Thursday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. There are people there to listen and support them.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: Michael Shine was an abuser who was well known for decades hiding in plain sight. There have been multiple failures, whether we are talking about Our Lady of Lourdes, Medical Missionaries of Mary, the Garda, successive Departments of Health and by the State and many Governments. We all welcome the scoping exercise by Lorcan Staines. There has been good engagement by the survivors and victims. However, it only matters if it provides what is needed, which is a full public inquiry that provides the absolute truth in relation to what happened and beyond what happened, why it happened and why it continued to happen for so long. Like many others, I was very taken when I listened to the stories of the likes of Larry, Cianan, Gerard, Peter and Ian. Many of us were at that presentation and many others over the years by those survivors. We are talking about Dignity4Patients, which has done huge work on delivering where we are today. It represents 398 men and two women. We know that the group represents a lot more. We cannot even imagine how many were abused by Michael Shine.

I reiterate what Deputy Byrne said about the absolute necessity for funding, but also that notice goes out for those who still have not spoken and need to that Dignity4Patients and others are there to provide that support. This is back to the Government. It is about ensuring that the scoping exercise does what it is supposed to and that we find a means of providing people with the full powers of inquiry that are required.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: I acknowledge the words of the Minister. She mentioned two counties in her contribution. She did not mention County Dublin. There are people living in my constituency who were living there when they were abused by Michael Shine because Our Lady of Lourdes is the local hospital for Balbriggan. I am sure that was an oversight on her part. What is at the heart of this is that these kids and their families were not listened to. When we talk to victims and survivors of that vile and disgusting man, they tell us that everybody knew but nobody stood up. As my colleagues said, it was an open secret along the corridors of Our Lady of Lourdes. The State failed those children, their families and the good decent

people in the hospital who were trying to speak up. Those kids carried that hurt into adulthood but they have carried themselves with dignity. They have carried themselves so well. I pay tribute to the Dignity4Patients group. The Minister needs to resource that group. It is a lifeline and a support for those victims. That group needs to be resourced.

Deputy Ged Nash: The Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell, spent time in County Louth last Friday opening a welcome new social housing development. It was great to welcome him to our hometown and our small city. In the time he spent in County Louth, there was a very strong chance that some of the men he met are survivors and victims of disgraced paedophile and former doctor, Michael Shine. The spectre or ghost of Michael Shine hangs over my hometown, counties Louth and Meath, north County Dublin and parts of counties Cavan and Monaghan. That one of Europe's most prolific sex offenders and abusers managed to get away with immunity with what he did over many decades working in one of the most substantial and largest public hospitals in our country requires the kind of statutory investigation that successive Governments have not been of a mind to grant. Michael Shine has spent a short time behind bars. Prosecution through the criminal courts and spending time behind bars having lost one's liberty for a short period does not accountability make. Accountability is a more complex matter. When we discuss the crimes of Michael Shine and the way in which he was allowed to operate with impunity up until the mid-1990s, thanks to the actions of Bernadette Sullivan, we need to look more closely at the environment in which he was allowed to operate.

As I have said in this Chamber on countless occasions, there was a network. The system allowed this to happen. It turned a blind eye to the damage done to my friends, my peers, my contemporaries, and it went on for far too long. It went on for years without any intervention whatsoever being made. I want to say, hand on heart, that I am grateful - if gratitude is the right emotion or position to take - for the interest the Minister, Deputy Carroll MacNeill, has taken in this matter since her appointment as Minister for Health. That interest was generated by the remarkable campaign and advocacy work done by the Dignity4Patients group and the victims and survivors, individually and collectively, of Michael Shine, many of whom are friends, contemporaries and peers of mine - people I grew up with. They deserve a form of justice that has been denied to them to date.

In the context of the scoping exercise process we are in at the moment, it is appropriate to acknowledge that many of the survivors and victims who have engaged with Lorcan Staines and the experts who are advising on the scoping exercise have acknowledged that this is the most significant initiative taken to date since they first went public. Some of them had to go public and waive their anonymity and tell their story in public. They should not have had to do that. I pay tribute to their courage, bravery and tenacity, and to the bravery of their families as well, and to the Dignity4Patients group which supported these men in very difficult circumstances who had to state publicly what happened to them, and all of the vulnerabilities that it involved. It has been a remarkable journey.

I do not want to pre-empt the outcome of the scoping exercise. I do not necessarily want to interrogate the words of the Minister today and what she said on previous occasions, especially back in March in this House, but there is a clear expectation that a form of statutory inquiry or commission of investigation will emanate from this process. We know the legislation guiding

these processes. We are aware of it and we understand it. We are conditioned to expect a bespoke arrangement to allow an investigation that has a statutory basis to happen.

Without pre-empting the outcome of the scoping exercise, which would be unfair to those who are involved – I do not necessarily want to scope out what the frame of a process like that would look like - there need to be powers of compellability. An Garda Síochána needs to be held to account for how it handled the management of complaints over the years. Clearly the Medical Missionaries of Mary will be involved in that as well, as the owners and operators of the hospital before it was taken over by the North Eastern Health Board, which was, to the best of my recollection, in 1997. In addition, the old North Eastern Health Board, the Department of Health and any other agency that had any kind of responsibility whatsoever from the point at which former Dr. Michael Shine was allowed to perpetrate these crimes against young children, who are now young men, must be involved. Many of the men who suffered at the hands of Michael Shine are now dead. They have gone to their graves without any form of public accountability for the actions of Michael Shine, the way in which these crimes were allowed to happen and how he was permitted to operate with impunity for so long.

There are lots of unanswered questions. This is an initiative I support and that the patients support. As colleagues said earlier, it is a constant battle. The very first statement I made in this House when I was elected back in 2011 was for additional funding for Dignity4Patients. That funding was never more essential than it is now because more victims and survivors are coming forward. When this emerges again into the public domain, it piques interest. Clearly, financial support and advocacy support are required. I appeal to the Minister to have an open mind on that and to grant the group the support it needs to help the victims through this very welcome process.

Deputy Gary Gannon: We in the Social Democrats welcome today's statement and the scoping exercise into Michael Shine's abuse. I thank the Minister for Health for providing time for this dedicated debate. Michael Shine is one of the most notorious and prolific paedophiles in Irish history and a full public inquiry into his abuse is long overdue and must finally be delivered. His abuse was carried out on an industrial scale and went unchecked for far too long – dating as far back as the 1960s and continuing throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Reports of his abuse at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda began in 1964, but no action was taken by the hospital and the beginning of the despicable pattern in our State institutions continued. Public bodies turned a blind eye to the abuse of children and young people, allowing him to continue his crimes for decades. Even as recently as the early 2000s, when a victim took the brave step of making a formal complaint to the Garda, he was told that there was not sufficient evidence and that he should write a letter of apology to Michael Shine for bringing the allegation. That is an outrageous situation. It is more evidence of a system that has systematically failed victims over and over again, retraumatising them rather than supporting them. It is not as if Shine's abuses were not known. It has been described as an open secret locally, yet his crimes went unchecked by the State for decades. As has been the case again and again, the systems that should protect and support victims closed ranks. There must be accountability for this. We need to know who knew what, who facilitated it, and who allowed it to continue and to cover it up. Why was this man aided and abetted for so long?

While it is welcome that a scoping exercise is finally under way, why has it taken decades to get to this point? In a country with such a long and dark history of abuse, we should know

better. More decisive action should have been taken years ago. There have been too many cases of abuse in which the State has dragged its heels, in particular when it comes to establishing inquiries, ensuring transparency and delivering accountability.

For years, survivors have sought an inquiry to examine how Shine's abuses were allowed to go unfettered for so long and why it took decades to secure a conviction. The fact of the matter is that Michael Shine has only served three years in jail for these horrific crimes. Survivors have rightly argued that this is not justice served given he has only been convicted for crimes against nine boys when we know there were so many more victims of his crimes. The Court of Appeal said he preyed on these young boys whom he was entrusted to medically examine. To date, more than 400 men have come forward. However, new cases continue to emerge and victims believe that a more accurate figure could be in excess of 1,000.

Even as recently as last year Shine still showed no remorse, nor would he take any responsibility for his depraved crimes. This is a man who got to retire more than 30 years ago on a full pension, having spent decades abusing boys and young men. It took until 2019 for him to face any jail time, albeit far too short a sentence. That was following years of him fighting every step of the way, even seeking damages from the State. His recent prosecution barely scratched the surface of the crimes he committed. Notwithstanding the unjustifiable delays in getting to this point, it is a positive development that this scoping exercise is finally under way. The appointment of Lorcan Staines SC in March was a welcome step. It is essential that this scoping exercise is now followed by a full statutory inquiry in which victims, who have waited long enough, should have their voices heard.

On behalf of the Social Democrats I pay tribute to the courage and resilience of the survivors and their representative group, Dignity4Patients. They should not have had to tell their stories again and again to finally secure this scoping exercise. Their tireless fight in the pursuit of truth must now be honoured with a full statutory inquiry. Nothing less will suffice. The system failed them. Now it must support them in the pursuit of truth. A statutory public inquiry is the only way to properly investigate not only the actions of Michael Shine but also the failings of several public bodies and how this was allowed to continue for so long. The matter has never been properly dealt with. It is time for the State to rectify that and ensure that this is never allowed to happen again. After decades of fighting for justice and truth, the scoping exercise's 16-week timeframe must be adhered to. This process must finally deliver for the survivors. It is crucial that any ultimate statutory inquiry is victim-centred and adheres to their experiences and needs.

5 o'clock

Victims' stories must be listened to and their questions must be answered. Above all, we must ensure nothing like this can ever happen again. We in the Social Democrats will work with the Government in whatever way we can to advance this important work and obtain justice for the victims once and for all.

Deputy Erin McGreehan: I thank the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell, for being here today. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the long-awaited and much-needed scoping exercise on the disgusting paedophile Michael Shine. He abused his position. In a depraved manner, he took advantage of his perceived respectability, and the trust we usually place in the medical profession, to abuse hundreds of patients. Today, I acknowledge and pay tribute to the

courage of those victims – the survivors who have carried this burden for decades and who were denied not only justice but also any semblance of support in dealing with the pain and trauma of their abuse.

I always get nervous when I speak about these things because they are so deeply personal to so many. You want to do justice to them and their trauma every time you come into these Houses to speak about them, but the truth is that none of us in here really can. The only way in which we can push for them is to make sure we listen to them now.

Having listened to Deputy Nash, who has been to the forefront of this since he entered elected office, I note it is very rare that all the Louth TDs stand in this place in complete agreement. All of us knew what was going on. Everyone from County Louth and from our home knew about it. Even I, as a child, knew about Michael Shine nearly as a verb, not understanding what was involved, the abuse or its consequences. The reason we did not understand is because the victims were silenced and everything was in place to protect Michael Shine, the hospital and the authorities. Thank God we have had representatives like Deputy Nash and others to speak out about this and represent, in these Houses and other places, the people affected, the whistleblowers and everyone who, against all odds and to the detriment of their careers, spoke out against this absolute demon who abused so many. I cannot use the words I wish to put on the record of the House because they would be very unparliamentary.

It is only when you hear the stories and look into the eyes of the men involved, the victims, that you realise what occurred. It is those eyes that I look at. I look at the wee pictures of what the men looked like as children. You look at your own children and think, “Jesus, it could be my wee boys. It could be my brothers.” It could be anyone. It could be any of us. It is important that the Government continue to listen to Dignity4Patients.

I echo what other representatives have said here today about supporting and funding Dignity4Patients because of what it has been doing over decades, on a shoestring, to support so many victims. There are hundreds of victims. I hope a statutory inquiry is to come. The victims trust Dignity4Patients and we owe them respect. We owe Dignity4Patients so much in this House and we need to respect that.

I very much acknowledge the work of Mr. Lorcan Staines SC and Gemma McLoughlin-Burke JC because the feedback I am getting from the survivors is really positive. The work is very important and really matters after years of frustration and mistrust. We have to keep it up and keep listening to the victims. It shows what can occur when Government actually listens, properly engages and places survivors at the centre of the process rather than at its margins. That is where it is at.

As a Senator in the previous Seanad, I worked very closely with an awful lot of victims of the mother and baby homes. They very much felt outside every single framework. That is where we failed miserably regarding the related scoping inquiries. We forgot the victim. We cannot move on to the next stage if we do not do well on this stage. We have to make sure that all the buildings and settings in which Michael Shine abused the children are taken into consideration. This has to be the first part of a two-stage process. We have to make sure this is being done not only for the victims who came forward but also to ensure that what occurred never happens again, that there is safeguarding and that there is a trusted structure to report abuse.

Victims are always silenced. They are always afraid that they will not be heard and they will not be believed. If there is a process in place as a default, they will come forward. We cannot change what happened in the past but we can change what could happen in the future and ensure the statutory inquiry has a strong focus on patient safety and sexual abuse prevention. Lessons must not simply be documented and thought about but acted upon.

It would do us all well to listen to the stories and testimony of victims of Michael Shine because doing so grounds us in a dark, dark time for this country. It shows why it is important to listen to victims. It shows why it is important to have proper safeguarding in our hospitals. It shows why it is important that victims be believed, trusted and minded. An awful lot of this is just about minding people, looking after them and giving them some dignity. We owe it to the victims and to those who were abused as wee children to see this through fully, properly and without delay.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kieran O'Donnell): I sincerely thank the Members of the House for their heartfelt contributions this evening and the specific points raised.

Today, the House has reflected on the scoping exercise in response to requests from Dignity4Patients on behalf of the victims and survivors of Michael Shine. As we close, I want to bring us back to the heart of why this process matters. It is because it affects the lives of the people who have been so deeply shaped by the events and systems we are now examining. The survivors and victims who came forward through Dignity4Patients have shown immense courage. Everyone here today has remarked on that courage. The victims have carried trauma and pain for a very long time, and it takes profound bravery to revisit the experience of harm and violation in order to help to shape a system that is safer for others. Deputy Nash referred to people coming forward initially. That must have been very traumatic and required great bravery, not to mind revisiting the trauma now.

The appointment of Mr. Lorcan Staines SC, and the trauma-informed, victim-centred approach underpinning the scoping exercise, represent the commitment of the Government, including the Minister for Health, to ensuring victims and survivors are heard and treated with dignity, respect and care at every step. Their well-being is the foundation upon which this work is built. The Minister, Deputy Carroll MacNeill, had to attend the Cabinet meeting and has already referred to that. However, her officials are present today and she will be looking at all the contributions made in this debate.

This scoping exercise is essential for enabling those impacted to contribute to shaping any future response. Its purpose to recognise harm, analyse failures and strengthen our system to ensure that it is safe, effective and compassionate enough to prevent such failures from happening again. It is important to emphasise that this scoping exercise will be substantive with a focus on rigour and direct engagement with the lived experience of victims and survivors of Michael Shine.

To the families, victims and survivors listening today, I say that their great courage and advocacy have shaped the scoping exercise and their voices will continue to guide what happens next. This process is intentionally designed so that the independent facilitator, Mr. Lorcan Staines SC, is tasked with finalising the terms of reference for the scoping exercise in direct consultation with Dignity4Patients. Mr. Staines will have the resources and the full

support from Government he requires to assess the full situation and provide a meaningful bespoke approach and response capable of addressing decades-long traumas. We thank Mr. Staines for his work on this scoping exercise, which is over halfway through the 16-week period, and look forward receiving his final report.

We particularly thank Dignity4Patients for its sincere and meaningful engagement with Mr. Staines to finalise the terms of reference and for its continued support to the victims and survivors. Mr. Staines will carry out his role as the independent facilitator through direct engagement with victims and survivors of Michael Shine. The lived experience and voices of victims and survivors are at the centre of this scoping exercise and will shape this work.

We particularly thank victims and survivors for engaging with Mr. Staines and for their incredible courage and commitment to this process. We appreciate that participating in the process like this must be exceptionally difficult for them and their families but their lived experience is essential to shaping a bespoke approach that will lead to real and lasting change. Mr. Staines is approaching his work with care, independence and respect and with the engagement of victims and survivors, this scoping exercise will deliver the understanding, accountability and improvements that victims and survivors, their families and the public deserve. We have a responsibility to those impacted to make sure this work is careful, caring, comprehensive and considerate. It must result in real change and improvements.

As the Minister stated earlier in the debate, the final report and recommendations will be submitted to Government to guide and development of an appropriate bespoke response to the issues raised and the needs identified on behalf of the victims and survivors of Michael Shine. Many speakers made reference to various aspects, which the Minister is taking under very careful consideration. We have listened carefully to everything raised in this House today regarding the victims and survivors of Michael Shine. I want to thank all Members for their continued engagement on this very important matter and echo whatever everyone has said, namely, that this is a partnership with Dignity4Patients and, more particularly, the people it represents - the victims and survivors of Michael Shine.

Dublin City Flat Complex Retrofit and Regeneration: Motion [Private Members]

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I move:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

- Dublin City Council (DCC) has 6,000 flats across 100 complexes built from the 1930s to the 1960s;
- due to poor maintenance by the Council, and underfunding by central government, living conditions in these flat complexes are amongst the worst in the city;
- these sub-standard conditions have a significant impact on community cohesion and the well-being of residents, in particular, young people;

— damp, mould, rodent infestation, chronic overcrowding and inadequate sports and community facilities, continue to blight the hard-working communities who live in these flat complexes;

— in 2017, following a collective complaint to the European Committee of Social Rights at the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, by the residents of many of these flat complexes, the Irish Government was found to be in breach of Article 16 of the European Social Charter (Revised), which protects the right of the family to social, legal and economic protection, including the provision of adequate family housing;

— despite valiant campaigning by residents, supported by the Community Action Network and the Communities of Practice, the conditions in these flat complexes have continued to deteriorate;

— in 2023, DCC undertook a comprehensive engagement with communities in flat complexes, and produced a plan for the deep retrofit and regeneration of these flat complexes, to bring their homes in line with contemporary standards;

— this plan is based on successful estate retrofit and regeneration, such as Killarney Court and the pilot project in Ballybough Court;

— the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, is refusing to fund the initial proposals for the retrofit and regeneration of these complexes in Pearse House and Oliver Bond House, on the spurious grounds that it would lead to a reduction in the number of homes in each complex;

— this decision is now fatally undermining years of community consultation, and further delaying the bringing of these flat complexes up to legally required standards for rental accommodation; and

— Dublin City Councillors from Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Labour Party, the Green Party and some Independents voted for the recent Council Budget, which included significant rent increases for Council tenants, including those living in sub-standard accommodation in the inner-city flat complexes; and

calls on the Government to:

— reverse its current position of refusing to fund DCCs proposed retrofit and regeneration on the inner-city flat complexes;

— put the views and needs of our strong and vibrant long-standing inner-city communities at the centre of all policy and funding decisions related to the retrofit and regeneration of the flat complexes; and

— provide DCC with a dedicated team of staff, headed by a senior assistant director of service, with a comprehensive budget, to drive an accelerated programme of flat complex retrofit and regeneration.

The flat communities of Dublin's inner city are not a problem to be managed. They are communities to be respected - communities built on resilience, solidarity and enormous pride. Let us tell the truth here this evening. For decades, these communities have been failed with families forced to live with damp, mould, chronic overcrowding and rodent infestations -

conditions no Minister in this Government would tolerate for a single week or day. Yet these families have endured this for years because successive Governments lacked urgency and, more importantly, lacked respect. We are talking about the people of Ballybough, St. Michan's, Oliver Bond House and Pearse House. Across Dublin's inner city, these communities fought to be heard and after years of campaigning and engagement, finally there was a pathway forward. A regeneration plan was developed with residents and not imposed on them. We know that this is the approach that can work because we have already seen it in action. In Killarney Court in my constituency, regeneration transformed living conditions for residents and families while the pilot project in Ballybough Court shows what is possible when communities are listened to and properly supported so nobody in government can claim that this cannot be done.

The problem is not the communities. The problem is the lack of political will and now the Government has pulled the plug. The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage has refused to fund the regeneration of Oliver Bond House and Pearse House because some flats would be amalgamated to meet modern living standards. That is an absurdity. Families are now living in overcrowded flats and parents are trying to raise families in conditions utterly unfit for modern life and the Minister's response is that the homes are too small to regenerate or that families should be forced to remain in inadequately small accommodation. This is bureaucratic cruelty masquerading as policy and is absolutely indefensible. The message it sends to working class communities is devastating which is that after all the consultation, promises and engagement, this Government is still not prepared to treat these communities equally.

These are not abstract policy debates for us in Dublin Central. These communities are our neighbours. They are our communities. They are the people we represent. These communities are tired of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Ministers turning up occasionally for photographs and then disappearing when decisions have to be made. They are especially tired of being asked to pay more rent for sub-standard homes. Let us remember that Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Labour and the Green Party all supported rent increases for council tenants while these same tenants continue to live in deplorable conditions. Families are paying higher rents while mould climbs their walls, overcrowding worsens and regeneration is delayed yet again. The people of Dublin's inner city deserve so much better than this.

Let me say clearly that regeneration must never become code for displacement. Residents must remain central to every decision and communities must remain intact. Families must be guaranteed the right to remain with their communities, so really our motion is straightforward. The Government must reverse this disgraceful decision, fund the regeneration plans, provide Dublin City Council with the resources and the staffing necessary to accelerate this work and, most importantly, start treating the people of Dublin's flat complexes with the dignity, urgency and respect that they rightfully deserve because the people of the inner city have waited long enough - far too long - and they should not have to spend yet another decade fighting for what every family in this State should already have, namely, a safe, warm and decent home.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: For decades, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have neglected Dublin city's and county's flat communities. I am talking about inner-city flat complexes like Pearse House, Oliver Bond House, St. Michan's House and Dolphin House but also suburban schemes like Cromcastle Court in Coolock and Balgaddy in my constituency. These are strong, vibrant and

resilient communities that have been utterly failed by successive Governments. So bad were the failures that in 2014, residents from 20 council housing estates supported by the Community Action Network and others took the Irish Government to the European Committee of Social Rights.

After listening to all the evidence and hearing the weasel words of Government, that committee found the Government and State were in breach of Article 16. It was failing to protect the rights of families to social, legal and economic protection, including the right to provision of adequate family housing by the State.

That decision in 2017 finally meant Dublin City Council started to take action, with a report in 2018 and another report in 2020. In 2021, intensive negotiations began, led by residents of these communities and Dublin City Council. Over three years of enormous effort, a regeneration and deep retrofit plan was agreed. What did Government do then? In 2025, the first application for the retrofit of Pearse House was rejected on the grounds that it would see a reduction of units because you had to amalgamate homes to meet legally required minimum standards.

Then, yesterday, the second application for Oliver Bond Street flats was also rejected by a Minister who clearly does not understand the realities in these communities. I want to make it clear the false economy the Government is imposing on these communities. It is saying you cannot reduce the number of units to meet legally required minimum standards, so you have to retrofit the units as they are. However, fewer people will be allowed to live in them. That makes absolutely no sense whatsoever. In fact, this is going to lead to even greater delay.

When Pearse House was knocked back last April, it took until March of this year for a revised proposal to be accepted. From my own conversations with Dublin City Council, it is not clear at all that it will be able to proceed fully with the regeneration of these estates, based on the policy of the Department. What is also without doubt is that the letter from Government to Dublin City Council yesterday was deeply dishonest. It said the reason the Department cannot accept it is that there is a 38% reduction in the number of homes. However, it fails to mention is that in the Dublin City Council plan, which I have here, in order to deal with the fact there would be a reduction of units when you amalgamated two flats into one or three into two, Dublin City Council identified a brand new vacant site opposite Oliver Bond House where it would deliver an additional 43 homes. The scheme has a net gain of 15 homes, and the Minister of State's Government is saying "No" to the people of Oliver Bond House. It is utterly disgraceful.

What needs to happen? The Government needs to accept it has got this wrong. It is adding insult to injury to the hardworking, rent-paying tenants in these communities. It needs to reverse its policy decision of opposing amalgamation. It needs to fully fund the adequate regeneration of these estates, and it needs to do it at a more accelerated pace than was originally agreed. What will that take? A dedicated team of staff in Dublin City Council, led by a senior official at assistant director of service grade, and a proper multimillion euro budget provided annually to deal with these issues.

I had the very good fortune of being at an event earlier last year in which Gayle Cullen, one of the leading figures in Oliver Bond House, was discussing their experience of regeneration. That was before that community received the devastating news yesterday. What she said at the

end of her presentation was that as a community, they were worn out, tired, fed up and living in or beside derelict blocks in awful conditions, and that it was no wonder residents did not back regeneration boards. Speaking to Gayle today, she said the news yesterday was like a death in the community.

This is on this Government, and I hope we hear at some point today from Deputy Browne, the Minister who has taken the decision to refuse the funding and who is forcing these communities to continue to live in illegal, substandard accommodation. These conditions have to be reversed, the funding has to be provided and the communities in the Public Gallery today need to have the rights of everybody else to live in safe, secure and adequate homes.

Deputy Mark Ward: I thank my constituency colleague, Deputy Ó Broin, for bringing forward this motion here today. The issue of regeneration of inner city flat complexes is not new. I was actually in Henrietta House today, canvassing on behalf of Janice Boylan for the upcoming by-election, and you could not meet a nicer bunch of residents. One woman I was speaking to asked me to come in here to give the Government hell for the conditions she has been left in. She also asked me to say "Up the flats", so I am saying "Up the flats" on her behalf. That is for you, Dee.

Dee, and residents like her, do not deserve to be left behind by this Government. My mother originally lived in Dolphin's Barn and my father lived in Keogh Square in Inchicore. They talk about the living conditions back in the 1960s but things have not improved. Dublin City Council has 100 flat complexes built right across the city, which were built between the 1930s and 1960s. Years of poor maintenance by the council, compounded by under-funding by central government, has created a situation where living conditions in these flat complexes are some of the worst you will see anywhere else, never mind in the city. We have seen countless reports of damp, mould, rodent infestation and chronic overcrowding in the flats. There are not enough sport facilities and community facilities, and this is so unfair for hardworking communities who have to live in these flat complexes, like the people I met in Henrietta House today.

Do you know what is even more absurd than having to live in these horrific conditions? It is being asked to pay more to live in them. Councillors from Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Labour Party, the Green Party and some Independents inexcusably voted to increase rents on these hard-pressed families. You could not make it up. The message from these councillors is, "We are going to leave you in squalor but we are going to ask you to pay more for the privilege."

Deputy Máire Devine: Yes.

Deputy Mark Ward: This is not good enough.

This motion we are talking about today calls on Government to fund Dublin City Council's proposed retrofit and regeneration in inner-city flat complexes and to put the views and the needs of the strong, vibrant, long-standing inner city communities at the centre of this policy, like the people we see here in the Public Gallery. They need to be at the heart of this conversation. I genuinely do not think this is too much for people to ask for after decades of neglect.

As Deputy Ó Broin said, the European Committee of Social Rights concluded the Irish Government was found to be in breach of Article 16 of the European Social Charter, which protects the rights of the family to social, legal and economic protection, including the provision of adequate family housing. Balgaddy in my area was part of this ruling. Méile an Rí, Tor an Rí, Buirg an Rí and parts of Foxdene Avenue were built almost 20 years ago. Since they were built, there has been constant problems with damp, mould and leaks. I have witnessed water literally running down people's walls.

South Dublin County Council has said it is committed to dealing with the housing maintenance issues in Balgaddy, and I acknowledge there has been some progress. However, residents will tell me it is simply not enough. They continue to live in unacceptable conditions, and like the flat complexes in the inner city, residents of Balgaddy are having to pay more to live in these substandard conditions.

Sinn Féin Councillor William Carey has done Trojan work in trying to get South Dublin County Council to review the rent increases. However - here we go again with the same names - this was voted down again by Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Labour Party and some Independents. Because of them, the people in Balgaddy will have to pay more rent while having to live in these substandard conditions.

A working group was set up in Balgaddy but they are working in a vacuum. Elected representatives are not on this working group nor are residents. I have called for this process to be changed so that people in Balgaddy can have their voices heard. Some of the nicest people, my best friends and the best people in my area come from Balgaddy, and it is absolutely heartbreaking to see them being left behind and having to pay more to live in these horrendous situations.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I commend the residents, especially those here today, and all those who have to live in these unfit conditions. All of a sudden, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour has decided that there is an increase in their rent. If it is unfit, there should be no increase. In fact, there should be no rent for the conditions some of these tenants are living in, pure and simple.

The council has been informed for many years of the unfit conditions, and that includes, for a long time, sewage coming up through the baths in some of the flat complexes. That is how bad it is and how bad has been, yet we have a Government that is willing to put on hold any chance of regeneration in Oliver Bond Street.

I have sat on the Dolphin House regeneration board for many years. In that instance, they keep telling lies, coming up with new dates and then turning them upside down, and it does not happen. I have documents and questions here where we have been continuously told that phase 1B of Dolphin House will proceed. It was supposed to be finished by the end of this year; it is now 2029.

Let us look at how disgraceful the Government amendment is. Most people do not normally look at it because they know it is a negative. The Government parties are crowing and saying how great they are at delivering social housing regeneration. They picked out Dolphin House and said that they completed it in 2018. They did not complete phase 1 in 2018; they are still working on it. That is how badly the work was done. It is not complete. There is still no

movement on phase 1B. We are still waiting on it. Where are phases 2, 3, or 4? Nobody knows. The last we heard was 2035. That is supposed to have started 20 years ago. All of the deadlines set by the council or the Government have never been met because they do not involve them living in it, pure and simple.

Deputy Máire Devine: Hear, hear.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: They would not live in the conditions they are asking residents in my constituency to live in, whether it is Oliver Bond House, Emmet Buildings or Basin Street. There are quite a lot more, including Bernard Curtis House, Dolphin House and Seagull House. In some places, they have pulled them down. People might remember the Emmet estate, or the old St. Michael's Estate. How long has that been waiting for the building? They are only on-site, yet the buildings were pulled down many years ago. That is scandalous.

It is strange that the Labour Party even bothered trying to amend our motion because it tried to take out the criticism we had of the party increasing the rent. Shame on it for that.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Hear, hear.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: It should acknowledge that it has increased the rent in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis. It should also acknowledge the increase in rent is for substandard accommodation, pure and simple. These flats are substandard and people know it. They are not fit, in some cases, for human habitation. I have had many cases over the years where residents have come to me about the level of mould and damp, with water running down their walls, not the windows but their walls, and into sockets, making it dangerous to live in. The floor gets saturated and the furniture they have starts to warp and attract mould and damp. The Minister of State would not expect to live in that, yet the State expects people to live in those conditions.

It needs to end now. The Government needs to reverse the decision taken on Oliver Bond House and not just that. It needs to accelerate all of the other ones. The communities have spent time and effort and have had consultation after consultation, yet they are getting knocked back. Communities will not continue to engage in those consultations. Is that what the Minister of State wants? Does he want to break the communities and separate them around the city, as has happened in the past, because of the delays? Blocks are detenanted, people are moved out of the community and they are no longer part of it. They are elsewhere. Is that the intention? Then, all of a sudden, the Government has a greenfield site it can build public-private apartments on. That is the wrong approach.

These communities are proud. They are the best people in the world, yet we have allowed them to continue to live in unfit accommodation with all of the other pressures these communities are under. We all know about the antisocial and criminal behaviour of people selling drugs in many of these complexes. That needs to end, and it needs to end now.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
(Deputy John Cummins):** I move:

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

"notes that:

- the Programme for Government commits to continue and accelerate Social Housing regeneration schemes in Dublin, and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage continues and commits to support regeneration projects submitted by Dublin City Council (DCC) that do not result in any significant loss of homes;
- the Government's objective is to maximise the quality and availability of homes within the established inner-city flat complexes, and to ensure that they are to an acceptable standard;
- DCC, through funding from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, are focused on eradicating any sub-standard conditions that have arisen in aging flat complexes, and this directly addresses the issues raised in the collective complaint to the European Committee of Social Rights at the Council of Europe, Strasbourg;
- the Government is fully committed to working with DCC to ensure that all plans to regenerate all such flats, through either deep-retrofit or demolition and re-build, comes to fruition;
- the Government has shown its commitment through National Development Plan funding of €20 billion for housing, which includes support for Dublin City regeneration;
- a number of funding channels are available to local authorities to support regeneration projects, including the Social Housing Investment Programme, the Affordable Housing Fund, the Capital Advance Leasing Facility, the Cost Rental Equity Loan, and through the Regeneration and Refurbishment Programme;
- an unprecedented level of funding is available to local authorities through these schemes, totalling over €3.4 billion in 2026;
- local authorities are supported by almost €260 million per annum for the management and maintenance of local authority housing stock, through the Planned Maintenance/Voids Programme (€40 million), Energy Efficiency Retrofit Programme (€140 million), Housing Adaptation Grant for Disabled People (€28.5 million), and the Regeneration and Refurbishment Programme (€50 million);
- the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, has recently approved funding of €13.8 million for the deep retrofitting of 78 flats across four blocks at Pearse House;
- the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage are working with DCC on a proposal for retrofitting the flats at Oliver Bond House, that will not result in a significant loss of housing, but will result in all homes being upgraded to modern standards;

- the Minister and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage will continue to support such retrofitting of these aging flats to bring them in-line with modern standards, and previous delivery of projects, such as the successful estate retrofit and regeneration or demolition and re-build of Killarney Court, Dolphin House Phase 1 and O'Devaney Gardens, shows that a pathway exists for successful delivery of inner-city regeneration to the satisfaction of all stakeholders, and the Government, and the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, are fully committed to continue this work;
- the Government continues to recognise and support the needs of our strong and vibrant longstanding inner city communities, and recognises the value of their input and valuable lived experience to the planned regeneration of inner-city flat complexes, and this work is continuing throughout DCC, and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage is happy to assess each proposal that is submitted by DCC; and
- the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage works closely with the local government sector to ensure that delivery teams are fully resourced, and continues to do so, and are awaiting a report from a County and City Management Association working group on local authority social and affordable housing resources, and the Chief Executive of DCC has ultimate operational responsibility for the organisational structure of DCC, including additional staff requirements."

I thank the Deputies opposite for tabling the motion, which relates to flat complex retrofit regeneration in Dublin city. While the Government cannot support the motion, I welcome the opportunity to set out its clear and robust position on the issues the motion raises and to table a counter-motion.

Within the programme for Government 2025, Securing Ireland's Future, a commitment was specifically made to continue to accelerate social housing regeneration schemes across Dublin. In our housing plan, Delivering Homes, Building Communities, the Government commits to a social housing regeneration and remedial works programme for ageing flat complexes and estates nationwide. Social housing is absolutely a central priority for this Government, with 72,000 units planned under our housing action plan to the end of 2030. It is a fact that we are delivering the largest investment in social housing in the history of the State. That investment is being directed specially towards delivery of new social homes, the regeneration of older complexes and the refurbishment and maintenance of existing stock. This is a sustained, multi-annual commitment, not a short-term response.

Regeneration is actively happening across Dublin city.

Deputy Máire Devine: That is rubbish.

Deputy John Cummins: Large-scale redevelopment projects are progressing, transforming communities-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Rubbish.

Deputy John Cummins: -----and improving living conditions for residents. The Department of housing is fully supportive-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Has the Minister of State been in any of these complexes?

Deputy John Cummins: -----of regeneration proposals submitted by Dublin City Council, which do not result in any significant loss of homes-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Come and visit them.

Deputy John Cummins: -----or when loss of homes cannot be avoided, such decisions are fully justified. Furthermore, over €230 million per annum of Exchequer funding is being provided to local authorities under the planned maintenance and voids programmes, the energy retrofit programme and the regeneration and refurbishment programme, all of which are proving vital in the refurbishment and maintenance of local authority stock nationwide.

Contrary to what the Opposition is saying, the Government does not accept there is an issue of underfunding. Local authorities generate significant-----

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: The Government refused Dublin City Council the funding for Oliver Bond House yesterday.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Ó Broin.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: That is the reality.

Deputy John Cummins: A Leas Cheann-Comhairle-----

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: He is talking down the clock and ignoring the issue.

Deputy John Cummins: -----I can respond to the motion that is before us if the Deputies want to give me the respect I gave them in the Chamber.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: How about some respect for the residents who are being forced to live in Third World conditions because of the Government's refusal?

Deputy John Cummins: If the Deputy wants me to respond to the motion, I will but-----

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I would really like the Minister of State to.

Deputy John Cummins: -----but if he does not want to hear what I have to say-----

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: The Minister of State should direct his remarks to the people in the Gallery.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Deal with the issue. Do not talk down the clock.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Ó Broin.

Deputy John Cummins: Am I allowed to respond?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: As far as I am concerned.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: We would welcome it.

Deputy John Cummins: I would appreciate the same respect that I accord the Deputy in this Chamber all of the time.

Deputy Mark Ward: While sitting on his phone.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Respect is earned.

Deputy John Cummins: I do not shout across the Deputy. I listened to him; I would appreciate if he could give me the same respect.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: It is the residents we want the Minister of State to listen to, not us.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Go ahead.

Deputy John Cummins: Thank you, a Leas Cheann-Comhairle. As I was saying before I was rudely interrupted by the other side of the House, local authorities do generate significant rental income that should supplement central government funding in the area of maintenance because nobody in this Government wants to see anybody living in substandard accommodation.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Apparently the Government does.

Deputy John Cummins: Dublin City Council is working closely with the Department to determine the best solution for each complex, be that demolition and rebuild resulting in mixed-tenure communities or, where appropriate, deep retrofit and remedial works. Mention has been made of local authority staffing and while it should be noted that the operational responsibility for staff lies with Dublin City Council and the chief executive, I assure the Chamber that my Department will consider all staffing requests that can add value to the delivery of housing in the city and across the country.

With funding from my Department, Dublin City Council is delivering significant regeneration in Dublin city and we are supporting the council's ambitious pipeline of regeneration projects. Significant work is ongoing within the council's portfolio of regeneration projects as a direct result of extensive supports the Government is providing.

Large-scale, mixed-tenure redevelopments are beginning to bear fruit, transforming their respective communities and delivering housing at scale. The Donore project at the former St. Teresa's Gardens flat complex, as well as the Montpelier development at the former O'Devaney Gardens-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: How long did that take?

Deputy John Cummins: -----are both currently on-site. Construction has recently begun at An Droichead Órga in Inchicore, at the former St. Michael's estate next to the historic Richmond Barracks.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Twenty years after.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: How long did that take?

Deputy John Cummins: These three regeneration projects will revitalise their communities and deliver over 2,000 mixed-tenure homes, including cost-rental, affordable purchase and social housing once all phases are completed, with the support of Exchequer funding of over €460 million. This is clear evidence of the significant investment that Government is making-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Minister of State needs to come and visit the flats because he is speaking from a position of absolute ignorance.

Deputy John Cummins: -----in the regeneration of Dublin city, which is in stark contrast to the motion before us.

The Department has funded Dublin City Council to the tune of €120 million for social housing regeneration projects completed in recent years, refurbishing or rebuilding 345 homes, including 72 homes at Dominick Street east-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: How long did Dominick Street take? A generation.

Deputy John Cummins: -----100 homes as part of Dolphin House phase 1, and 32 homes for older persons at Glin Court in Coolock.

The Department is funding eight projects currently on-site, delivering almost 1,000 homes at a total investment cost of €490 million. Additionally, Dublin City Council has a strong pipeline of regeneration projects that are currently at implementation phase, with building contractors on-site and construction progressing rapidly. These include 163 homes at Dorset Street, St. Mary's, Dublin 1, 102 homes at St. Anne's Court, Dublin 5 and 46 homes at Constitution Hill, phase 1, Dublin 7. The Department has also provided funding approval for regeneration projects in Dublin city, where DCC is working on the design, including Pearse House, Dublin 2, Dolphin House 1B, School Street, Dublin 8, Constitution Hill phase 2, Dublin 7, as well as Glover's Court, Dublin 2. In addition, the Government is supporting the Land Development Agency in its objective to deliver social and affordable homes at scale, and it is partnering with

Dublin City Council to deliver significant schemes at Donore Avenue at the former St. Theresa's Gardens flat complex, Bluebell Waterways, Dublin 12 and Cherry Orchard. The LDA has also engaged with Dublin City Council in planning for significant social and cost rental delivery at Dolphin House flat complex.

In relation to Pearse House and the Oliver Bond Street flat complexes, this Government recognises the need and potential difficulties of regeneration in fully tenanted, ageing buildings. As I have said, we do not want to see anybody living in substandard accommodation.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Government parties do. They are in the Gallery here. This is deeply frustrating. This is doolally stuff, with no bearing on how decent people are currently living, on the Minister of State's watch.

Deputy John Cummins: A Leas-Cheann Comhairle, I always address through the Chair.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: No, the Minister of State do not.

Deputy Máire Devine: He is very good.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: The best boy in the class.

Deputy John Cummins: I would appreciate some extra time because I might not get finished as a result of the interruptions, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: The Minister of State might actually address the question in front of us.

Deputy John Cummins: To that end, and recognising the efforts of Dublin City Council to create an agreeable and sustainable plan, funding of €13 million for the retrofit and deep refurbishment of four blocks at Pearse House has recently been approved by my Department. This follows an initial rejection of an amalgamation proposal from DCC, which would have resulted in the loss of 43% of existing homes at a very high cost. The Department is currently working with the Council to find an equally appropriate solution for the Oliver Bond House flat complex. This remains a priority regeneration project for Dublin City Council and for the Department. A recent funding submission received from the council for blocks L, M and N included a reduction of existing homes from 74 to 46, a 38% decrease in existing homes. That loss of 28 homes was not acceptable, given the current shortage of homes. A more appropriate response to this issue has been suggested by my Department, whereby flats that are currently configured as two-bedroom flats, with floor spaces of 48 sq. m should be converted into one-bedroom, two-person flats that would satisfy the minimum floor area standards for apartments. Coupled with this, Dublin City Council is proposing to develop an adjacent site at Bridgefoot Street in which larger families from the Oliver Bond Street complex could be accommodated, thus maintaining an appropriate mix of household types and sizes within the complex. The clear focus of Government is on driving delivery and increasing the number of homes available for use by all individuals and families. Additional supply is the only long-term sustainable solution to our current housing challenges.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Minister of State is joking.

Deputy John Cummins: The Department is acutely aware that regeneration programmes cannot succeed without the input from local communities. That is why Dublin City Council continues to seek input from existing communities in flat complexes at each stage of the regeneration process.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Which the Government then ignores. The Government then ignores and throws it in the bin.

Deputy John Cummins: Their input is valued and all projects are advanced with the objective of improving the living conditions of these long-term established communities.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: That is them. That is a good one.

Deputy John Cummins: I have a couple more concluding comments and would appreciate some latitude, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle, because I was interrupted several times.

We are aware of the collective complaint that was made to the European Committee of Social Rights in Strasbourg in 2017. It is for that very reason that Dublin City Council has been working on plans to regenerate all such flats through either deep retrofit or demolition and rebuild. The unparalleled funding available to local authorities through delivering homes and building communities will continue to be a key focus of this Government because both the Minister and I want to ensure that these flat complexes and other regeneration projects across the country are delivered.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Oh, my God.

Deputy Máire Devine: A Leas-Cheann Comhairle, the Minister of State is way over and he has not answered anything.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: That is a disgraceful response. Have he visited them?

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: This is Orwellian.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Minister of State is welcome to come to my constituency and visit to see how people are living.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Labour Party amendment cannot be moved until the Minister of State's amendment has been disposed of. We will continue with Sinn Féin.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: The absolute neck of the Minister of State reading out that diatribe. He should have addressed his remarks to the people in the Gallery but he would be ashamed. He could not even look them in the face. My God, this makes me so angry. He is dragging

people back to tenements. My mam and dad were born in tenement housing in the city centre in Dublin and they left, they moved to the suburbs so that they could make a better life for themselves and the slums were cleared. That is not good enough for Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. They want to bring the slums back to Dublin city. Shame on the Minister of State, shame on him. Nothing that he read out in his script will give comfort to any person up in that Gallery that he is listening, that he understands, that he gives - I am not even going to say it because I am better than that.

I want to talk very briefly about a lady who commented on a Dublin Live article on the conditions that she is living in. She is five months pregnant. Her home is overcrowded and no matter what she does, she cannot win the fight with the mould. She cannot buy anything for her baby because she knows that by the time the child is born, the stuff is going to be covered in mould. Imagine that when you are planning to bring a lovely newborn baby back to your place. Imagine that you cannot buy anything, not a Babygro, not a Moses basket, nothing for the child, because you know by the time the child comes home, by the time you bring your little baby home to your overcrowded, draughty, damp flat, the stuff is going to be covered in mould. She lies in bed every night, five months pregnant, terrified because of what she is breathing in, and worries that it is going to harm her and her baby. Imagine how she feels when the Lord Mayor of Dublin votes to jack up her rent five minutes before he hops on a plane to head off to California. She is trying to wipe the mould off the walls and she is listening to him tell her she has to pay more rent, that she cannot move, she must endure those conditions, and that this is the place she is going to have to bring her baby home to. Imagine listening to that, five minutes before he hopped on a plane and headed off on a first-class flight to California.

The people in the flats are house-proud. If the Minister of State visited the flats, he would see that. He has been invited by Deputy McDonald to go to her constituency and see the conditions. He is their landlord. There are plenty of private landlords sitting on the Government benches but he is their landlord. If this was private renting, the landlord would not get away with it. It is getting away with it because it is the Government and it should be ashamed of itself.

Deputy Máire Devine: Céad míle fáilte to all the residents up there. I want to give a shout out to the flat complexes of Meath Place, Dolphin House, Tyrone Place, Braithewaite Street and Seagull House in my constituency alone. Unfortunately the residents of Oliver Bond House, who planned to attend, cannot be here, as has been mentioned. These residents are devastated by dealing with yet more Government ineptitude but they are ready for the fight ahead. All these guys in the Gallery have fought all their lives and they are not going to give up now. Some 120 years ago, Dublin had the worst slums in Europe in which 30% of the city's population resided. Slums were described as unfit for human habitation. These conditions bred illness and premature death. It was called the consumption at the time. Even the Brits were forced to acknowledge this was unacceptable and undertook the construction of estates for public health and to clear some of the slums.

In 1917, Sinn Féin alderman Thomas Kelly chaired the Dublin Corporation housing committee and kicked against funding delays, a mirror image of the failings of today's Government and the Minister. Residents of Dolphin House had to bring their case to Europe due to sewage, damp, rodent infestations and mould. There has been no meaningful maintenance of inner city flat complexes. DCC has been bled dry of expertise and decimated

due to the Government decisions and funding cuts over the past 20 years. The Minister of State should know this well. He has continued these practices and policies that perpetrate Dickensian conditions. The damaging criminality, antisocial behaviour and drug dealing are picking off our youth in these complexes. Some of the well-heeled are aghast that these young people seemingly do not respect their areas but why should they when the Government does not lead by example? The social cost to communities the Government is tearing asunder and neglecting is immeasurable. The Government's counter-motion cites the successful rebuild of phase 1 of Dolphin House. What a joke - more jokes than a cracker factory. Entire rows need to be redone. If the Government considers this a success I would hate to its failures. The Labour Party's amendment decries the recent rent increases in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis, yet Labour Party councillors voted in favour of these hikes along with the Green Party. Apparently the Labour Party not only has buyer's remorse; it is also having by-election remorse. The Minister of State should be ashamed of himself - absolutely morto for you - at the irreparable damage he is wreaking upon the working classes of our city and the inner city that is their place and their home. Respect is a two-way street. Please stand up and respect these guys in the Gallery.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Dublin's inner city like other areas of the city, including my constituency, Dublin North West, has long faced challenges related to social inclusion, economic disparity and the consequences of many years of ageing infrastructure and buildings coinciding with a lack of proper maintenance of such structures or adequate financial investment in the areas. In the past there were efforts to revitalise local communities, improve the quality of life of residents and stimulate economic development. The Ballymun regeneration project is one such effort as is the more recent project in O'Devaney Gardens and the redevelopment of St. Mary's Mansions in the north inner city. Regeneration is not only about renovating or building new houses or apartments; it is also about providing proper community facilities and services. It is important that such redevelopments and regeneration projects ensure community-led decision-making by actively involving local residents and other stakeholders in the planning and decision-making process. A recent report from Eurostat shows Ireland has the highest household electricity prices in the European Union. DCC currently maintains an ageing housing stock with over 50% of its properties built between 1930 and 1977. A big problem with the council's retrofitting works programme is that it stops in October and does not resume until April, which leaves a huge gap in knowing what works are required for the following year and contractors left without confirmation of future contracts. There is also an inefficiency in how it works. Where a terrace of houses gets wraparounds, a single house in the middle does not because it is privately owned. Dublin City Council's new differential rent scheme is supposed to augment its maintenance budget and has increased rents for almost all of the city's 68,000 council tenants. It disproportionately impacts social housing tenants already struggling with the cost of living and has placed the burden of funding DCC's maintenance programme on the shoulders of its most vulnerable tenants. Additionally, Dublin City Council manages a significant number of vacant social housing units or voids awaiting refitting or refurbishment. Government assistance is inadequate for such works as the cost of refitting a unit is approximately €40,000 but the Government provides around €10,000 for each unit averaging out from its contribution. DCC has to make up the shortfall. It is outrageous that so many of these regeneration schemes face delays and roadblocks because the Government is blocking the funding necessary for projects such as Pearse House regeneration and

the Moore Street redevelopment. Today we heard the regeneration of Dublin's Oliver Bond Street complex is to be scrapped. These regeneration projects need to be fully funded and any roadblocks to progress lifted. The neglect of our communities needs to end.

Deputy Marie Sherlock: I apologise that I could not be here earlier. We were dealing with the ambulance strike due to take place next Tuesday so I missed the earlier contributions. I do not know who wrote the Government's countermotion this morning but the people sitting around the Cabinet table who signed off on it this afternoon and the person who wrote this have their heads in the clouds. Everything in the Government's countermotion suggest an aloof and, worse, an indifference or callousness towards the appalling conditions in which far too many council tenants in this city find themselves living. Of course, there has been progress - none of us is denying that - particularly in the north-west inner city in recent years in Constitution Hill, Dorset Street, and O'Devaney Gardens. That is all welcome but the context is that there are 211 flat complexes across the Dublin City Council area and just 12 are either undergoing major regeneration or subject to some sort of plan. There is a hell of a lot to be done. I am in no way hearing from Government that it gets the depth of the problem with the flat complexes in our capital city or has any idea of the impact of its short-sightedness, particularly when we see the stalemate between it and DCC on Oliver Bond Street flats. The news that emerged today regarding those flats is disgraceful. We have listened for many weeks to the Taoiseach talking about how local authorities are well-resourced, lots of money going into the housing budget for local authorities and money having to be carefully spent.

Hundreds of thousands of euro have been spent trying to get the plans for the Oliver Bond Street complex to where they are, yet the Department has been blindsided by the desire for volume, which we all share, but cannot see the short-term and long-term costs to families continuing to live in squalor in the flats. It is condemning those people to all the social and health costs that with it. We know from research conducted by the Robert Emmet Community Development Project and Trinity College that children in the Oliver Bond Street flats are 2.4 times more likely to have asthma relative to the general population. There is still not a huge volume of evidence relating to the causation but the correlation is enormous. We have to draw an inference that suggests people's lives and health are badly affected from the people who come to my clinics, in the flats I step into, the babies on inhalers before the age of 18 months, and the children missing school days because of chest and throat infections due to the mould on their walls and around their windows, mildew and fungus growing from their ceilings. Year after year people paint their walls. Who paints their walls every year? The people in the flat complexes in my constituency in Dublin Central do. It is unacceptable and outrageous. They are trying to cover up a problem that will not go away because of construction defects, yet the Government continues to say plenty of money is going into housing. It is not going into flat maintenance or regeneration and it must. The reality is hundreds of flat complexes are old and in need of regeneration but there are also new complexes like Blackhall Place, which is only 30 years old and won awards at the time. It was poorly built and now residents have to deal with issues with drinking water and drainage. I spoke to a lady last Saturday on Poplar Row whose insulation is soaking. That is a result of Dublin City Council dropping the ball and the Government. We talk about fire safety defects and the enormous bill for private apartment complexes but there is also a massive issue with the Government dropping the ball on building standards in flat complexes in this city and beyond.

6 o'clock

A big concern I have in all of this is that there have been so many broken promises to residents in flat complexes over the years from successive Ministers and public representatives in Dublin Central. We were told Croke Villas was due to start in 2019. It is still to happen. Matt Talbot Court is still standing there. It was supposed to be finished in 2022. Gardiner Street flats and Dunne Street flats were supposed to start in 2021. There is still no progress. I know all too often that Dublin City Council and the Government will point to the pandemic. We saw the Mater getting its act together during the pandemic and building much-needed hospital bed space, but when it comes to flat complexes we have seen no progress.

It is important to say that the corrosive impact of the broken promises is not just for the residents but is right across the communities. We are seeing that manifest with the local election results in 2024 and what may happen in our constituency over the coming weeks. This Government has to wake up to the reality that there is a serious crisis when people are living in those sorts of degrading conditions. Deputy Devine mentioned the rent increases. I tell the Minister of State clearly that I am not happy about the rent increases. It is crap that anybody has to pay a rent increase in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis. Dublin City Council executives dropped the ball by not having a rate review for over 30 years, but the Government has also starved Dublin City Council of funding for refurbishment and regeneration. The reality is that the €30 million that is going to be raised by the rent increases is supposed to go into maintenance. We will be doing our damndest to make sure it does, but it is a drop in the ocean in terms of what is needed. There needs to be a honest conversation about the expectations for all the people I am delighted to see in the Gallery today and what they can expect over the coming years.

Let us look at the figures. To try to do decent maintenance across four complexes will cost approximately €70 million. To fully regenerate major complexes will cost hundreds of millions of euro. We have to hear from the Government whether it is willing to stump up those hundreds of millions of euro to fully regenerate those flat complexes in coming years or whether it will merely involve replacement of windows, doors and ventilation, which is important, but does not go far enough in making the lives of people better.

It is not all about money. It is about capacity and resources. In local authorities across this country, we have seen a hollowing-out of staffing over many years. Some local authorities have tried to start apprenticeship programmes in their maintenance departments, but we have far too few. If we are to seriously have a planned maintenance programme across all local authorities we need to see leadership from the Government on this. We need to see direction from the Government to make sure it is direct employment within local authorities so the day-to-day maintenance can be dealt with and the real money can go into the issues of cold walls that need the insulation and broken windows. Far too much of the money at the moment is going into day-to-day stuff. None of it, or far too little, is going into proper maintenance and upkeep of flat complexes that are many years old.

For many years there have been residents and residents' groups fighting tooth and nail on this. I know in my constituency ICON has been to the fore in leading the charge to bring people together in recent years. I pay particular tribute to Belinda Nugent and others working there and looking at this as a systemic issue rather than just going back and forth between maintenance staff in Dublin City Council and individual tenants. The reality is that we have a

systemic crisis. There are far too many children growing up in degrading conditions in our flat complexes. At the very least, for the dignity of families in this country we need to see a change in tone and attitude to funding local authorities from this Government.

Deputy Rory Hearne: Today's motion from Sinn Féin is welcome and we support it. It is timely given what has come out today about the Oliver Bond Street flats, which is absolutely disgraceful. I have been in Oliver Bond Street and have worked with colleagues who have done research and community work in those flats. I worked for many years as a community worker in the Dolphin House flats dealing with issues of mould and damp. One of the big motivations for me to get involved in politics was that people should have the basic necessity of a home, a place where they can rest their head and raise their families, and that does not make them sick and ill. We know in flat complexes across this city and in social housing across this country there are tenants living in homes making them and their children sick. It is wrong. It is a breach of this State's obligations to ensure that not just all housing but social housing in particular, for which the Minister is responsible and landlord of, is not damaging people's health. It is, and we have known about it for years. Ultimately it comes back to the failure to treat housing as a human right, particularly for renters. They have a right to live in housing of a decent standard, whether that is social housing or private rental housing. Many people who own their homes are living in mould and damp as well.

In Ballymun, in my constituency, I have dealt with many people living with similar situations of mould and damp. I have been dealing with one mother in particular. I visited her home two months ago and saw the mould in the child's bedroom. It is absolutely unacceptable that babies are born into, and children growing up in homes with mould in the walls. I put my finger on the windowsill, and it went into it because of the dampness. The Minister of State knows what that does to a child with impacts on asthma and even development. It is unacceptable and this State cannot accept that children and families are left growing up in substandard social housing. On top of that, they are being asked and forced to pay even higher rent. It is absolutely disgraceful and unfair that they are living in homes that are uninhabitable and being asked and forced to pay higher rents for that. There are alternative ways to raise funding. Councils need to be funded properly, but ultimately the Government has to take responsibility. We are jeopardising the lives of our children and families growing up. People in social housing have an absolute right to a decent standard of home, just like anybody else. This and previous Governments have failed social housing tenants in this country, and it is not okay.

My colleagues will be talking about this, particularly in relation to Oliver Bond Street and what is happening there, but also about inner-city flat complexes that have been left derelict. I was involved in a research project recently specifically about Oliver Bond Street and the concept of care. The question that was put over and over again was whether the Irish State cares about people living in social housing. The only conclusion I can draw, and they can draw, is that right now it does not care. However, it should, and it needs to, and we will fight and push until it does and until people have decent homes in this country.

Deputy Gary Gannon: I listened to the Minister of State's contribution earlier. My only hope is that he did not write it himself because I cannot describe it as anything other than obnoxious. It was a gaslighting of communities, some of which I am sure are in the Gallery

this evening and are living in conditions nothing short of inhumane. The response from Government was "carry on" because things are good and it will get there in due course. However, due course has health implications for the people living in those flat complexes. There are respiratory issues and mould on the walls. When I canvas any of the inner-city flat complexes I will inevitably be brought in by a person to see the mould on the walls, to see hinges on doors that do not actually close, and to see windows only barely contained within the structure. Only 17% of flat complexes in this city have experienced any form of upgrade.

The people living in them have been given a double insult.

I will get to the insult in a second, but in addition to what this motion is asking for, all anybody in the flat complexes or those who have the pleasure of representing them are asking for is that this Government lives up to its own commitments. In October 2024, to great fanfare, Simon Harris and lots of other Ministers stood in the GPO and announced a capital-only plan called the Big Move 2. It committed to a "total regeneration of all existing social housing in the city centre [and this is the real kicker] within three to five years". I do not believe a single flat complex has been renovated in that time, but the Minister of State's speech tells us the State will get to it in due course. The Government is going against its own commitments made in the GPO under the heading "Ten Big Moves". I can imagine a person in one of the flat complexes locally, like Greek Street, Henrietta Street, Ballybough House or Dunne Street would have looked at that and said it was great and that maybe within in three to five years they would have habitable conditions in which they could raise their children. What did they get within 12 months of the Government's Big Move? They got rent increases. I cannot imagine anything more cruel than a report commissioned by the State that commits to addressing the absence of any sort of humane conditions in flat complexes and rather than the State doing the job it committed to do, which was to allocate the funding promised, it turned around and raised the rents of people living in conditions not one of us in this Chamber would live in now.

I grew up in Mountain View Court. I spent the first seven years of my life there. I will not romanticise it as there absolutely were issues, but I still see people on the street who say they remember me from the flats. A sense of solidarity, commitment and community exists there, but it exists in the absence of State intervention and of a State willing to say that, as these people's landlord - the overarching truth is that this State is quite literally the landlord - it is going to allow people to live in conditions that are nothing short of the tenement conditions of old. Within these complexes you will find people who keep their flats immaculately. They clean their flats every single day. I am sorry to the Minister of State, but I am talking to him. I am talking to him through the Chair, admittedly, but I would appreciate it if he-----

Deputy John Cummins: I am listening to the Deputy.

Deputy Gary Gannon: -----listened to me about the cry I am getting from flat complexes the length and breadth of this city, which is that the State should just do its job. With Dublin City Council or any other local authority, it is the State that is the overarching landlord of conditions that were found by European courts to be inhumane. The Minister of State cannot tell me we are a rich country when we are a slum landlord. The calls in this motion are minuscule but the demand from the people living in these flat complexes the length and breadth of the city, who we meet every single day, who are hurting and who have that hurt compounded

by increased rents, is simply for the State to do its job, live up to its commitment and stop asking people to live in conditions none of us in this Chamber would live in.

Deputy Jen Cummins: The Minister of State is having a bad time today because what is happening with the Oliver Bond Street complex is an absolute disgrace. I have the letter that was sent by the senior Minister, who really should be here to answer the questions. Well done to Sinn Féin for bringing this forward. Dublin South-Central, which I represent, has a number of regeneration projects that have been going on for what seems like decades. It is quite outstanding that the State could build homes designed by Herbert Simms and all these amazing places and then let them rot, let the people inside them also rot, promise the people it will get the regeneration done and then not do that. The State wasted people's time on the Oliver Bond forum for years. It wasted their valuable time sitting and talking about things only to say, at the last minute and with the stroke of a pen, that the answer is "No"; the computer says "No".

The Taoiseach visited Oliver Bond Street six years ago and promised the sun, moon and stars. He promised that regeneration would be done, but there is not a dicky-bird. Nothing has happened in six years. Again, the State was making people spend their valuable time coming up with ideas and working with the council - giving them the runaround - and then saying "No", with the excuse that regeneration would reduce the number of units. If the Minister of State had ever visited the place he would know it is not fit to live in. There is mould and damp. They are tiny flats. They do not reach any standards. It is a computer says "No" situation. The utter disrespect this Government has for the people in Dublin South-Central is seen today. I do not like calling people out but the TD for that area who is from the Government and the Senator for that area who is from the Government should not knock on doors and promise people the sun, moon and stars and then not deliver on it. It is unfair and inhumane how people are living down there. Not one person would accept it for themselves and it should not be acceptable for anyone who is paying rent in social housing in Ireland.

Deputy Eoin Hayes: The living conditions faced by Dubliners in social housing flats built between the 1930s and 1960s are frankly unconscionable. I have heard stories from people who are desperate, who are enraged and who, increasingly, are resigned to the failure of this State to uphold their human rights.

I get countless pleas in my constituency of Dublin Bay South from people living in flats with mouldy walls, rotting woodwork and rat infestations in places like Pearse House and Markievicz House. The endless tick-tacking between central government and Dublin City Council on regeneration plans has left these residents exhausted and hopeless. As one resident put it to me, residents have gone through hell over the last five years with the planned and cancelled regeneration of Pearse House. Another told me of her deteriorating mental health and said residents had suffered in silence for too long and the thought the regeneration may be cancelled has left them hopeless. She said they were simply asking for a chance to live in peace and dignity.

Residents of Pearse House and Markievicz House have been left in limbo by a housing Minister who seems more concerned with optics than solutions. The Department refused the comprehensive regeneration plans put forward by Dublin City Council last year on the basis there would be a reduction in the overall number of units. However, it would stand to reason that the severe overcrowding issues simply cannot be solved without some reduction. Imagine

if the same had been said about the tenements. The solution for Pearse House that has been approved is a reduced refurbishment project that will not solve overcrowding and has only had its first phase approved. Is the progress the Minister and Minister of State are making on supply of new housing so limited that the loss of a few units in Pearse House would make a substantial impact on the Department's performance? Must the residents of Pearse House and Markievicz House continue to live among rats in mouldy, overcrowded flats in order to appease ministerial vanity? The choice is the Minister's.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I have had the pleasure over the last number of months of visiting a lot of flats in the north inner city. This is in the context of both the by-election and the campaign against the rent increases, which is a Dublin-wide campaign even though we are at different phases. It is interesting to hear the TDs from the constituency talk because what strikes you is the very deep sense of community due to people living so close together. It is a very strong sense of community and solidarity. These are really great people. That is on the one hand, but what also strikes you is the pretty horrific conditions in which people have to live in 2026. There is mould everywhere. There are stories of people repainting their flats over and over. There are rats. Obviously there is overcrowding, which is chronic across the city. It is utterly unacceptable. What we have heard about the Oliver Bond Street complex is outrageous. People have had their time wasted, have been led up the garden path and then have been left waiting again in horrific conditions because of what is effectively a tick-box approach to resolving the housing crisis, as opposed to dealing with the situations people are facing.

It is outrageous that people who are living in such poor conditions have been asked, forced or compelled to pay even more in rent. It is outrageous that the argument for them to pay more in rent to Dublin City Council – an average increase of 30% - is wrapped up in the language of the council wanting to be a good landlord. It wants to be a good landlord so it has left people living in crap for years and years or even decades, and now it wants them to pay more for the privilege of it. It is outrageous. The main responsibility for that goes to central government for not properly funding our councils, but there is a lesson here for Labour and the Greens in particular because it was a horrendous mistake to vote to increase these people's rents.

Deputy Máire Devine: Hear, hear.

Deputy Paul Murphy: The mistake can be righted at the next budget. There is a big campaign to ask people to reverse it. Ultimately, the vote was lost by one vote. There was an amendment to say we should not be increasing people's rents and should instead be hitting the big companies by introducing what is effectively a differential rates scheme. It can be reversed for next year. We need commitments from Labour and the Greens to do that, as opposed to charging people more.

I wish to speak for a moment about South Dublin County Council. In my constituency we do not have that many social housing flats.

Obviously, we have lots of social houses and the same sorts of issues apply. The biggest issue is people waiting for years and years for windows and doors that are necessary. There are gale-force winds passing through their houses. The idea of having insulation or whatever in that context is obviously a complete joke.

Just as in Dublin city, Fingal and Galway, the management in South Dublin County Council, with the presumed agreement of the ruling group, is planning to go for big rent increases. The council has produced a PowerPoint presentation to outline its case. Effectively, it is trying to suggest that just as in Dublin city, the council takes in less in rent than it spends in maintenance. It is not true. When you go through the figures, you see that it is not true whatsoever. The council is adding in all sorts of extra expenses - I will go into some of it for a second - to try to create that impression. Dublin City Council has said that it is not getting enough in rents so it has to increase them, and then it will improve maintenance. South Dublin County Council is raising a fair bit more in rents than it is actually spending in maintenance. It has no excuse for not providing it. I will give one example; the council includes in its expenditure the money that comes from central government for retrofitting, which is about €7 million a year. The council is including that in its own expenditure to try to pretend it is making less. The truth is that it is taking a lot more in rent than in maintenance. It does not need to increase the rents; there is no argument for it whatsoever.

Deputy Seamus Healy: Decent housing is enshrined as a human right in Article 25 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It should also be enshrined in Bunreacht na hÉireann, the Irish Constitution. A referendum to that effect should be called immediately. The policy of successive Governments has been and continues to be an abysmal failure. Target after target has been missed. There are well over 17,000 families who are now homeless, including well over 5,500 children. Thousands more are living in substandard council houses and flats all over the country. Housing rents, including council rents, have skyrocketed and are being further substantially increased by the new rents regime introduced by the Minister. Billions of euro every year are being paid to landlords in respect of HAP payments. Over 140,000 households are on council waiting lists and thousands more are being locked out of the housing market because they are earning slightly over the council housing income limit but not enough to secure a mortgage while they cannot save for a deposit.

This housing emergency has broken the social contract between the State and its citizens. Successive Governments have paid lip service to this situation by calling it a priority, a crisis and even an emergency while failing to take any housing emergency action. To deal with this housing emergency, the Government must enact a housing emergency measure in the public interest law. Bunreacht na hÉireann, the Irish Constitution, provides for such an emergency action in Article 43.2.2°. The new law must provide for a massive construction programme for social and affordable houses on public land by local authorities. Local authorities must be funded to carry out this programme, which includes building houses as well as retrofitting and upgrading existing houses.

Tipperary County Council must be commended on delivering 180 social houses in 2024. Despite this, and due to the failure to provide capital funding to the council, the council's waiting list is, at best, static with 3,400 on the list. This waiting list significantly underestimates the real demand because large numbers of households are being excluded from the waiting list on income grounds. I will give an example. An applicant in receipt of one-parent family payment who is working part time and in receipt of the working family payment is deemed to be over the limit. These applicants are condemned to long-term renting at exorbitant levels, with no hope of a council house or a mortgage. The income limits for housing applicants for local authorities must be increased by at least €10,000. To address the country's dependence

on fossil fuels, the retrofitting of council houses must be hugely increased. The illegal US-Israeli war on Iran shows how important this is.

Tipperary County Council has a social housing stock of 5,210 units, but works on just 71 of those houses were completed under the energy retrofit programme in 2024. This is a snail's pace and is totally unacceptable but it is the best that could be done with the funds available to the council. The Government needs to significantly increase funding to local authorities on this scheme, with a target of completing all council houses in a four- to five-year period.

Deputy Brian Stanley: I fully support the proposals being put forward to improve accommodation for the people living in the flat complexes in Dublin city. I have been to many of them over the years and I have seen at first hand the difficult conditions that people are living in.

I will turn to private rental accommodation and apartments. In County Laois, there are 5,600 households who are living in private rented accommodation. A lot of them are flats and apartments. Some of the older private rented stock is in very bad condition. Tenants complain to me about dampness, mould, poor ventilation and houses that are impossible to heat. This creates health issues. It is not just a housing issue; it creates a health issue as well. Tenants in private rented accommodation are often reluctant to complain because it is followed up by an inspection from the council which can lead to a notice to quit. I have seen examples of where a notice to quit follows the inspection. Of the 5,600 private rented homes, 227 were inspected last year by the Laois County Council inspector and of those 227 - this is a telling figure - 176 received an improvement notice. That means 80% of the landlords of those properties got a notice to improve them. That high percentage shows that some are in a very bad condition. Tenants can often get a notice to quit. After a period of time, the flat or house is re-let. Much of the private rental stock has a very poor energy rating and this well known. Every TD here knows this. There is very poor insulation and a very poor energy rating. In turn, they have sky-high energy costs because they are heated by very expensive electricity meters. We know today that we have the highest electricity costs in the European Union. We must change this.

On top of all of that, rents in County Laois continue to skyrocket. A two-bedroom flat now makes €1,600 plus per month. There are examples of three-bedroom houses for rent for in excess of €2,000 per month. In fact, one house was advertised for €3,000 per month. People on low and middle incomes who are living in private rented accommodation are those hardest hit because they are not on the fuel allowance, they do not have any other supports and they are paying for a whole range of other things as well, such as health costs, and are commuting - in some cases as far as Dublin city - to work every day. They are really being caught. They are paying high rents, ever-increasing high energy costs and a high cost for everything else.

On the Laois County Council part of it, a lot of the housing stock is fairly new and built in recent years. That is in fairly good condition and a lot of it has a reasonably good energy rating but there is a lot of stock that has to be improved as well. There are over 2,400 council dwellings in the county. At the moment, 250 properties from the older stock are getting a deep retrofit. Some others have had more minor energy upgrades. That work has been successful but it needs more money because the midlands just transition fund, which was mainly funding it, is running out. It has now run out so Government funding is needed to keep it going. I urge the Government to keep the funding going for the remaining Laois County Council houses,

particularly the older ones that need further upgrading. I also urge the Government to ensure enforcement standards are improved for private rented accommodation and for council housing as well, including what we spoke about earlier. We need to put the onus on landlords to improve the energy rating of the rental stock. We cannot have tenants paying the highest rents in the worst accommodation with the most expensive electricity.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: I acknowledge the presence of the Minister of State for further and higher education on the Government side. The Minister of State is a very fine Minister of State but I find it rather upsetting that we do not have the senior Minister in the House.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Hear, hear.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: This is a very serious debate and some very serious questions need to be answered on what we are discussing here. I commend my colleagues in Sinn Féin on bringing this to the House and I welcome those people to the Visitors Gallery. I say to tenants in Dublin that they are not alone in what is happening in their properties. We have exactly the same thing in Cork city and county.

I received a copy of an email from Councillor Noel O'Flynn, a former Member of this House and member of Independent Ireland. He informed me that he received an email from one of the senior engineers in Cork telling him that a B2 energy rating by the time the flats will be completed in Mary Aikenhead Place will be 2050. Most of those people will have reached their eternal reward. Those flats were built in 1959. It was the first set of flats and has not been retrofitted. Other flats around them have been retrofitted but they have not.

We can go to Blackpool and to Farrancleary Place. Those flats were built in the 1960s. They have no fire escape, despite the issue being brought up in this House on a regular basis. The set of steps there is bad anyway but if there is a fire in those flats, we are going to lose over 100 people because there is no fire escape. That has been flagged with Cork City Council on a regular basis and Cork City Council has applied for funding and has requested Government funding. It is all very well for junior Ministers to come in here and to say that the duty of care is a matter for the local authority. That is no good unless the Government is funding it. That is no good unless the Government is handing down the money and making it available.

We can walk down into Blackpool and into Madden's Buildings, which were built in 1868. We can go up the hill and into Roche's Buildings, which are 18th century buildings. We can visit Kelleher's Buildings in Dillon's Cross or Ryan's Buildings in BallymacThomas. Those buildings have been there since the 18th century and there has not been a tack of retrofitting. The only retrofit that happened was that the outside toilets were brought in in 1991 and bathrooms were fitted, thanks to Noel O'Flynn.

In Roche's Buildings at the moment, tenants have water streaming down through Velux windows. Tenants have water streaming down the walls because soffits have not been replaced and building work has not been done. No retrofit has been carried out despite continuous calls from the local authority requesting money to do that.

We can go to the south side. I have an email from Councillor Albert Deasy, a very fine independent councillor in Cork city. He is a great man. He has been working in the Taoiseach's

constituency. He is a member of the council in the Taoiseach's constituency. You would think that the Taoiseach might have a small bit of influence over what goes on in his constituency. The Togher flats now have a situation of chronic dampness, black mould and rodent infestation. I must also mention that there is a rodent infestation in Mary Aikenhead Place. There are serious structural defects there. A series of problems is continuously happening and yet we are being told that the Government is providing money for retrofitting. Why are these flats not fixed? Why are the people in the Gallery here? Why are we not fixing that and addressing those issues? They have been around since 1860 and 1959. It seems absolutely absurd. I meet constituents every day of the week. I have constituents with black mould in their properties. We all have photographs. It is okay if the Minister of State wants to go. We have so many people who have sent photos that are now on our phones. Every TD has photos of black mould on walls or water coming down in flats and council houses. We continuously come across such situations and it is not acceptable. Nobody should have to live like that.

Deputy Michael Collins: I thank Sinn Féin for bringing forward this important motion. There are families from flats in Dublin in the audience today. Good, decent people are being left to live in damp, mouldy, unsafe homes. That is simply unacceptable. I have seen it in towns and villages in west Cork, where people have been waiting years for repairs that never come. They are paying high rents while living in conditions that no one here would be expected to tolerate.

The Government talks about housing numbers but a substandard home is not a housing solution. We must fix the homes we already have and make them warm, dry and safe. When regeneration is promised, we must be honest. If we knock down homes, where are the replacements? Communities deserve straight answers. People are tired of plans, consultation and glossy announcements. They want delivery, accountability and funding that is ring-fenced, time-bound and actually spent on the ground.

This is not just a Dublin problem. It is a very serious problem in Dublin and I fully respect those who are here today to highlight their crisis, as such. However, it is happening across rural Ireland, too. The message from those communities is clear: treat tenants with dignity, stop the waste and delays, and make sure no regeneration project reduces the number of homes available. We support action, and want to see real delivery, real value for money and real homes in which people can actually live.

We must look at different ways. The Government has, in fairness, been looking at some ways, including extensions at the back of houses. I fully agree with that and think it is wrong for anyone to criticise it. We must look at every opportunity out there. I would like the Government to consider affordable sites and the value to communities. People bought sites with State subsidies and homes were built for local people who took their children to the local school and invested in the local community. They were a huge benefit long ago but are not there today. I would like the Government to look at that again. Affordable sites are a considerable issue in rural communities. People cannot afford to buy sites or get a mortgage or whatever.

I have been fighting for a long time about housing and have talked about planning. It is a serious issue. I am a big believer in the county development plan but county development plans are built not to engage. That is a serious mistake. It tells people how to get housing and

planning for the next number of years but if you are not allowed to participate in it or it is poorly advertised or poorly discussed with people, they do not get that chance. People have come to me often recently. They have ruins and are trying to rebuild them. There is an amount of hassle involved. It costs thousands and thousands of euro for this report and that report. It is turning people away from just doing up a ruin that is falling down anyway. I cannot understand for the life of me where the Government is going.

We need to look at vacant houses. The Government is attacking the short-term lets sector. I plead with the Minister not to allow that to continue. In rural communities, the Government has said it is dealing with-----

Deputy Máire Devine: I do not mean to be rude but-----

Deputy Michael Collins: I thank the Deputy. I did not interrupt when she was speaking.

Deputy Máire Devine: -----this is about inner-city flats.

Deputy Michael Collins: Hang on a minute, we are talking about them too. There is plenty of time to let the Deputy talk when she wants to. The whole problem of the short-term lets is a serious issue for our communities. At the same time, you see vacant council houses and HSE houses all over the place. There is plenty of housing. The Government is going after a sector it should not be going after.

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy James Browne): I thank the Deputies for the opportunity to clarify the situation in relation to Oliver Bond flats and regeneration right across the country. I highlight that in 2026 alone, there will be just over €9 billion in capital invested in housing in this country as a result of Government policies. Some €50 million per year is set aside specifically for regeneration projects that require refurbishment and remediation works. That is only one part of the funding that there is for regeneration in this country. Funding for projects is at record levels that have never been seen previously in the history of the State. That must be acknowledged.

The commitment is further evidenced in the Dublin city task force and implementation plan to prioritise the total regeneration of social housing complexes within the city centre as well as the ambition shown by Dublin City Council in the recently launched Dublin home building programme. There is concrete evidence of the Government's commitment to regeneration at complexes within Dublin city. In the past ten years or so in Dublin city alone, there has been significant spending on regeneration projects, including the demolition and rebuilding of homes at St. Michael's Estate, O'Devaney Gardens, St. Teresa's Gardens, Dominick Street and Dolphin House. Those are just examples.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Dolphin House is not finished.

Deputy James Browne: My Department always welcomes-----

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: The Minister is saying it but it is not finished

Deputy James Browne: -----applications for funding for regeneration-----

Deputy Máire Devine: The Government has kicked to touch.

Deputy James Browne: -----including for funding to support refit, retrofit and remedial works programmes. In the case of Oliver Bond flats, funding has not been withdrawn. Let us be very clear. There is plenty of funding available for the regeneration of Oliver Bond flats.

Deputy Máire Devine: There is the letter.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: There is the letter.

Deputy James Browne: Deputy Ó Broin is fully aware of this.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: The Minister refused the funding application from the council.

Deputy James Browne: What the Department cannot-----

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Tell the truth, Minister.

Deputy James Browne: What has been refused?

Deputy Máire Devine: Do not twist it.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: The Minister decided this.

Deputy James Browne: What the Department will not stand over is the reduction in the number of homes.

Deputy Máire Devine: Pathetic.

Deputy James Browne: The proposal includes-----

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: There would be 15 extra units in this plan.

Deputy James Browne: Every time I try to speak in this Chamber and it is something the Deputy does not like-----

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: We cannot let the Minister lie in the House

Deputy James Browne: -----he tries to shout me down.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: The Minister is misleading the House. He refused funding.

Deputy James Browne: These are shouting tactics because they do not want to-----

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Tell the truth.

Deputy James Browne: This is a Chamber. The Deputy does not want to listen because he does not want me to say what I am saying.

Deputy Máire Devine: Read that sentence again.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I have the letter from the Department.

Deputy James Browne: Let me say what I am saying. May I speak?

Deputy Máire Devine: Will the Minister read again the sentence he just read?

Deputy James Browne: Are you going to keep shouting me down?

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: The Minister should not be telling porkies.

Deputy Máire Devine: Porky pies.

Deputy James Browne: The Deputies are not doing this House or anybody any favours-----

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú): Bomaite amháin here.

Deputy James Browne: -----by constantly trying to shout me down.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú): Déanfaidh sé sin cúis. Lean ar aghaidh.

Deputy James Browne: I thank the Cathaoirleach Gníomhach.

The funding stands available for the regeneration of Oliver Bond House. What the Department cannot stand over is a reduction in the number of homes. We will not fund a reduction in the number of homes.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: There are 15 extra homes in this proposal, a net increase.

Deputy James Browne: The proposal includes a 30% reduction in the number of homes. There is not a net increase in the number of homes in this regeneration project.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I have the map. Maybe the Minister could look at-----

Deputy James Browne: Since 2015, the Department has spent over €500 million on regeneration projects across Limerick, Cork and Dublin, as well as providing additional funding for planned maintenance, voids programmes, energy efficiency upgrades and refurbishment works. The Government has made available substantial funding.

In terms of how we govern in this country, we govern in a way that we ensure we have a strong economy that benefits local communities. We have to have both. We have to have the money to be able to spend it. That happens through the good management of the economy. As I have highlighted, Montpellier, Donore, An Droichead Órga, Dorset Street and St. Mary's have all been significantly redeveloped. The pipeline for regeneration is extremely strong.

I wish Deputy Ó Broin would stop putting out misinformation that the funding for regeneration has been withdrawn. The funding remains available. Dublin City Council knows full well that we will support regeneration, just as we did with Pearse House where a solution was found. What we will not do is fund a reduction in the number of homes available to people.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Just the number of people living there. Fewer people will live there under the Minister's policy.

Deputy James Browne: That is the reality of the position.

Deputy Máire Devine: That is shameful.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: The Minister talks about a strong economy. A strong economy is not made up of thousands of homeless children who face Christmas after Christmas in emergency accommodation. A strong economy is not made up of young renters who cannot afford to buy a home and feel they will never have the ability to do so under this Government. A strong economy is certainly not made up of all of those people who feel they never will have a future in Galway city, a place they are from, because they simply cannot afford to rent or buy and there is no prospect of ever building a home there.

I am outraged by the disastrous way in which the Minister has handled the housing crisis. I have been an elected representative in Galway city for the past 12 years and in that time I have never seen the housing crisis as bad as it is now under the watch of the Minister. That is the reality of the situation. I am constantly speaking to young people who tell me they are paying €2,000 or more in rent each month and have no option to buy or provide a future and stable environment for their young children because of the policies of the Government. This is not a natural disaster. This is a man-made disaster caused by successive Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Governments which continue to fail to meet the demand in terms of housing supply for the people Galway.

Bhí mé ar na hoileáin amach ó chósta na Gaillimhe inné. Bhí mé ag caint le daoine ar Inis Meáin agus Inis Oírr agus bhí an rud ceannann céanna le rá acu sin. Níl deiseanna tithíochta ar na hoileáin sa chaoi chéanna nach bhfuil tithíocht ar fáil do mhuintir chathair na Gaillimhe ach an oiread. Níl sé de dheis acu tithe a cheannacht ann nó a thógáil agus is féidir rá go cinnte nach bhfuil an deis acu tithe a fháil ar cíós. Tá na lochtanna seo ar fad ann mar gheall ar chinntí a rinne Rialtais de chuid Fianna Fáil agus Fine Gael ar feadh na mblianta. Tá sé thar am don Rialtas rud éigin a dhéanamh chun stop a chur leis an ngéarchéim tithíochta.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: I have spoken to tenants in various Dublin City Council properties and I know they feel the exact same as tenants in Cork City Council flats. They feel that when it comes to housing, they are at the absolute back of the queue. It is a case of out of sight, out of mind and they are shuttered away. Not only has the Government neglected buildings, it has neglected people. These people are watching their children with lung conditions becoming unhealthy. Every year they are throwing out bags of clothes and other possessions because of damp. They are dealing with rodents and very often local authorities tell them it is their problem, despite the fact that they are local authority buildings. There are issues with how city councils in Dublin, Cork City Council and elsewhere manage properties.

At the end of the day, the buck stops with the Minister. He spoke about misinformation and referred to progress happening. It was said that progress is glacial but at least a glacier moves forward a small bit. Tenants in Cork City Council flats in Togher, including those on Cherry Tree Road, Sycamore Place, Togher Road, Clashduv and Hazel Road, have seen no progress in the past three years. I have dealt with one tenant over the past couple of months who has had issues with a chimney collapsing and a banister falling off the stairs in the flat, and is now dealing with a rodent problem. Throughout this, Cork City Council has not offered the tenant alternative accommodation. At the end of the day, there has been no investment in these flats and no prospect of it as far as I can see.

There are profound issues. People renting in the private sector have to deal landlords who let people live in poor conditions but as far as I am concerned, the State and the Minister, as the landlord, are neglecting people. The Minister is leaving them in the cold and damp. Some of the conditions in these flats are appalling. They are way beyond their shelf life. I have heard stories of children who have cut their hands on jagged railings that have rusted away to nothing. There are issues with subsidence. There is a need for urgent investment. This is in the Taoiseach's constituency. I ask the Minister to speak to the Taoiseach. He should visit these flats. I am sure he has passed them many times. He should see the conditions.

No family in any form of accommodation in this country should have to deal with rodents crawling all over their kitchens. That is the reality in too many of these homes in Desmond Square, Fort Street and Dean Street. Those complexes still do not have clarity about what is happening. Nobody deserves to live in such conditions and it is the responsibility of the Minister to address that.

Deputy Thomas Gould: I recently undertook a housing survey across the State. There is more information in it than in everything the Minister or Minister of State, Deputy Cummins, said earlier because these are the facts. I will give the Minister a few facts. Some 83% of people said they had maintenance issues with black mould all over their houses. Some 77% of people said they had damp. They are major issues. Black mould, damp and cold in homes can do damage to people, including young people, people with asthma, people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, COPD, and people with disabilities.

Dublin City Council and other city councils are trying to increase rents. People have to leave their heating on constantly and Ministers have said summer is coming. It does not matter if it is winter or summer; the flats are cold all year round because they have not been retrofitted or regenerated. The Minister has come in with facts and figures. Deputy McDonald and I asked the Minister, to come to the flats in the inner cities of Dublin and Cork to see what people

have to put up with. I have been in some flat complexes in Dublin and met residents and it is the same in Cork. The conditions are horrendous.

These are proud people from proud communities who keep their houses immaculate. They try to do everything right but if the windows are falling out, the doors are loose and there is no insulation or proper heating, what are they supposed to do? Some of these flats are 80 or 90 years old. The Minister has said the Government will do something and then tried to blame local authorities, the council and residents. The Minister is trying to blame everyone. He is the Minister and is part of the Government. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have never given a damn about working class people or cared about people who live in flats because they never voted for them. They have abandoned and betrayed them for years.

I live on Cathedral Road. Behind me is Mary Aikenhead. The houses are freezing cold. In Blackpool, Castleknock or Baker's Road, there are freezing cold homes. What is the Minister doing? He is blaming everyone instead of doing his job.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: The approach of the Minister to inner-city flat complex regeneration is fundamentally flawed. After three long years of consultation with the local community on Oliver Bond Street, Dublin City Council made a very detailed proposal.

It would take 74 1930s flats and bring them up to modern standards with a loss of 28 units. It identified a brand-new site, adjacent to Oliver Bond flats, with an additional 43 units. That is a net increase of 15 homes. In addition to that, there would be a community centre. The Minister has refused funding for that. The letter was sent to the council this week. He has refused funding on the most spurious of grounds, namely, that the Department cannot accept a reduction in the number of units. What the Minister is proposing is that instead of having an adequate mix of one-, two- and three-bedroom homes in these large flat complexes, these will have to be scaled down to a large volume of studios, one-beds and some two-beds. That is going to fundamentally undermine the coherence of those housing estates. The Minister will not be able to do that across all of the blocks in Pearse House or in Oliver Bond flats. It is a fundamentally flawed approach. This policy says fewer people will live there. The units will be maintained - this fictional target - but fewer people will live there.

With respect to the other schemes the Minister has mentioned, he listed off a series of regeneration schemes where communities were destroyed ten or 20 years ago, flung to the four corners of our city, and only now the Department is finally getting around to rebuilding them.

The Minister's approach to this is a mistake and it is one he needs to reverse. I think he is being badly advised by the Department. He is refusing to listen to the residents who have given enormous amounts of time to this consultation. The irony is that if a private landlord was the owner of these flats, they would be in front of the Residential Tenancies Board, fined and the problems would be fixed. If an approved housing body was the landlord of these flats, it would be in front of the Residential Tenancies Board and forced to fix them. However, the Minister is refusing funding, is pursuing a failed policy and, as a consequence, thousands of people in Dublin, Cork and elsewhere will live in slum conditions. That is his policy. He can come into the House and speak for four or five minutes, having not listened to the debate, and think that might convince somebody. It does not convince us and, more importantly, it does not convince the residents in the flats he is allowing to live in squalor. He should reverse the decision, change

the policy, fund the councils to fix the flats and stop misleading this House with information about what is going on on the streets of Dublin, Cork and elsewhere.

Deputy Máire Devine: Hear, hear.

Cuireadh an leasú.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú): De réir Bhuan-Ordaithe 85(2), cuirfear an vótáil siar go dtí an chéad am vótála seachtainiúil Dé Céadaoin, an 13 Bealtaine 2026.

Ábhair Shaincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Matters

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú): 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 Pat Buckley - To discuss the failure to follow through on a Labour Court recommendation.

Deputy Colm Burke - To discuss the establishment of a national radiation therapy equipment replacement programme.

Deputy Malcolm Byrne - To discuss the planned new Courtown coastguard building.

Deputy Jen Cummins - To discuss the status of the Cork Life Centre.

Deputy Pa Daly - To discuss funding for youth service in Kerry.

Deputy Michael Cahill - To discuss the refurbishment of school buildings across County Kerry,

Deputy Séamus McGrath - To discuss the recruitment process for the Defence Forces.

Deputy Michael Murphy - To discuss the local democracy task force report.

Deputy Mark Ward - To discuss waiting times for occupational services in Dublin Mid-West.

Deputy Eamon Scanlon - To discuss reducing capital gains tax for families passing homes to their children.

Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil - To discuss social infrastructure provision in Kildare North.

Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan - To discuss proposals for the use of the old prison site at Rathmore Road, Cork city.

Deputies Ged Nash and Joanna Byrne - To discuss the exclusion of schools in disadvantaged areas of Drogheda from the DEIS plus scheme.

Deputy Brian Stanley - To discuss overcrowding in the Midlands and Portlaoise Prison.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly - To discuss expanding the communications allowance to include broadband and mobile data.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú - To discuss supports for those with frontotemporal dementia.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire - To discuss the armed assault by Israeli naval forces on the Global Sumud Flotilla.

The matters raised by Deputies Eamon Scanlon, Pat Buckley, Mark Ward, Michael Cahill, Ged Nash and Joanna Byrne have been selected for discussion.

Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate

Tax Code

Deputy Eamon Scanlon: I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak on this issue. I know I am not the only TD who has been contacted by parents who want to pass a property from one generation to the next. At its heart, this is not about tax breaks for the wealthy; it is about fairness, stability and the ability of ordinary families to plan their futures without being overwhelmed by financial pressures that are, in many cases, disproportionate and unnecessary.

One family contacted me recently and their case illustrates the problem clearly. They own a second property and they want to gift it to their adult child, so that it will become their home. Before they can make the transfer, they face a capital gains tax bill which in their case is somewhere between €70,000 and €75,000. They simply do not have that kind of money. On top of that, they remain liable for tax on the property even when no rent is being collected. This is not an isolated case. This is a hardworking family who have never asked for anything from the State. They work, they pay their taxes, they cover college fees and they contribute to their community. They are not opposed to capital gains tax in principle but a 33% rate on a property they are not selling is excessive by any measure. The reality is stark. Their child is now considering emigrating, leaving behind a good job, because they do not want their parents burdened with a massive tax bill. That is the human cost of the current system.

Across the country, families who have worked for decades to build security are finding that transferring a property to their children triggers a tax burden that simply does not reflect the reality of their circumstances. These are not investment properties or speculative assets. In many cases, the property is the only significant asset a family has and the intention is not for profit but for continuity, stability and giving the next generation a foothold in the housing market. We already have models that balance support with safeguards. The vacant property refurbishment grant, for example, requires owners to live or rent out the property for a minimum of five years. That protects the integrity of the scheme while still delivering meaningful help to families and communities. A similar safeguard can and should apply.

It is entirely reasonable to require that the property becomes the child's principal private residence for, say, ten years. Such a condition would ensure the measure supports genuine family transfers rather than speculative behaviour. This approach would strike the right balance. It would ease the financial pressure on families who simply want to keep a home in the family while ensuring the tax system remains fair, transparent and resistant to abuse. It

would help younger generations put down roots at a time when housing affordability is one of the greatest challenges they face and, crucially, it would allow parents to pass on property without the fear of being hit with a large capital gains tax bill on a gain they never actually receive because the property is not being sold; it is being gifted.

Parents should not have to pay capital gains tax when transferring a second property to a son or daughter who will use it as their family home. That is the principle at stake and it is one we should be willing to stand over.

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Marian Harkin): I thank Deputy Scanlon for raising this important issue. I am responding on behalf of the Minister for Finance. The Deputy will be aware that capital gains tax, CGT, is a tax on the gain that arises on the disposal of an asset. The chargeable gain of an asset is the difference between the amount a person received for it - in other words, the sale price - the amount a person paid for it, the purchase price, and any allowable expenses in the meantime. Capital gains tax arises not just on the sale of an asset but also on the transfer or gift of an asset from one individual to another, and that is the issue the Deputy is raising here. Capital gains tax is payable by the disposer of the asset and the current rate is 33%. The first €1,270 of chargeable gains of an individual in any year are exempt from capital gains tax. The rate at which capital gains is charged has varied both upwards and downwards since its introduction back in 1975, and the present rate of 33% has been in place since 2012. It is understood that Deputy Scanlon is referencing a situation where a person is selling a second house, such as an investment property, for the purpose of providing funds to a child to buy their own house and, as such, no relief from capital gains tax applies.

7 o'clock

While capital gains tax makes up only a small proportion of overall taxes, it is considered an integral part of the overall taxation system due to the need to ensure as broad a tax base as possible. The purpose of capital gains tax is to ensure fairness. It ensures taxation is not focused solely on income tax and that those who benefit from gains in the value of their assets are included within the tax net on an equitable basis. In doing so, we can limit the need for increases in income tax rates and secure the sustainability of the taxation system against future challenges.

While capital gains tax is a broad-based tax, which applies across the board to virtually all gains that a person can incur, appropriate reliefs are provided in particular circumstances. For instance, section 604 of the 1997 Act provides relief from capital gains tax on the disposal of a person's principal private residence. A principal private residence is defined as any dwelling house, together with surrounding land, occupied as gardens or grounds up to an area of 1 acre. There is no requirement to pay capital gains tax on gains accrued if such a house is sold. An individual, married couple or civil partners cannot have more than one principal private residence at any one time. The Deputy should note that there may be difficulties with unintended consequences if the rate of capital gains tax were reduced for one category alone. If that were to happen, it would be difficult to distinguish in legislation such a property from other circumstances where second properties are sold, for example, paying off a loan or providing for a pension. There may also be a possible State aid dimension to such a proposal due to the targeting of the measure. In such circumstances, where a reduction to the overall

rate of capital gains tax was necessitated, there would be a significant Exchequer cost. For instance, a 5% reduction would result in a cost to the Exchequer of €436 million.

Deputy Eamon Scanlon: I thank the Minister of State for her response. I am pointing out that where there is a gain somebody is definitely entitled to pay capital gains tax but, unfortunately, the parent who hands over that property has no gain, gets no money and has to pay out maybe €70,000 or €75,000. In this particular case I raised, they may have to pay out €70,000 or €75,000 in capital gains tax, despite the fact they do not get any funds whatsoever. They are gifting the house to one of their family members. In these times with such pressure on young people and young families to try to get a home for themselves, it is something that should be looked at in the coming budget.

Deputy Marian Harkin: I thank the Deputy for bringing this issue to the House. The rate that capital gains tax is charged at has varied upwards and downwards. The truth is that the existence of capital gains tax can help maintain a balance between the rate of taxation of capital assets and the higher rate of income tax. It can also prevent tax planning behaviour. There are a number of targeted reliefs from capital gains tax, including principal private residence relief as well as retirement relief and revised entrepreneur relief. It is often the case that significant exemptions often require a higher rate to generate an appropriate yield.

As the Deputy is aware, the programme for Government commits to maintaining a broad tax base to guard against the need for a countercyclical fiscal policy in the event of a downturn and to prepare for future budgetary challenges related to population ageing. Capital gains tax is part of a system to ensure a wide taxation base reducing the burden on income tax that is tax on labour. I assure the Deputy, as with all taxes, that capital gains tax is subject to ongoing review which involves the consideration and assessment of the rate of capital gains and the relevant reliefs and exemptions from capital gains tax. Capital gains tax policy and legislation are reviewed as part of the annual budget and Finance Bill process, and is part of wider tax policy considerations. That same consideration will take place this year. It will be kept under ongoing review most particularly in light of the upcoming budget. That is an opportunity for the Deputy to make his case.

Labour Court

Deputy Pat Buckley: I thank the Minister of State for being here. A Labour Court recommendation on 22 October 2022 recommended that Stryker management in Carrigtohill should enter into negotiations with SIPTU, with a view to concluding a collective agreement that covers procedural arrangements within which normal industrial relations business can be conducted. It would have given members a voice at the negotiating table so that serious issues, such as improving health and safety standards, at both plants in Cork would be addressed. I raise this because it goes back to 2018. The said factory was subject to a Cork City Council health and safety motion. That was ignored. Around 2021, I was involved with Deputy Mairéad Farrell and former Minister, Michael McGrath, on the Protected Disclosures (Amendment) Act 2022 because I had possession of a protected disclosure on the failings of all the health and safety in this. I went to three separate taoisigh over a number of years on

this. I have met with the HSE on this. There is a High Court case running at the moment. I will be careful not to mention any more about that, but it has been delayed continuously.

Multinationals are coming into this country and they can rickshaw over Government policy. They will not recognise unions. Unfortunately, between working on protected disclosures - in protected disclosure law the most important one is the reversal of burden of proof for whistleblowers today who have more powers - and in my experience of dealing with this specific protected disclosure, every one of those whistleblowers were got at, so they have disappeared. I do not know about that court case I mentioned. When you are given a protected disclosure specifically on health and safety issues, you are duty-bound to report it. I do not know whether the DPP has got that evidence. That is serious. I do not know how to find out, which is very serious. If we move onto 2023, after numerous articles in most of the national papers reporting the failures in health and safety on this, we had a fatality. It is three years on and that family are still in limbo because that company is ignoring them. The company has refused to engage with any union.

As recently as last week, I got another anonymous letter mentioning the said company and another pharmaceutical company in Cork, which I will not mention. I am here like anybody else as an elected representative and people put trust in us. These were red flags going back to 2018. We are now in 2026. If we go from 2018 to 2023, it had at least four to five major incidents where people were hospitalised. Health and safety were ignored. We are talking about titanium fires. I contacted Cork County Fire Service. It cannot put out a titanium fire. This individual died by burning. Titanium burns at around 2,000°F. To this day, I am stuck in limbo here. That is why I wanted to raise this tonight. The Labour Court recommendation is just to engage with unions that were concerned about health and safety. This is the decision in October 2022. We are now in May 2026. Nothing has moved forward. We have had a fatality. We have also had some major incidents that have been reported where people were left out in the car park - three in particular - with no health and safety officer. Nobody knew whether it was water, oil, gas or air before they were hospitalised. There is a breakdown in communications.

I am just trying to understand why these companies will not engage in respect of the Labour Court recommendations. In this country, we have unions, and people have a right to be represented.

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Marian Harkin): I thank Deputy Buckley for raising this very important issue. I have been asked to respond on behalf of my colleague the Minister of State, Deputy Dillon.

Volunteerism has long been a defining feature of Irish industrial relations. It respects the autonomy of employers and workers, places a strong emphasis on dialogue and engagement and has served the State well over many decades. This model remains central to maintaining a stable and balanced industrial relations architecture. However, volunteerism also carries responsibilities with it for all parties. When disputes arise and engagement at workplace level breaks down, the State provides well-established institutions to support resolution. Chief among these is the Labour Court, which plays a vital role in offering independent, reasoned guidance aimed at restoring stability and constructive relations. Under Ireland's voluntary

system, Labour Court recommendations in industrial relations disputes are generally non-binding. This is a long-standing and accepted feature of the framework. Nevertheless, such recommendations are intended to be treated with seriousness by both parties. They are the product of careful consideration of evidence and competing interests and are designed to support renewed engagement and resolution where voluntary processes have failed.

I should also draw a clear distinction between industrial relations recommendations and decisions of the Labour Court made under employment rights legislation. Decisions under the latter - such as those relating to unfair dismissal or payment of wages - are legally binding and enforceable. Industrial relations recommendations, by contrast, are not for the reasons I have outlined. In essence, this reflects the Labour Court's central role in upholding statutory employment protections and the confidence placed by the State in its expertise and independence.

At the heart of many disputes is the issue of voice - that is the ability of workers to raise concerns in a structured and orderly way and the ability of employers to have their perspectives heard. Labour Court recommendations frequently seek to establish or strengthen procedural frameworks that allow normal industrial relations business to be conducted between the respective parties without disputes escalating. This is particularly important in sensitive and high-impact areas such as health and safety, workplace change and terms and conditions. These matters are best addressed through engagement, dialogue and the confidence that both sides will be heard.

It is important to say that volunteerism does not mean the absence of structure, nor does it mean that guidance from the State's highest industrial relations body can be set aside without consequence. A voluntary system relies on mutual trust and a shared commitment to engage in good faith when difficulties arise. When recommendations designed to promote dialogue are disregarded, workers may reasonably ask where they are expected to turn to resolve disputes constructively.

I also acknowledge, as Deputy Buckley did, the tragic incident that occurred at Stryker in 2023. As investigations remain ongoing, however, it would not be appropriate to comment further on that workplace fatality at this time, but I did hear what he had to say. Any concerns regarding workplace health and safety can be raised directly with the Health and Safety Authority, which enjoys considerable legislative powers to inquire into and enforce occupational health and safety standards.

If it is any help to the Deputy, I heard both what he said and his sincerity. I will bring this issue to the attention of the Minister.

Deputy Pat Buckley: I thank the Minister of State for her response. She stated, "When disputes arise and engagement at workplace level breaks down, the State provides well-established institutions to support resolution." I understand that the Labour Court recommendations are generally non-binding. She also stated, "Nevertheless, such recommendations are intended to be treated with seriousness by both parties." I understand that she cannot comment on the case, but I want to follow up on what she said about the recommendations being treated with seriousness by both parties.

In 2018, when Cork City Council had a health and safety motion before it, I engaged with the Health and Safety Authority, HSA. It took a lot of work and it was difficult, but the families involved are relatively happy with the HSA. I have brought this up many times; it is frustrating. We have to wait for Europe to change the law on protected disclosures before we can change anything. In fairness, it was done by mutual consent in this Parliament. An office was set up. I met with the HSA prior to these accidents. It is not being taken seriously. I ask the Minister of State to put herself in my position. I have gone through three taoisigh in the context of protected disclosures. I have tried to raise the matter. I spent 18 months working on protected disclosure legislation in order to strengthen it for whistleblowers. I discovered that there have been constant breaches of health and safety standards, accidents and leakages in the meantime. I could write a book on the subject.

How does the Minister of State think that makes me feel as a human being when I am sitting at home and hear that there has been a fatality? I feel that I have failed everybody in the factory who came to me. We are here again in 2026. I understand where the Minister of State is going, but I want to get on the record that the matter has not been sorted, that the union is not being recognised, that the company is ignoring everybody, that the family is being destroyed, that a person is dead and that nobody provides answers. All I am getting is that the matter is before the courts and that we cannot say anything. I am saying it now that this is not good enough. We have a separate protected disclosures office. It should have the power to investigate because that is what the protected disclosures legislation was for.

Deputy Marian Harkin: I go back to what I said initially, which is that our system of industrial relations is built on volunteerism, which is a model that values engagement, respect and good faith over compulsion. It has delivered stability and progress precisely because it prioritises dialogue rather than conflict. As I said, however, volunteerism only works when all parties participate responsibly.

The Labour Court plays a central and indispensable role within the system. While its recommendations in industrial relations disputes are generally non-binding, they are neither incidental nor optional. They represent the considered judgment of the State's highest industrial relations body and are intended to guide parties back towards constructive engagement, and they are expected to be taken seriously.

It is also important to recognise that the Labour Court's authority is firmly established in law. When recommendations designed to promote dialogue and provide workers with structured voice are set aside, confidence in the voluntary system is undermined and, as I said earlier, workers are left uncertain as to where they should turn. This debate is not about mandating outcomes or moving away from volunteerism; it is about reinforcing its foundations, namely engagement, good faith and respect for our industrial relations institutions. If volunteerism is to remain credible, Labour Court recommendations must be treated as more than advisory comment. They should be understood for what they are, a roadmap back to stability, fairness and mutual respect in the workplace. The Labour Court fulfils its role and it is incumbent on all parties to do the same.

The Government's action plan to promote collective bargaining demonstrates a clear commitment to further strengthening the industrial relations framework through structured engagement with the social partners, improved data and practical initiatives, including public

procurement pilots. The focus remains on expanding effective collective bargaining coverage and improving pay, working conditions and overall quality of life. As I said, I will speak to the Minister.

Deputy Pat Buckley: I thank the Minister of State.

Health Services

Deputy Mark Ward: I thank the Minister of State for taking this matter. I am disappointed that the Minister for Health - or a Minister of State with a health brief - is not here to respond to the debate.

I have been informed by some of my constituents about unacceptable waiting times for occupational therapy. Occupational therapy is important for people who may have suffered an injury that requires their home to be adapted. An occupational therapist will visit a person's home and compile a report in respect of the disabled person's grant. The relevant form cannot be completed without an occupational therapy report. The form will not be accepted by South Dublin County Council without such a report, so it is vital.

I will speak about three of my constituents who received this news.

I have their permission to mention them tonight.

Larry is to turn 80 this year. He needs a stairlift installed in his home because he has a pacemaker due to a heart condition and is regularly out of breath. I contacted the HSE for Larry and the response I got was that he would be waiting 330 weeks for an appointment. That is over six years. The Minister of State has to agree that a six-year waiting list for an occupational therapist for anybody is unacceptable. I am lost for words that an 80-year-old man was told he must wait six years for occupational therapy. I was speaking to Larry myself and he told me that when you get to 80, you are lucky to think six months down the line, never mind six years.

Angela is a woman in my constituency. She is not 50 and broke her hips two years ago. She has not been able to go up the stairs in her home since. She has told me she has to travel to her daughter's home in a different county just to be able to wash herself. She has also been told she will be waiting 330 weeks for an appointment.

Sarah-Jane is a young woman in her 30s but she has mobility issues and needs the assistance of her 71-year-old mother to be able to shower. Her mother is finding this more difficult over time. Sarah-Jane was referred in March 2022 for an occupational therapy appointment so she could adapt her home. She was not told she would have one in 330 weeks like the other two constituents; rather, she was told there was no appointment date for her. She is not even getting an appointment in six years.

Such delays are having an abject impact on people's quality of life. These are just three cases. I could mention more from my constituency. I have written to the Minister for Health and have requested that she urgently examine these cases and introduce the necessary measures. I do not know what the Minister of State's response will be, but if it is a matter of a staffing issue, it must be addressed urgently. Six years is far too long to wait.

Furthermore, there is a postcode lottery for care in Dublin Mid-West. If the three people I mentioned were in a catchment area in the constituency with a different primary healthcare centre, I expect they would not have to wait so long. Care should be based on need, not on where you live. Also, it should not be based on the ability to pay.

In the response I received for Sarah-Jane, the HSE advised her to go private. A public health service that is in place to serve the public is telling patients they should go private. The HSE also told Sarah-Jane she needs to recoup the costs from South Dublin County Council. I have been a councillor and know how South Dublin County Council works. It is not possible for residents in council homes to recoup the cost of private occupational therapists from South Dublin County Council. However, if Sarah-Jane lived in a private home and paid for private healthcare, she could recoup the costs. This is a two-tier system that discriminates against those who rely on the public health service. There is nobody who is not on the same page. I do not think there is a person in this House who would agree a six-year wait for an occupational therapist, so people's quality of life can improve, is acceptable. I am looking forward to hearing the Minister of State's response.

Deputy Marian Harkin: The Minister for Health has asked me to thank the Deputy for raising this important matter and for the opportunity to update the House on it. He has outlined it very clearly. On behalf of the Minister, I fully acknowledge that waiting lists for primary care therapies, including occupational therapy, are far too long. She recognises that people waiting years to access these services is simply unacceptable.

It is important to recognise that overall activity within the eight core primary care therapies is significant, with approximately 1.3 million appointments having been provided across occupational therapy, physiotherapy, dietetics, psychology, speech and language therapy, audiology, ophthalmology and podiatry services in 2025. However, the HSE has advised that the increased pressure and demands on primary care therapy services are related to an increase in referrals, the increasing complexity of presentations, which of course leads to longer interventions, and challenges related to the recruitment and retention of healthcare professionals.

The recruitment and retention of healthcare professionals, in particular therapy professionals, remain a challenge across the health, education and disability sectors and comprise one of the key causal factors impacting primary care therapy waiting lists.

The HSE has advised that, in integrated healthcare area, IHA, Dublin South West and IHA Dublin South City and West, waiting times are particularly long because demand exceeds the current service capacity. In response, referrals are being triaged and prioritised on the basis of assessed clinical need so those most in need are seen as soon as possible.

The HSE has confirmed that the IHAs in the Dublin Mid-West area continue to progress recruitment and service improvement measures aimed at reducing the current waiting times for primary care therapy services. However, the Minister acknowledges that a lot more needs to be done to reduce waiting times. To that end, the Department of Health is currently working with the HSE on a focused joint programmatic approach to primary care therapy waiting list management to put in place considerable standardised infrastructure to address both the long waiting times and long-term capacity planning.

As part of this programme of work, in September of last year the Minister approved proposals to address occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech and language therapy waiting lists through a national initiative supported by the enhanced community care programme. The goal of this initiative is to reduce the waiting times for these three therapies to less than ten months. The initiative aims to remove over 60,000 people from the waiting lists across these three therapies by the end of this year, with efforts currently under way in a number of IHAs. The initiative has been rolled out on a phased basis to include all IHAs nationally over the coming months.

Initial results show a reduction of 12,700 patients from these waiting lists for physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy since the initiative commenced. It is very welcome news that both waiting list numbers and the waiting periods of those waiting longest are reducing. For the first time since 2021, waiting lists have decreased month on month over a three-year period. As the work continues throughout the year, we expect to see waiting lists nationally reduce and improved access times for all, including those in Dublin Mid-West.

Deputy Mark Ward: I thank the Minister of State. She mentioned priorities, triage and how people are assessed. Larry, who is 80 and whom I spoke about, is not priority 1. He is priority 2, and that is why he must wait for six years. Angela, who broke both her hips and has not been up her own stairs in two years, is not priority 1. She is priority 2. Sarah-Jane, who has to rely on her 71-year-old mother to get washed, is also not priority 1. She is priority 2. Whatever this triage system is, it is not working because Larry, Angela and Sarah-Jane are falling through the cracks.

To make a bad situation even worse, if Larry, whom I will use as an example, has to wait for six years for an occupational therapy appointment, he will probably have to wait a further three or four years to get the disabled persons grant from South Dublin County Council. Larry, who is 80 now, could be 90 before he gets the stairlift he badly needs to get up his stairs. That is simply not good enough in a modern society.

The Minister of State spoke about waiting list reductions and said there were 1.3 million appointments. That is absolutely fantastic but the reality in Dublin Mid-West as we speak is that if you live in Palmerstown and are waiting for an appointment for a physiotherapist, you will be left waiting because the service is suspended. A parent of a newborn child will not receive developmental checks for his or her baby if they have to go to Rowlagh health centre. This is because of staff shortages. The average waiting time to see a psychologist for a child in my area is four years. An adult living in Lucan who wants to see a psychologist will not get an appointment. That service is suspended as well.

There are currently over 7,000 children in my area alone who are overdue an appointment for an assessment of needs. If you live in Lucan, you can expect your child to wait over two years for a speech and language therapy appointment. There are also 800 children waiting for an appointment for child and adolescent mental health services. That is just in Dublin Mid-West.

Whatever work is going on behind the scenes really needs to happen quickly because patients, including children, are being left behind. The problems that they have now, because they are not being addressed, are just going to get worse.

Deputy Marian Harkin: Again, on behalf of the Minister for Health, I thank Deputy Ward for raising this important issue and the cases of the various people he spoke about.

The Minister fully acknowledges that the increasing waiting times for primary care therapy services is a source of real concern for service users, their families and, indeed, the Minister herself. As outlined, a national initiative is under way to address long waiting times for primary care, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy and to reduce the numbers awaiting access to services significantly by the end of the year. Furthermore, the Minister has committed to building capacity in primary care. To support efforts to reduce waiting times, an additional 200 whole-time equivalents were approved for recruitment in primary care therapy services in 2026. The Government has also committed to increasing the number of college training places for therapy professions. In June of last year, the Government announced a major expansion in health and social care professional training places, with 461 new places to be delivered across nine priority disciplines. Occupational therapy places have increased from 125 in 2020 to 198 in 2025, which is an increase of almost 60%. In 2025, additional occupational therapy places were also created on a new tertiary programme.

The Minister assures the Deputy that this Government is committed to ensuring that every person with therapy needs receives timely, high-quality care. The Minister continues to support efforts to address the waiting times for primary care therapy services, including occupational therapy.

School Funding

Deputy Michael Cahill: I welcome the opportunity to again raise this important issue and to request that the Minister for Education and Youth provide additional funding for significant improvement and refurbishment works in schools. What is happening in my county of Kerry is simply not acceptable in 2026. We have a systemic problem of underinvestment and as I outlined about two weeks ago in this Chamber, it is very obvious in Scoil Iognáid Rís in Daingean Uí Chúis-Dingle. Conditions there are "outdated and dangerous", yet the school is told to apply under the emergency works scheme or the summer works scheme. With respect, these schemes are completely inadequate for what is required here. One cannot fix a 60-year-old school with structural and design failures through patchwork funding.

It is not an isolated case. In Scoil Réalt na Mara in Cromane, the principal has confirmed to me that its minor works grant is just over €8,700 but a basic project like painting the school costs over €21,000 plus VAT. This is a funding model that is completely divorced from reality. Even more concerning, the school is being extended, increasing the building's size by over 50%, yet the funding to maintain it will not increase accordingly. How can that possibly make sense? We see similar problems in Presentation Monastery National School in Killarney. I call on the Minister to urgently progress the climate action summer works scheme application for St. Brigid's Presentation Secondary School in Killarney, particularly regarding the upgrading of pupil toilet facilities. This is basic infrastructure and it cannot be delayed any longer.

In general, schools are waiting far too long for clarity on staffing and summer programmes. This should be provided as soon as possible to allow schools to plan accordingly and give certainty to staff. It is the least that they deserve.

Beyond infrastructure, the school is also dealing with significant demographic pressures and high levels of need yet has no access to DEIS supports in the Killarney area. This must be analysed and corrected. In Filemore National School, funding has been approved under the additional school accommodation scheme but is stuck in paperwork and bureaucracy. Will the Minister of State ask his officials to progress this with immediate effect? Aghatubrid National School is still waiting on progress for an autism unit, which is a vital service for families there. The tiles in Scoil Naomh Mhichíl Naofa in Dungeagan are almost 50 years old. The school has been asked to recost the works for a second time. Can that be looked into? Financing the day-to-day running costs of Caherdaniel National School is a major struggle. The list goes on. Castledrum National School is seeking a special class. The building is already there. The National Council for Special Education, NCSE, might review this decision, as the school was already turned down. I do not see any sense or merit in that. It is the same in Killarney, which has major development plans - I will talk to the Minister of State in due course about that - as has Coláiste na Sceilge in Cahersiveen.

The common threads here are clear - delays, underfunding, a system built on outdated assumptions, bureaucracy and too much red tape. Schools are being forced to fight for basic and essential infrastructure, so I am calling for three actions. The first is a comprehensive assessment of all primary and secondary school buildings in County Kerry and a proper identification of the scale of the refurbishment and modernisation required. The second is a dedicated funding stream for older school buildings, separate from minor and emergency works, to deal with structural long-term deficiencies. The third is a review of the minor works grant model so that it reflects the actual size and maintenance needs of school buildings and not just enrolment numbers.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Youth (Deputy Michael Moynihan): I thank the Deputy for his Topical Issue. It gives me the opportunity to update the Dáil about investment in schools in Kerry but, more importantly, it shows that the Deputy is in touch with all the school communities, which is hugely important. All Deputies from all sides of the House are engaging with school communities because they are a hugely important piece. They are educating our young people and are meeting many challenges head on both at leadership level in the schools and as teachers and special needs assistants, SNAs, for which I commend them.

The Deputy mentioned a number of schools in Kerry. I do not have the exact details of all the schools but I will endeavour to get them. I want to reassure the Deputy that we are aware of the challenges faced right across the country with regard to the schools estate, particularly in County Kerry. The Deputy will be aware that over €7.55 billion has been included in the sectoral investment plan for education and youth over the next four years. This plan has a very strong emphasis on maximising existing capacity and prioritising building projects to meet the most urgent needs. The plan includes 105 schools across the country, three of which are in Kerry.

Since 2020, the Department of Education and Youth has provided €148 million in capital funding for schools in Kerry. Over this period, a total of 66 schools have been upgraded either through the provision of new school buildings, large-scale extensions or modular accommodation. More than 160 small-scale improvement projects were also completed in

Kerry during that time. Eleven school projects in Kerry are under construction while another three projects will go to tender or construction in the 2026-27 period.

The Deputy mentioned a number of schools awaiting special classes. A total of 70 special classes have been sanctioned in County Kerry over the past five years, of which 17 have been sanctioned for September 2026. The Deputy spoke about the minor works scheme. A number of grants are available to schools such as minor works grants, ICT grants, the summer works scheme and the emergency works scheme.

The Deputy gave a reasonably good tour of the kingdom of Kerry in respect of the schools he mentioned and asked me to do a number of things. We are constantly reviewing the funding mechanisms and the capital investment in our schools right across the country. Visits to some schools would have shown that minor works or emergency works would not be enough to deal with the scale of the work that needs to be done. We are acutely aware of the challenges. The Deputy put his point very well with regard to a school that increased its capacity and floor size and still remained at the same level of the minor works scheme. I will certainly go back to the Department and look at that.

On the Presentation school and the toilet facilities, these are urgent matters that need to be dealt with. The Deputy has made several representations across the school communities in Kerry and I endeavour to take up those issues with him. As for the schools he has mentioned, I will certainly look for an update on them to ensure there is an investment in the schools, starting with the most urgent. I will also meet the Deputy to go through the list of schools he is progressing. In the not-too-distant future, if the visas will be stamped, I hope to get across the border to the kingdom as well.

Deputy Michael Cahill: I thank the Minister of State for the response but I have to say it does not match the reality being experienced by many schools across County Kerry. This evening, I have raised consistent and repeated concerns from multiple school communities and I would like to return briefly to a few of them. Scoil Iognáid Rís, Dingle, has a building that is fundamentally unfit for purpose. This is not a minor works issue; it is a full redevelopment issue. In the case of Scoil Réalt na Mara, the funding model is clearly broken in that schools are expected to maintain expanding buildings with completely inadequate grants. In the case of Presentation Monastery National School, Killarney, I stress again that the climate action summer works scheme application, particularly for upgrading the pupil toilets there, must be progressed urgently. These are basic facilities and there is no justification for delay.

As schools cannot continue to operate in a system where essential projects are stuck in bureaucracy, approved funding is not translating into delivery on the ground and principals are left firefighting instead of planning, I will ask again very directly whether the Minister of State will commit to a full assessment of school infrastructure in Kerry. Will he introduce a dedicated refurbishment fund for older schools and will he ensure urgent applications like that of Presentation Monastery National School are fast-tracked without delay? At the heart of all this is a very simple question, namely, why should a child in Kerry be expected to learn in conditions and environments that would not be tolerated anywhere else in the country?

This is about safety, fairness and delivering a basic standard of education infrastructure that every child deserves. If we continue as we are, we are not improving our education system but

are allowing it to fall behind. As the Minister of State knows well, the ones paying the price for this are the children sitting in those classrooms every day that are not sustainable.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: I thank Deputy Cahill for his closing remarks. I take the point very seriously. He has very eloquently put the challenges facing several schools he has listed on the Dáil record as regards funding and some basic infrastructure.

As a country, we have been very proud of our education system that has developed over many years but it is crucial because you have to have the right working environments for the teaching communities, leadership, teachers, SNAs and all the school communities together. More importantly, it is crucial to deliver a first-class education system. We have a huge amount of funding in place in terms of the capital funding over the next while, but we also have a huge amount of schools where there is competing demand to try to meet that.

The Deputy mentioned seven schools, and if I have missed any one of them the Deputy might correct me on it, but I will endeavour to find out exactly what the issues are with each of those and report back to him. On the minor works and all the other schemes, the summer works scheme was started many years ago and has allowed funding to go into schools. It was the intention at the time that the works would be done over the summer holidays to allow for the least disruption but it has moved on from that. I take the point regarding some of the schools the Deputy mentioned, particularly in Dingle and the structural deficit that is there. I will endeavour to get a full update for him on them. He can rest assured the Government is very committed to funding schools right across the country, particularly in County Kerry. We have seen the benefit of education and the Deputy mentioned several schools that have indicated they wish to have special classes. We are working meticulously through numbers at present and I will certainly come back to the Deputy on the schools he has raised with me as a matter of urgency.

I assure Deputy Cahill that I take seriously the issues he has raised regarding the school estates across Kerry. I will endeavour to make sure any bureaucracy or red tape that is holding up any the projects is cut through to deliver for him and for County Kerry.

Educational Disadvantage

Deputy Ged Nash: We were told time and again that the identification of DEIS plus schools would be done in a transparent, robust and evidence-based way but the fact that not a single school in Drogheda has found its way into this long-awaited scheme leads me to challenge that assertion.

As the Minister of State will know, Drogheda is the largest town in Ireland yet to be declared a city. It is a great place with a great spirit and yet like all urban areas, we have our problems. We have pockets of severe and deep social and economic intergenerational disadvantage. I deal with those challenges every day. This is recognised officially in the Geiran review, which I managed to have commissioned several years ago. What followed was *ad hoc* short-term additional teaching and support resources. When the Drogheda implementation board's mandate ended, the disadvantage and poverty did not. Schools like St. John's and St. Paul's, St. Patrick's and St. Brigid's would have expected to be included in DEIS plus. St. Joseph's, Sunday's Gate, for example, and others would have expected elevation to DEIS 1 status.

Deputy Byrne and I brought all principals of local schools together when the original decision was made to review this appalling decision soon after it was made. To say we were collectively shocked at the outcome is the understatement of the year.

That these schools were left behind leads me to question whether the Pobal index and the new DEIS plus identification model were used at all. The Department of education has got this badly wrong. The evidence before my own eyes, based on the work I do every single day, the levels of need and the data and the qualitative and quantitative evidence we have available all say to me that a massive error was made in this regard by the Department. The Minister of State will have the chance to correct that error. We genuinely believe a mistake has been made. While we know there is an appeals process under way, there needs to be more meaningful engagement with these schools aside from a desktop appeals process and review.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Right through last year and continuing up to this week, I met principals of DEIS schools in Drogheda on various issues. Even back then, before the announcement of the DEIS plus scheme, it was very disheartening for schools to tell me they were very worried about being forgotten once more and as it turns out, they were right.

DEIS schools in Drogheda provide an incredibly supportive environment for local children to thrive in. They are at the heart of communities that have been forgotten by successive governments. After the Government's DEIS plus announcement, Drogheda schools and community leaders collectively expressed absolute outrage and devastation at the fact that not one school in the largest town in this country was included in the new DEIS plus funding scheme despite several other schools at the other end of the county being included- fair play to them - but there is a blatant imbalance here.

Local principals at these schools went as far as to say there was a de facto demotion for existing DEIS schools. How can people in our area have confidence in the Department of education when they are once again being snubbed by the Government and this Department on the provision of desperately needed DEIS placement in an area that is suffering severe deprivation? The exclusion directly contradicts the 2022 Pobal HP deprivation data and recommendations from the 2021 Geiran scoping report, which have been outlined already. In a town that is used to being treated unfairly by successive governments, and I do not say that lightly, this latest snub has gone beyond the pale. Behind this wrong decision by the Government, thousands of children are being left without. It needs urgent reconsideration for all those who are being left behind.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: I thank both Deputies for raising the issue. On a serious note, I always admire when constituency colleagues come together on issues of education. It shows the depth of knowledge and commitment they have to education and I have seen that in several constituencies, so I compliment them on that.

Addressing the education disadvantage and ensuring every child and young person can reach their full potential is key for both me and my colleague, the Minister, Deputy Naughton. We look at this and the supports we give to children as leading to better outcomes for their lives individually, as well as for society. The DEIS plus scheme represents a significant expansion of the targeted education supports. It is designed to provide enhanced, evidence-based support

to 121 schools with the very highest concentration of children and young people experiencing persistent and intergenerational disadvantage.

Approximately 30,000 children and young people nationally will benefit from inclusion in the scheme.

The Deputies raised issues in relation to schools in disadvantaged areas of Drogheda not being included in the scheme. At the outset, I acknowledge the very real challenges faced by the school communities in Drogheda, as well as the commitment of the school leadership, teachers and the entire school community who work continuously to support children and families facing complex and entrenched difficulties. It is important to stress that a school not being included in DEIS does not imply that disadvantage does not exist within that school's community.

The DEIS plus schools were identified using a rules-based model built on nationally available pupil-level administrative data. This model draws on a range of indicators associated with persistent and intergenerational disadvantage, including small-area disadvantage, lone parents, unemployment, Traveller or Roma identity and children living in State-funded emergency accommodation. These indicators are applied consistently across all schools using enrolment data from the past three years. In order to be included under the model, schools must demonstrate both a level of disadvantage significantly higher than the national average and a high concentration of pupils from very or extremely disadvantaged areas.

Schools can experience significant levels of challenge and need but still fall outside the thresholds required for inclusion in this very targeted scheme. A school-led application or self-reporting process would introduce inconsistencies and inequality, which is why a data-driven and national comparative approach is essential. The OECD review of the DEIS identification model highlighted the strengths of this approach, noting that it is multidimensional, general data protection regulation compliant and places no administrative burden on the schools.

The Department also recognises that some schools operate in particularly difficult local environments, where community pressures can impact well-being, engagement and learning. While such pressures are often well understood locally, they are not always captured in the datasets that can be fairly and consistently applied across the entire school system. A rules-based national model must consider all schools on the same basis; it cannot substitute locally known challenges for data that are not available or comparable nationwide.

When applied to schools in Drogheda, the model reflected disadvantage but not at the level of concentration required for inclusion in DEIS plus. However, DEIS schools in Drogheda continue to receive significant supports. DEIS grant allocations have been recalculated under the new model, with a number of schools receiving increased funding, and all continue to have access to a full home school community liaison co-ordinators. Additionally, three schools in Drogheda benefit from further staffing supports under the DEIS urban band 1 enhanced capitation rate, as recommended by the Geiran report, providing additional teaching capacity and stability. This measure has been recently extended and all schools have been notified. The appeals process for schools not included in DEIS plus is now open, with full details available on the Department of education's website.

Deputy Ged Nash: I would like to have more time available to discuss this, because I am confounded by that response. Effectively, what the Minister of State is saying is that we have disadvantage but that it is not at the level of concentration required for inclusion in DEIS plus. That is quite extraordinary in light of the data we have available.

I will give the Minister of State an example. At least three of the schools serve particular areas. I am going to read out the levels of disadvantage in the context of the HP deprivation index in 2022. One area on the north side had a HP deprivation index of minus 33. There was 27% unemployment among males there and 47% of people in the area were lone parents. On the south side, one area stood at minus 32 on the deprivation index. It had an unemployment rate of 27% and 25% of those in the area were lone parents. All the schools in that area are accommodating children who are in international protection accommodation services, IPAS, centres, many of them coming from the largest IPAS centre in the country, namely the Mosney centre. It is meeting all the thresholds laid down by the new DEIS identification model and the HP model. This is extraordinary. It needs to be reviewed in a meaningful way.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: The Minister of State is paying lip service to the dedication of the staff carrying the can for inadequate Government investment in areas ravaged on the basis of the criteria he listed, namely lone parenthood, unemployment and children living in State-funded emergency accommodation and international protection accommodation. We have Mosney seven minutes down the road and we have the D Hotel, the only large hotel in the town centre of Drogheda, which was ripped away by Government. It does not meet the Minister of State's criteria. It is an absolute insult to the schools and to the teachers who are carrying the can for this. Worse still, it is an insult to the children who need these State supports.

I will tell the Minister of State another thing: the silence in the south of Louth and Drogheda by Government representatives is absolutely astounding. I think that Government backbenchers will agree that this is the wrong decision and that it needs to be reversed.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: In the first instance, the appeal process is there. I am sure the school communities are engaging to ensure that appeals are submitted.

Going back to the challenges in relation to this matter, we have often seen that the criteria being used are very robust. The data collection is also very robust. The challenge here is that the Deputies have given me figures in relation to percentages of unemployment and lone parents and information in respect of IPAS centres. It is hugely important that we have a robust system that goes through all the schools and that the resources that are put in for DEIS plus, or even DEIS in the first instance, are robust enough that we can understand it and stand over it. What the Deputies have outlined is serious, particularly as they see flaws in the system. It is hugely important that this is demonstrated in any appeal that is put forward by the school communities in relation to DEIS plus. These are robust mechanisms that have been considered in the context of international best practice. To be fair, the review in that regard was very complimentary regarding the system.

We are trying to make sure that the scarce resources available to the State are targeted at and reaching the most vulnerable. What the Deputies have outlined would certainly give me food for thought in the context of the percentages they mentioned in a number of instances, such as the figures relating to lone parents and unemployment. I appeal to them to make sure

that the school communities include that information in their appeals. I take this opportunity to reassure them that the system is robust enough to ensure that those data will be taken into consideration into the future. The wider points the Deputies made in relation to Drogheda and the large urban centre are not lost on me.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar athló ar 7.57 p.m. go dtí 8.47 a.m., Déardaoin, an 7 Bealtaine 2026.

The Dáil adjourned at 7.57 p.m. until 8.47 a.m. on Thursday, 7 May 2026.