



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—Neamhcheartaithe
(OFFICIAL REPORT—Unrevised)

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 13 Bealtaine 2026

Wednesday, 13 May 2026

Chuaigh an Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan) i gceannas ar 9 a.m.

Paidir agus Machnamh.

Prayer and Reflection.

Ábhair Shaincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Matters

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): 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 Joe Cooney - To discuss the need for a statutory community engagement standard.

Deputy Emer Currie - To discuss the need for regulation of loot boxes and chance-based microtransactions in video games in view of their similarities to gambling and the potential risks posed to minors.

Deputy Michael Cahill - To discuss the rising costs of living across housing, energy, insurance, childcare and essential services and long-term affordability for households in Ireland.

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

Deputy Robert O'Donoghue - To discuss funding for family resource centre buildings in light of increasing demand for services.

Deputy Albert Dolan - To discuss the pricing of train tickets for services between Athenry and Galway.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness - To discuss patient transport and other challenges to accessing health services in Waterford.

Deputy Louis O'Hara - To discuss recognition of long Covid as an occupational illness for healthcare workers.

Deputy Mattie McGrath - To discuss the Shannon pipeline project and the cost and environmental implications for and impact on the Shannon region.

Deputies Paul Murphy and Seán Crowe - To discuss the proposed move of the An Post sorting office in Edmondstown to Lucan.

Deputy Jen Cummins - To discuss supports for children and students with dyslexia.

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

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

Deputy Barry Ward - To discuss support mechanisms for families when their childcare centre withdraws from the core funding model.

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

Deputy Tom Brabazon - To discuss the disruption to DART services in north Dublin.

Deputy Michael Murphy - To discuss actions to address growing road safety risks associated with horse-drawn vehicles on public roads.

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

Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan - To discuss the loss of medical card access due to age-based insurance restrictions on general practitioners.

Deputy Pa Daly - To discuss provision of an additional special needs class in Ballyduff.

Deputy Thomas Gould - To discuss the promised review of the voids return programme.

Deputy Ciarán Ahern - To discuss the proposed move of the An Post sorting office in Edmondstown to Lucan.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire - To discuss the working time directive and Defence Forces staff.

Deputies Pearse Doherty and Pat the Cope Gallagher - To discuss the urgent need for the drug givinostat to be made available for children suffering from Duchenne muscular dystrophy, and to discuss access to approved treatments for people with Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

The matters raised by Deputies Pearse Doherty, Pat the Cope Gallagher, Mattie McGrath, Joe Cooney, Séamus McGrath and Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire have been selected for discussion.

Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate

Medicinal Products

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta as a chuid ama a roinnt liom. Tá dhá nóiméad agam. I raise the urgent access to the drug givinostat for children-----

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): Dhá nóiméad.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Yes. I want to raise the urgent issue of access to the drug givinostat for children living with Duchenne muscular dystrophy, or DMD, as it is commonly known. Givinostat was approved by the European Medicines Agency last June. Nearly a year has passed, the HSE is still reviewing whether it is going to cover the cost of this drug for children and adults across the State. What makes the delays around givinostat's availability particularly distressing - and I am sure the Minister of State knows this - is that it is only available to children who still have mobility. These children are in a race against time, and their parents are looking on as the HSE and the Government drags their feet while their children are seriously at risk of not being able to have the life-changing support offered by this drug.

Matters are particularly urgent for young Aaron Langan. Aaron is a nine-year-old from Laghey in my county, Donegal. His family are fearful that if Aaron's mobility is further impacted by this condition that he will not be able to have this life-changing drug, even if the HSE approves its reimbursement. Aaron's mother and father were here in the Dáil last year campaigning and pleading with Government to get its act together to allow them access to this lifesaving drug. At that time, Aaron was walking. Today, he is in a wheelchair. As a result, the issue of mobility is absolutely crucial.

This drug is not just a life game-changer for Aaron. Young Diarmuid O'Sullivan from Donegal is another example. Diarmuid is ten years of age. His older brother Nathan was on a trial in Britain. Nathan is now an adult who is able to avail of this drug and have a fulfilled life, yet Diarmuid, who is ten, is not able to have it. Imagine the distress of a parent knowing that one child has the drug that changes your life and the other child is denied it because the HSE and the Government have not got their act together. I ask the Government for a compassionate intervention to allow these drugs be made available to children who are in a race against time.

Deputy Pat the Cope Gallagher: I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise this important issue. My colleague Deputy Doherty has outlined how it is affecting two families in Donegal. The European Medicines Agency has approved this drug for DMD last year. Now, together with, I am sure, all colleagues in the House, I am anxious that the Department would exert pressure on the HSE to make this drug available to these children. An example of the success of this drug is that Nathan O'Sullivan, who Deputy Doherty mentioned, has been on this drug for a number of years. His mother took him to the UK. He took part in the trial relating to the drug. The trial was extremely successful, and his life has been prolonged. He leads a full life. He works with the local GAA club as a statistician and has his own car. We would like to think that his brother Diarmuid and the Langan family would have the opportunity of obtaining this drug as well.

We know the cost of it can seem rather high but we cannot put a cost on the life of a child. They are suffering and the families are suffering. The mental torture for families with this condition is 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year as they care for their children. There are about 100 or so in the country. It is incumbent on the Minister, the HSE and the Department to ensure that this drug is made available as soon as possible. There is a question of being ambulatory. They have to be able to move when they start the drug so the clock is ticking. It is vitally important that a positive decision is taken as soon as possible and that the drugs are made available.

I would also say to the drug company involved, which is making exorbitant profits, that it should reduce the prices and work with the Department and the HSE to make the drug available sooner rather than later.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): I thank Deputies Gallagher and Doherty for raising this matter. I will be answering on behalf of the Minister for Health, Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill.

As stated, Duchenne muscular dystrophy is a rare and progressive disease affecting the muscle strength and function of boys almost exclusively, with approximately ten children diagnosed with the condition each year. The Minister, Deputy Carroll MacNeill, has engaged with representative groups and the parents of children suffering from this condition several times over the past year. The Minister has followed progress closely and will be meeting with patient groups again this week. The Government is committed to providing timely access to new and innovative medicines and has made considerable investments in recent years, with annual expenditure on medicines now approaching €4 billion.

To move completely to givinostat, it is sold under the brand name Duzyvat, for the treatment of DMD in ambulant patients aged six years or older. It has recently undergone assessment by the European Medicines Agency, EMA. The European Commission granted conditional marketing authorisation for use of givinostat in this indication on 6 June 2025. The Health Service Executive has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. In line with the Act, a company must submit an application to the HSE to have a new medicine added to the formal reimbursement list. Reimbursement is for licensed indications that have been granted marketing authorisation by the EMA or Ireland's Health Products Regulatory Authority.

This is the importance piece. The Minister met with her Italian counterpart at the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council, EPSCO, meeting in June 2025 in Luxembourg to ask him to encourage the company, Italfarmaco, to submit a timely pricing and reimbursement application to Ireland. On 6 August 2025, an application for reimbursement was received by the HSE and underwent a rapid review by the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics.

Following the conclusion of a rapid review on 14 August 2025, a full health technology assessment, HTA, was commissioned by the HSE on 26 August. The assessment of the pricing and reimbursement application for givinostat could not proceed until the NCPE received the HTA from the company almost four months later, on the 15 January 2026. I need to set out the timelines clearly. The HTA has been completed and confidential commercial negotiations between the HSE's corporate pharmaceutical unit and Italfarmaco have begun, with the receipt of a commercial offer from Italfarmaco on Friday, 8 May, which was last Friday. The HSE continues to engage with the applicant to progress this application in a timely manner. To be clear, the conclusion of the rapid of review was on 14 August. A full health technology assessment was commissioned by the HSE. The assessment of the pricing and reimbursement application for givinostat could not proceed until the NCPE received a full HTA from the company. That arrived on 15 January this year. The HTA has been completed now and

confidential commercial negotiations are under way. A commercial offer was received from the company last Friday.

I thank the Deputy for sharing the stories of the two families who will want to understand exactly where the hold-ups are.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: With respect, that does not cut it for these families. These parents are looking at their children in a race against time. The case of Diarmuid is an example. His mother said that Diarmuid's brother, Nathan, has the same condition. Nathan has had access to the drug through a UK trial for more than ten years but Diarmuid is approaching the age where he is likely to lose mobility. She asked me to imagine being a mother opening the fridge every day to give her eldest boy this life-changing medicine and not giving it to her other little boy. She asked me to imagine the turmoil that causes her day after day. She said she met the Minister for Health and a promise was made to allow compassionate access that would be fast-tracked for her child. She says time is not on her side. The case of Aaron, a young boy of nine years of age, is the same. He was walking when people were pleading with the Government last year and now he is in a wheelchair, not knowing, even if the drug is approved, whether he will be able to access it. This is not good enough.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): Go raibh maith agat, a Theachta.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I am a parent of four young boys. I would go through a wall for them. The Government has to allow compassionate access to these drugs immediately.

Deputy Pat the Cope Gallagher: What is difficult to understand is that givinostat is available in most EU countries. Whatever is going to be decided now must be fast-tracked. The Minister of State referred to the receipt of a commercial offer on Friday, 8 May. In the next few weeks, a decision must be taken. The ironic thing about this is that Aaron's family lives in Laghy, close to the Border and the O'Sullivan family lives in Ballybofey, close to the Border. The children on the other side of the Border, in Fermanagh, Tyrone or wherever are availing of this. It is vital that there is no discrimination as far as these children are concerned. We are pleading with the Minister of State and with the Minister, who is pragmatic - we have had dealings with her about issues in Donegal. I hope a decision can be taken soon. The question of finance should not be an issue. I am calling on all concerned, including the drug company, the HSE and the Department, to ensure these children can avail of this treatment as soon as possible.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): Go raibh maith agat, a Theachta.

Deputy Pat the Cope Gallagher: Sorry Chair, time is ticking. It is an important issue.

Deputy Mary Butler: I thank the two Deputies. It is important we understand that negotiations are under way. There is a system and process in place and simply saying that does not cut it from a political perspective is not at all logical.

There are children all over Ireland who need this drug. The Minister recognises that. There is a process in place. Italfarmaco, the pharmaceutical company, came with a proposal last Friday and the confidential commercial negotiations are under way. Today is Wednesday. The reason there was a delay between January and now is that the NCPE did not received the full HTA from the company until 15 January. It took four months. I do not know why these delays have happened but there are children who need this drug and I agree with the Deputies that it should not be the situation that a child living in Donegal does not have access and a child living five miles down the road does. We understand that but it could not be clearer. The application relating to the commercial negotiations was received last Friday and it is currently getting the best attention. I will speak to the Minister again later today about this. She knows the two Deputies are raising it. She was not in a position to be here today.

The HSE cannot comment on the possible outcomes of the ongoing process, as the Deputies will understand, because of the confidential nature of it. I understand what they said about compassion but I also agree with Deputy Gallagher that the pharmaceutical companies need to come to the table as well. I answered a similar question here last week about Friedreich's Ataxia. It is important now that the negotiations are under way and that we get a positive result.

Water Services

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Ar an gcéad dul síos, gabhaim buíochas leis an Cheann Comhairle as cabhrú leis an Topical seo. I also thank the people who travelled here last week and who have been fighting this campaign in the interest of the community and common sense for more than a decade now. I thank Councillors Seamus Morris and Phyll Bugler, Emma Kennedy who has done massive work on this, anglers and others who came here last week, and the community activists and ordinary concerned citizens who are exposing the madness of this project. The proposed eastern and midlands water supply project seeks to abstract 300 million to 330 million litres per day from the River Shannon at Parteen Basin and transfer it to the Dublin eastern region. While securing a resilient water supply for Dublin is a legitimate national objective, the current proposal raises serious legal, environmental, financial and governance issues. None of us are anti-Dublin but we want common sense.

The project may breach international environmental laws, especially the water framework directive and habitats directive. Environmental impacts have been misrepresented through reliance on average flow statistics. This will lead to severe impacts during drought conditions. Better alternatives, including addressing leakage in Dublin - which everyone talks about - and groundwater development, have not been properly evaluated. The project externalises environmental risk to the Shannon catchment, while primarily benefiting Dublin. That is totally discriminatory. The environmental assessment does not exclude adverse impacts on protected habitats and species under EU law. The EU forbids those. In its current form, the project exposes the State to significant legal risk, ecological damage and long-term policy inconsistency and that must be looked at as well.

The 2% claim is misleading. The project documentation repeatedly states that the abstraction represents approximately 2% of the Shannon's average flow. This statistic is misleading and scientifically untrue. Ecological impacts are determined by flow conditions, not long-term averages. Evidence presented in submissions shows that during dry summer flows, extraction could remove 25% to 30% of available flow and during extreme drought

conditions, which we experience pretty often in Ireland, it could remove up to 38% to 40% of available flow. This is not a marginal intervention by any measure. The wool is being pulled over people's eyes. It is not acceptable to say the abstraction is 2%. The environmental law it will breach is the water framework directive. The EU law provides that member states prevent deterioration of water bodies. The Shannon system is already classified with a below good status in several stretches. The application does not demonstrate with certainty that a deterioration will not occur. If deterioration cannot be excluded, the project must pass the strict Article 4(7) derogation test by showing overriding public interest, no better environmental alternatives and all mitigation measures implemented. It is failing in all those important areas.

Regarding the habitats directive, we have been told about how it affects anybody who looks for planning permission at home for anything. We have to look at all those issues. Why would we allow Uisce Éireann do what it likes? It has a blank cheque. We are going to have the national children's hospital No. 2? It used to be a small amount of money but now we are talking about between €3 billion and €10 billion to put two big pipes up through the middle of the country when it is totally unnecessary. Fix the leaks in Dublin, use common sense and save the water. This is treated water and up to 40% of it is being leaked on a daily basis.

Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Niall Collins): I thank the Deputy for raising this important issue. There is a critical need for a new water source for Dublin, the east and the midlands. Currently, the River Liffey supplies 85% of the water requirements for 1.7 million people in Dublin, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow. By relying so heavily on one river, there is no alternative if there is a contamination or weather event and no backup if equipment failure affects supply.

The project will provide Dublin, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow with a resilient, safe and secure water supply. It will also provide infrastructure with the capacity for future offtakes to serve communities along the route in Tipperary, Offaly and Westmeath. The current cost estimate is €4.6 billion to €6 billion and construction of the project is scheduled to commence in 2028, with Uisce Éireann aiming to complete the project by 2032, subject to planning and other statutory approvals.

It is important to note that the project will abstract a maximum of 2% of the average flow of the River Shannon at the Parteen Basin downstream of Lough Derg. The water levels at Lough Derg and the Parteen Basin will remain in the control of the ESB and the abstraction will not affect the normal operating water levels.

Uisce Éireann's modelling shows that the abstraction is sustainable, will have a neutral effect on water quality and will make no visible day-to-day difference for any water users. Extensive preparation and studies have been undertaken and Uisce Éireann will continue to monitor the project during and after its construction. The potential environmental impacts of the project are being considered as part of the statutory planning process and will ultimately form part of the determination to be made by An Coimisiún Pleanála. This includes an extensive public consultation. As part of the planning application for the project submitted last December, a 30,000-page environmental impact assessment report, EIAR, was submitted by Uisce Éireann. The EIAR includes details of any likely significant environmental effects that may arise and the proposed mitigation measures that are being put in place. All of this is being

considered as part of the planning application process for the project and I would also note that the EIAR and other planning documents have been published by Uisce Éireann.

On the lands required for the project, Uisce Éireann has engaged extensively with the main farming organisations - the Irish Farmers' Association, IFA, and the Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers' Association, ICMSA - and an agreement has been reached on a standard agricultural wayleave package with both landowner representative organisations. I am pleased to note that around 81% of landowners have already signed up to this compensation package and Uisce Éireann is continuing its community engagement efforts.

Uisce Éireann's community engagement clinics are continuing throughout 2026 and a dedicated community liaison officer is working with the local communities along the route. The Government is committed to getting this vital infrastructure built as quickly as possible and will continue to support Uisce Éireann to deliver it.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: The same thing is happening. I think it was Albert Einstein who said that doing same thing over and over again and expecting a different result was a form of insanity. Uisce Éireann is obviously out of control. We all know that from dealing with it on a regular basis. The Minister of State believes this. Its arrogance is typified by the statement that 81% of farmers have signed up to a project that does not have planning permission or an abstraction licence. Imagine that. Hundreds of millions of euro paid out, along with a 25% payment, to those landowners. I criticised the IFA and ICMSA for doing those kinds of seedy deal before the planning permission for the project had even been granted. This is what goes on in this country. What about the hundreds of landowners who have not signed up and do not want this going through their lands? Many others might not want it either but they are being forced to by so-called representative bodies. We are leaving the people behind. Have we learned nothing from the protests in recent weeks?

I could go into a lot of stuff here. The habitats directive has been totally overridden. The Shannon system is already ecologically stressed. There are alternatives that have not been examined. It is insane to pump treated water from Parteen Basin into Dublin just to leak up to 40% of it into the ground. We ought to remember what leaks back in when the pressure goes down or there are bursts - the filth and dirt that seeps back in to the people of Dublin in the water they are getting. We are told that we are going to store the water in the pipe for a month during different drought periods. What kind of water are we going to have? This is insane but it is just a typical example of Uisce Éireann's arrogance. It will not deal with anybody properly. It just throws money at the problem and the Government throws money at Uisce Éireann. Councillors Séamie Morrison and Phyll Bugler, Ms Emma Kennedy, the team here last week and all the others who are opposed to this - not for any selfish reasons, but for the sake of the ecology, the River Shannon, the region and sanity - are not going to go away easily because it is riddled with mistakes. There will be judicial reviews and God knows what else, and it will fall down all over the place because it is based on a tissue of false information instead of proper statistics.

Deputy Niall Collins: It is important to restate why we need the project. Currently, the water supply in the eastern and midlands region faces a number of serious challenges. A single source - the River Liffey - supplies 85% of the water requirements for 1.7 million people in the greater Dublin area. This dependency on the Liffey results in a serious vulnerability to risks such as

prolonged drought and-or contamination, not just for Dublin, but for the whole of the eastern and midlands region. With forecasts showing that the region will need 34% more water by the year 2044 than is available today, this situation is not sustainable.

The project will address these challenges and provide a secure water supply for housing development and economic growth across eastern and midlands region. The project works in tandem with ongoing leakage reduction efforts. Uisce Éireann is investing over €2 billion in leakage reduction under the revised national development plan. Fixing leaks is, of course, essential but it is only part of the solution. Fixing leaks alone will not meet the needs of the region nor will it address the issue of over-reliance on the River Liffey. A new sustainable source of water is required alongside continued leakage reduction.

The project went for planning permission in December last year and construction is hoped to commence in 2028, subject to planning permission being granted and not challenged via litigation, so Uisce Éireann is hoping to complete the project by 2032. The project will work in tandem with Uisce Éireann's other major project, namely, the greater Dublin drainage project. Uisce Éireann will continue to work to accelerate the delivery of this vital infrastructure and this process has already been greatly aided by reforms that the Government has made as part of implementing the accelerating infrastructure report.

Public Consultation Process

Deputy Joe Cooney: I raise an issue that communities all over the country can relate to, namely, proper community engagement. These are three very important words. We hear the phrase all the time. It is in development plans, policy documents and Government reports. Developers talk about it while councils and other State bodies say they are doing it. It even came up in two Oireachtas reports that I worked on this week. However, what does "community engagement" really mean and does it actually make any difference? Many communities feel that the answer is "No" because there are no proper standards to judge whether engagement was real and meaningful or whether it was just a public meeting followed by a report that backed a decision that was already made. This is not real community engagement. It just looks like community engagement, and people can see through that.

There are already some good examples of how proper engagement can be delivered. They involve people being generally included, consultations happening early enough to influence decisions and public feedback actually being listened to. These are not radical ideas. They are basic common sense, but the problem is they are voluntary.

As we all know, in planning voluntary rules mean nothing. When a community in east or west Clare is being consulted about a wind turbine project that will affect its area for years to come, it deserves to know the process meets a proper recognised standard, not whatever the developer decides is good enough for the area.

My ask is simple. Will the Government consider introducing a national legal standard for community engagement in planning, policy decisions and grant funding? Will projects have to show that engagement was meaningful before planning permission or final approval is granted? Right now, we are spending public money on consultation that communities do not trust, reports they do not believe in and decisions they feel they have no real say in. That is not good planning and it damages trust between people and the State. We do not need to start from

the beginning. There are already good examples that could help create an Irish standard but we need the political will to make it a requirement instead of just a nice idea.

Deputy Niall Collins: I thank Deputy Cooney for raising what is a very important matter and giving us the opportunity to update the House.

Stakeholder public engagement is one of the most important principles underlining the planning system, with the need for engagement with local communities being of particular importance to enable every citizen to have their say in how their area grows and develops over time. Under the Planning and Development Act 2024, planning authorities are required to consult State agencies, prescribed authorities and members of the public when preparing development plans and determining planning applications. These legal requirements ensure that planning decisions are transparent, sustainable and consistent with national and regional policy objectives. The Planning and Development Act 2024 strengthens the emphasis on a plan-led approach to development, with co-ordinated planning and collaboration between public bodies to identify future requirements for schools, healthcare facilities, transport systems and utilities before major developments are approved.

Importantly, the planning process is not limited to institutional consultation alone. Public and community engagement is a core principle underpinning the 2024 Act. Members of the public, community organisations, environmental groups, business interests and other stakeholders have an important role in shaping the future development of their areas.

Public participation requirements ensure that communities are given opportunities to engage during the preparation of development plans, local area plans and planning schemes, including in relation to the zoning of land for different purposes. Statutory public consultation periods and engagement initiatives undertaken by planning authorities in developing these plans help to promote accountability and democratic transparency within the planning system, recognising that such plans ultimately guide and inform decision-making on planning applications.

The reforms introduced by the Planning and Development Act 2024 seek to create a more coherent, efficient and accessible planning system while preserving strong safeguards for democratic participation and inter-agency co-ordination.

Deputy Joe Cooney: I thank the Minister of State. Every one of us in this House knows of a local project, very often an energy project, in respect of which communities were angry about how developers engaged with them, or about whether they engaged with them at all. Instead of constantly dealing with these disputes, should we not create a clear set of standards that every public and private body must follow, whether it involves a major infrastructure project, a Department policy, the allocation of public funding or a county development plan? This is not about giving communities a veto; it is about making sure that when a project is to have a major impact on people's lives, engagement happens early enough to shape it before all the important decisions are made.

If we want climate projects, roads and housing developments to proceed more quickly and with less public opposition, we need proper national standards that every developer must follow before applying for planning permission. At present, too many communities feel that

consultation begins only after the real decisions have already been taken. That damages trust from the very start and can cause much avoidable concern in communities. It is my intention to bring forward a Private Members' Bill to create national statutory standards for community engagement that all public bodies and private developers will have to follow. I hope the Minister of State will support it.

Deputy Niall Collins: Again, I thank the Deputy for raising this important issue.

The Planning and Development Act 2024 recognises that strong and sustainable communities are best supported through meaningful public participation in local development planning and decision-making. Effective planning is not solely about technical assessments or infrastructure co-ordination; it is also about ensuring communities have a genuine opportunity to shape the future of the places in which they live, work and raise their families.

The Act strengthens the importance of engagement at all stages of the planning process, from the preparation of development plans and local area plans to consultation on individual planning applications and broader regeneration initiatives. Early and constructive consultation with residents, community groups, voluntary groups and local stakeholders, including local businesses, helps to improve transparency and build public awareness. As the provisions of the 2024 Act are commenced, meaningful community participation will remain a central element of a modern, democratic and plan-led system that seeks to deliver sustainable development and an improved quality of life for communities across Ireland.

Defence Forces

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I thank the Minister of State for being here this morning. The Government, including the Minister for Defence, has clearly stated its intention to increase the strength of the Defence Forces, which is badly needed and very welcome. At the end of 2025, there were 7,756 personnel in our Defence Forces, an increase of 200 on the previous 12 months. It is great to see that trajectory. In response to a recent parliamentary question I submitted, the Minister stated her intention to increase the strength of the Defence Forces by 850 in 2026. Again, that is very welcome.

We all know the importance of the Defence Forces and of ensuring they are fully resourced. They play a critical role in our national security. We are renowned internationally for our peacekeeping role. Every branch of the Defence Forces, such as the Air Corps, plays a critical role in many operations, such as humanitarian operations. In this regard, I want to particularly mention the essential role of the Naval Service, whose headquarters are based close to my own constituency in Cork, in our maritime security, which is receiving increasing attention given the importance of protecting our sub-sea utilities and infrastructure. We all agree we need to increase the strength of our Defence Forces.

I want to outline this morning a troubling communication I received from an individual who applied to join the Defence Forces and the difficulties they encountered in that regard over the past nine months or so. They applied initially in July of 2025, took an aptitude test in August and a fitness test in November but nine months on that individual has still not heard whether they will be allowed to join. This is not consistent with the thinking of a Government that says it is a top priority to increase the strength of our Defence Forces. We need an efficient and fair

recruitment process that encourages individuals to apply and ensures they are communicated with and updated on their application status.

This is very concerning and we need to show our genuine commitment to strengthening the Defence Forces. Hearing about situations like this where individuals are facing these kinds of difficulties in the application process, this needs to be reviewed urgently. Why would somebody put themselves through that? We have individuals in this country who are absolutely determined to have a career in the Defence Forces and, of course, they will stay the course, but there are others who may be marginally considering a career and if we have a recruitment process that does not stand up to scrutiny, is not transparent or efficient, does not keep them informed and is not user-friendly, we will not achieve the numbers we should for recruitment to the Defence Forces.

I put it to the Minister of State that this needs to be reviewed. It has taken far too long from the date of application to the point of induction into the Defence Forces. As I said, if this is a genuine commitment of this Government, which I believe it is, we need to review this system urgently so that we put a recruitment process in place that will genuinely achieve the kind of numbers we want and which our Defence Forces and citizens deserve as regards the strength of the overall force.

Deputy Niall Collins: I thank Senator McGrath for raising this important matter and for giving me the opportunity to reply. I begin by reiterating the Government's strong commitment to boosting recruitment to and supporting the retention of personnel in the Defence Forces. Military authorities have advised that the strength of the Permanent Defence Force stood at 7,778 as of 31 March, the latest date for which this figure is available. Last year saw an increase in the overall strength of the Permanent Defence Force by almost 200 personnel, which was facilitated by the achievement of a total of 790 inductions during 2025, the highest figure in 20 years. We want to build on the growth achieved in 2025 and have set a target of 850 inductions to the Permanent Defence Force for 2026. The total number of applications for careers in the Permanent Defence Force exceeded 16,500, and more than 7,000 were received by the end of March of this year. Increases in application numbers and the overall strength of the Permanent Defence Force demonstrate that the key enabling measures which the Government has introduced to support and drive Defence Forces recruitment and retention are yielding positive results.

On the specific matter of the recruitment process for the Defence Forces, the military authorities have advised that the process of candidates being recruited to the Permanent Defence Force comprises several stages, which include shortlisting, psychometric assessments, fitness and interview, medical, Garda vetting and security clearance, offer and attestation. It should be noted that some candidates may be subject to fewer or additional stages of the process, depending on the specific competition for which they have applied, but the majority of candidates follow the process as outlined.

A new candidate management system, Resumo, was introduced in December, making the process easier for applicants. Candidates now receive automated correspondence at all stages of the process to maximize engagement and ensure they are kept informed of the status of their application. My written reply contains a list of overall average times of progression by stage for all general service recruitment candidates who applied in quarter 1 of 2026. The Deputy

has it there in the reply, so I do not need to go through the table. It gives the average number of days for each stage of the process.

The military authorities have informed me that the security clearance process can take anything from six weeks to nine months for candidates, depending on a variety of factors, such as their previous country or countries of residence, how many addresses they have lived at, prior interactions with police or security services and the speed at which foreign authorities respond to requests, to name just some of the complexities.

Recruitment to the Defence Forces remains open and ongoing via a wide range of pathways, including general service recruitment, re-entry schemes and multiple direct entry competitions for specialist roles. A range of new recruitment competition streams have successfully launched in recent years and include new competitions for air traffic controller cadetships, aircraft maintenance technicians, grooms in the Equitation School and dental nurses. Additional new competitions for chefs, communications and information services or cyber roles, medical officers and aircraft maintenance technicians have all launched in recent weeks. The 2026 cadetship competitions closed in March, with over 2,800 applications received.

The key enabling measures include increases in the maximum ages of recruitment and retirement respectively, the extension of private and secondary healthcare to all personnel, and the application of the provisions of the working time directive across the Defence Forces, subject to certain exemptions. I can come back and finish that later.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I thank the Minister of State for outlining the facts. To reiterate, the increase in personnel in the Defence Forces is very welcome, with 780 inductions in 2025. That brought an overall net increase of 200 in the Defence Forces complement, which is welcome. The intention to have 850 inductions this year is also very welcome.

However, I repeat what I said earlier about the importance of having a fair and user-friendly application process in place. When you look at the stages of that process outlined in the reply, from the shortlisting to the psychometric testing and so on, it appears as if it is reasonable up to the point of the vetting. It takes maybe three months to get to the point of vetting and, from there on, there can be a delay of anything up to nine months. That is the area on which I ask for some focus. Of course, I understand the importance of vetting, but I do not see why it should take nine months to carry out that vetting process. I accept that nine months is at the upper end but, at the same time, that is probably the period where people feel the process is letting them down and where they are not receiving any communication, updates or contact.

People have alternatives in life. Thankfully, we are a country with high standards of education and people have alternative careers; we have a strong economy. If we genuinely want to encourage people into our Defence Forces, we have to have a system in place that works for them, is user-friendly and efficient and brings them from the point of application to the point of induction as quickly as possible. We all know the importance of ensuring we meet our targets, as a Government, in increasing the number personnel.

The issue of vetting in particular is one that needs to be reviewed, and I ask the Minister of State to convey that message back to the Minister for Defence, Deputy McEntee.

Deputy Niall Collins: To conclude on some of the key enabling measures that we have introduced for recruitment and retention, we have also increased the patrol duty allowance payable to Naval Service personnel at sea, which has been doubled after ten days at sea in a calendar year. We have seen the extension of the Naval Service tax credit for a further five years, the extension of the service commitment scheme for pilots in the Air Corps and air traffic control personnel, and we have seen engagement of external expertise to support recruitment in the Naval Service. To support recruitment and the implementation of related measures, budget 2026 has provided a record allocation of €1.49 billion to the defence sector, an increase of €145 million over 2025.

I hear what the Deputy is saying about vetting but, whether it is with the Defence Forces, people who are applying to An Garda Síochána or those applying for citizenship, the timelines for some parts of vetting are outside of our control. As I said, if people have lived at multiple addresses or in multiple countries, awaiting replies and clearance on vetting from other jurisdictions outside our control can sometimes lead to delays which, unfortunately, we cannot control.

Defence Forces

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: There is a lot of talk at the minute and a shared desire across all sides of this House to ensure we invest in our Defence Forces. The Defence Forces have been profoundly neglected and that needs to be addressed. As far as I am concerned, Ireland should be strong in neutrality and strong in defence; both things go together.

We hear a lot of big announcements from the Minister but, unfortunately, the reality is that big talk is not going to put feet inside the barracks door. Referring back to the last debate the Minister of State had on the various targets being set and Government's desire to hit those targets, the reality is there is not a hope in the wide earthly world that the Defence Forces will meet the target of 11,000 permanent personnel by 2028. That is under level of ambition 2. It is not going to be reached. At the minute, we are almost 4,000 personnel short of that. There is not a hope that this gap will be made up. We will be lucky to reach the established strength of 9,400. We will be extremely lucky to hit that target.

There is not a hope we are reaching 11,000. The reality is that for all the big announcements and so on, the ultimate test of whether we are going to be able to recruit and retain enough personnel is whether we are showing enough respect for the greatest asset of the Defence Forces, that is, the men and women of the Defence Forces. Against the backdrop of these big announcements, the European Committee on Social Rights has found that the Irish Government is in breach of the European Social Charter because of failing to implement the working time directive. The central point of that is that the Irish Government is refusing still to define what the working day is and what it means in terms of hours and duties. It keeps telling us this is complex but it has been dealing with it for years. If you refuse to define what the working day is, that has obvious implications for ensuring that overtime is counted, recorded and paid. We can go through the findings of the European social committee in relation to this, which found against the Irish Government. There are serious issues in respect of rest periods, ensuring that men and women in the Defence Forces get the daily rest period they are entitled to, that the average working time including overtime is not meant to exceed 48 hours, as well as various

other issues. This is ultimately leading to Defence Forces personnel not getting enough payment for the work they are doing. They are being underpaid for their overtime.

There are also very simple things that could be resolved in respect of when people are in barracks and on rest periods. Basic things such as gym equipment, TV subscriptions and Wi-Fi are meant to be in place in all of these 24-hour duty locations. They are simple things that the Government could easily resolve at very limited cost. These items need to be addressed. There has been some progress on the implementation of the working time directive, but until the working day is defined, until we get to grips with that, and the Government has been dealing with it for over three years, we are still going to have issues of people being underpaid and their overtime not being recognised. This is leading to Defence Forces personnel not feeling valued. They are working in challenging circumstances, with very lengthy periods of work and lengthy and onerous periods of duty. If they are not shown the respect they ought to be in ensuring this is properly compensated, this will contribute to the recruitment and retention crisis that continues in the Defence Forces.

Deputy Niall Collins: I thank the Deputy for raising this important matter. The Minister for Defence is at the annual PDFORRA delegate conference today.

Bringing the Defence Forces within the remit of the Organisation of Working Time Act has been a key issue for the Defence Forces representative associations for a number of years. The inclusion of the Defence Forces under the Organisation of Working Time Act required careful consideration and extensive consultation in getting here and recognises the unique nature of the work carried out by our Defence Forces members. A particular consideration was of course those military activities which, due to their nature, continue to be exempt from the Act. As the Deputy will be aware, it is over 12 months now since the blanket exemption from the Organisation of Working Time Act for Defence Forces personnel was removed in January 2025, and the majority of Defence Forces personnel now enjoy the protections of the Act, including daily and weekly rest and maximum weekly working time over a 17-week period.

I have mentioned that, due to their specific nature, a number of military activities continue to be exempted from the provisions of the working time directive. However, it is important to point out that a number of health and safety protections for those involved in such tasks have been agreed, including prescribed compensatory rest periods, which are now incorporated into Defence Forces regulation. This body of work is rightly seen as a significant step forward in the extensive transformational journey already well under way in the Defence Forces. A range of additional health and safety measures were also agreed, with a number of them already implemented, including the provision of one return commercial home-reunion flight to Ireland in respect of an operational tour of duty of six months, where the security assessment by the military authorities determines that the individual cannot avail of leave in-theatre. In addition, enhanced Wi-Fi services in UNIFIL have been put in place.

Upon the removal of the blanket exemption last year, the Chief of Staff was clear in communicating the responsibilities of Defence Forces management on the implementation of all aspects of the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 across the entire Defence Forces. This included ensuring that commanding officers are fully aware of their management responsibilities with regard to both activities coming within the scope of the directive, and for those activities which are exempt. Military management is continuing to progress the

implementation of a number of remaining health and safety protections and a Defence Forces working group has been convened for this purpose. Some of those measures requiring additional funding beyond existing resources are to be addressed in line with the normal Estimates process.

The military authorities have advised that in the intervening months, numerous briefings have been undertaken across the Defence Forces in addition to the availability of an instructional video. In addition, an instruction document from the Chief of Staff providing guidance to commanders and their personnel on all aspects of the implementation process, coupled with the Defence Forces' non-financial labour budget system, which is now in place, both provide important management tools in ensuring that the provisions of the directive are correctly applied. The Defence Forces are also leading on the development and implementation of a permanent electronic time and attendance system which is expected to be in place later this year. In the meantime, an interim time and attendance system has been put in place.

I am assured that all necessary measures are being taken to ensure the protections of the working time directive are implemented fully on the ground. In that context, the working time directive subcommittee through the conciliation and arbitration scheme continues to meet on a regular basis. Using this forum, any issues which have arisen which pertain to the practical implementation on the ground of the protections set out in the directive have been brought to the attention of the Defence Forces management.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: The Minister of State will be aware that the Defences Forces are a significant part of the life of Cork city. I believe it is similar in his own county. Many personnel are stationed in Haulbowline, Collins Barracks and even in Kilworth in Liam Lynch camp. When I talk to people in the Defence Forces, they see a huge discrepancy and a gap between the kind of ambition that the Minister talks about and the manner in which the Defence Forces operate. They say the same that I have said, that the men and women of the Defence Forces are the greatest asset the Defence Forces have. They see a huge gap between that rhetoric and the reality on the ground. There are some positive elements in the Minister of State's response but it still does not really nail down that key issue. When are we going to get a clear definition of the working day? How are we going to ensure that overtime is properly paid? If people are going to leave their families and their responsibilities at home, and be on campus for 24 hours or more, they deserve to be properly compensated. They deserve that respect. That is what they would get in other jobs. They recognise that this is not the same as any other job. Of course there will be extenuating circumstances. However, there has to be a definition for what is appropriate overtime and how that is paid. Those issues in terms of on-campus are easy fixes. None of them are very expensive.

I also want to briefly raise an issue that has come out of the PDFORRA conference. We wish the delegates the best in their deliberations and I am looking forward to attending later this evening. More than 6,000 personnel are waiting to be paid €3.7 million under claims under local bargaining agreements. Those are agreements already made, reached and owed. The Department of Defence and the Defence Forces are backing the personnel in relation to this. Some senior technicians are owed up to €5,000 each. About 6,000 personnel are down money because the Department of public expenditure has refused to honour agreements that are already made. In the same vein and out of respect for the Defence Forces, will the Minister of State raise the need to release those funds with the Department of public expenditure?

Deputy Niall Collins: I thank the Deputy for raising the issues he has raised. I am sure the Minister, Chief of Staff and management of the Defence Forces are following this discussion very closely. Any of the outstanding issues which the Deputy has raised and indeed any of the issues which will be raised at today's delegate conference will receive maximum attention over the coming weeks and months.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Will you bring it back to the Department of public expenditure?

Deputy Niall Collins: I will.

10 o'clock

Reproductive Rights (Amendment) Bill 2026: Second Stage [Private Members]

Deputy Holly Cairns: I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

Eight years ago, Ireland voted overwhelmingly to repeal the eighth amendment. People voted for compassion and to end the cruelty of forcing women onto planes and ferries. They voted because we believe women should be able to access abortion here at home, with their families, doctors and support systems around them. While enormous progress has been made since then, the promise of repeal has not been fully realised. Many women who receive devastating diagnoses of fatal foetal conditions, often after the 20-week scan, are still forced to make that long, lonely journey to the UK. The mandatory three-day waiting period continues to create unnecessary distress and delay despite having absolutely no medical basis. The continued criminalisation of abortion creates fear among clinicians and stigma for patients.

These issues were all identified in the Government's expert review of the law three years ago. Three years later, women are still waiting. This is why the Social Democrats are bringing forward this Bill which is based on a very simple principle, namely that women deserve compassionate, timely and evidence-based healthcare not stigma, shame and barriers but healthcare. A few weeks ago on Leaders' Questions, I raised the case of Denise Whitmore who nearly died travelling to England for a termination after receiving a fatal foetal diagnosis. After everything they had already endured, Denise and her husband, Mark, were advised to smuggle their daughter Éadha home in the boot of their car in order that they could bring her home to Ireland. The result of our current legislation is that grieving parents are being made to feel like criminals for wanting to bring their daughter home. That is not what Ireland voted for in 2018.

As legislators, we do not get to look away from the reality because it is uncomfortable or complicated. We are the only people in this country with the power to fix laws that are causing harm. Right now, our law only permits a termination where the condition is likely to lead to the death of the foetus before birth or within 28 days of birth. Doctors, families and advocacy groups have repeatedly told us that this threshold is too narrow and too rigid. Doctors are being placed in an impossible position, and women are still travelling as a result.

The mandatory three-day waiting period is another example of a barrier that exists not because of medicine but because of politics. Once again, it is women who pay the price. The

World Health Organization has been very explicit that mandatory waiting periods create barriers to care and should be removed because women are capable of making decisions about our own healthcare. We know from IFPA research that 98% of women return after the three days, so what does the law actually achieve? It does not improve healthcare or protect women. In some cases, it is pushing women beyond the 12-week limit entirely, forcing them to travel abroad again. This Bill would make a reflection period available to any woman who wants more time but would no longer force women who have already made up their minds to delay their care.

We also need to talk honestly about criminalisation. The World Health Organization is clear that abortion should be fully decriminalised and treated as healthcare, yet healthcare professionals in Ireland can still face up to 14 years' imprisonment. That matters because criminalisation creates a chilling effect whereby doctors must consider legal risk rather than focusing solely on the patient. Decriminalisation does not mean deregulation. There will be safeguards and accountability, and doctors will still be governed by professional standards and medical ethics. Healthcare should be regulated as healthcare as opposed to through the threat of criminal sanction.

I ask Members across this House not to close their minds to this legislation before the work has even begun. Allow this Bill to move to Committee Stage, because that is where we can do our best work, where we hear from experts and clinicians and where we can test and improve legislation and strengthen it. This Bill is not the final product; it is the start of improving a system we know is failing too many women. The gaps in our law were identified three years ago in the O'Shea review. Women are still living with the consequences of our failure to act. They deserve better.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: I thank my colleague Deputy Cairns for her leadership on this issue and for bringing forward the Bill. There are three things I would like to discuss which I think will come up during the course of our debate in the House this morning. The first is what the referendum was or was not about. For those of us on the progressive left who campaigned on this issue day after day, month after month and year after year, we are really clear about the what the referendum was and was not about. It was about listening to women, providing care and compassion, ensuring that no woman would have to travel abroad for healthcare and taking this issue out of the Constitution and into the hands of legislators to legislate in respect of it. It was also about reproductive rights and freedom, and that is what our Bill is about. For far too long, we looked away as women travelled abroad. That has to stop. We have to ensure that nobody is forced to go abroad. The referendum was also about smashing the shame, stigma and silence. We have to ensure that continues and that we have legislation which is robust and which works.

The second thing is that people will say there are difficulties with the Bill. That always happens with Opposition legislation. People they say that things need to change. To that, I say that the Minister should come back with amendments. That is why we have a ten-step legislative process. This is Second Stage. On Committee Stage, Report Stage and in the Seanad, the Bill can be amended and improved. Matters can be teased through on Committee Stage by the select committee. We can debate matters and fix things if they need to be fixed, and we can have a Bill that works for everybody. I am sure the over 600 officials who work in the Department of Health will work with the Minister on drafting amendments. Every time

Bills - even Government Bills - are introduced, they are vastly amended on Committee Stage and on Report Stage. That can happen with this Bill too if, as has been reported, the Minister has difficulties with it.

The final thing I will is about the process of progress. When we had the Repeal referendum, it was not frozen in time. There was always going to be a review. The review of the legislation was built into the legislation. We now have the review. We need to act on it. In the same way as marriage equality, that was not the end of the campaign for LGBT rights. The repeal referendum was not the end of the campaign for reproductive rights. We will continue to campaign on this issue. If we do not with the vote tonight we will be back because the women of Ireland deserve better.

Deputy Gary Gannon: I will start with a simple premise which I imagine will be repeated by other speakers today - eight years ago, Irish people voted overwhelmingly to repeal the eighth amendment. One of the central promises of that campaign, a promise that moved many people, was that women would no longer have to travel abroad when they received a devastating diagnosis of fatal foetal abnormality. Today, eight years later, many women still have to make that traumatic journey. That is a starting point for this debate; it is not about ideology or politics. The 2018 Act contained a provision for a review to take place after three years. That review happened. Marie O'Shea conducted it. She found serious systemic problems. That was three years ago. The Oireachtas has not acted since.

The Bill before the House is designed to fix three of those problems, the first being that the mandatory three-day waiting period has no basis in medical evidence. The WHO is unambiguous on this. It recommends against mandatory waiting periods, finding no evidence of benefit and clear evidence of harm. Some 98% of women who attend services proceed after the wait. It does not change minds, it just delays care. It disproportionately punishes women who are already vulnerable, women in rural Ireland, women in abusive relationships, women who can least afford another trip, another day off work, another arrangement. The 28-day rule forces clinicians to predict with certainty how long a baby will survive after birth. That is not something medicine can reliably do and because clinicians cannot certify, some women are then turned away. They are forced to travel. They go through one of the most devastating experiences of their lives alone abroad and that cannot continue.

Ireland has a 14-year criminal sanction on medical practitioners. It is one of only three countries in Europe at that level. The WHO recommends full decriminalisation. That sanction creates fear in our hospitals. It drives conservative decision-making in grey areas and causes harm. I will be clear about what we are asking for today. We are not asking for everybody to support every line of the Bill in its final form. We are asking for it to go to Committee Stage in order to scrutinise it, test it and amend it where needed. Where a Government-commissioned review has already found systematic failures in primary legislation, refusing further scrutiny is not a neutral act. That is a choice to leave things as they are. Leaving things as they are means more women travelling, and we were elected to do better than that.

Deputy Jen Cummins: I thank my colleague, Deputy Holly Cairns, for the work she has done on this legislation. When I grew up in Ireland in the eighties and nineties, abortion was absolutely not allowed. It was not spoken about and was portrayed as something only certain types of women did, and there was a massive stigma to it. When I went to college there was

no availability of information for people about safe and accessible abortion services here or abroad. Everything was hush-hush. If you got pregnant and there was a crisis pregnancy you were left to figure it out. If you found yourself in that situation and tried to find someone who might help you, it was almost impossible to find that information. Throughout the course of my career, I have worked with women who have been in crisis pregnancies. I worked with a 15-year-old girl who got pregnant and needed to have a termination. She had to travel for that termination. I worked with a woman who had a fatal foetal abnormality and had to make the heartbreaking decision to terminate her much-wanted pregnancy. It absolutely broke her heart. Abortion is one of those topics that is so divisive. It is uncomfortable to talk about it, and I think that comes from an era where women's rights were just put to the side. Now, it is 2026 and we need to have a situation where women should be treated with respect, dignity and trust. Irish legislation needs to trust women to know that the decision they are making is the correct decision. We need to protect them, and we also need to protect the medical workers who will give that care to the women.

This legislation seeks to ensure that women who receive a devastating diagnosis of fatal foetal abnormality no longer have to travel for care. It removes the three-day mandatory waiting period and provides more certainty about abortion in cases where a woman's health or life is at risk. It also clarifies the law when it comes to conscientious objection and removes the criminalisation of medics. As uncomfortable as some people may find this legislation and topic, it is imperative that we allow this legislation to move to Committee Stage to scrutinise it and make amendments and improvements that help women access the care they need.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I commend my party leader, Deputy Cairns, and her colleagues in the party, including Ellen Casey, on taking a lead on this Bill. Eight years ago, people in every part of this country voted to remove the eighth amendment from the Constitution. They did so because they had listened to women. They listened to women who had been sent away from their own country at moments of profound grief, fear and medical crisis. One of the central issues in that campaign was the tragedy of fatal foetal abnormality. Women and couples told the country what had happened to them. They described receiving devastating diagnoses in Irish hospitals and being told the care they needed could not be provided here. They described booking flights under a cloud of shame, travelling abroad, navigating an unfamiliar health system and trying to stave off the effects of the trauma they were living through before returning home carrying grief that had been made worse by the actions of this State. Those stories changed Ireland, yet years later some families are still being put through versions of the same ordeal. The recent public testimony of Denise Whitmore brought this home with painful clarity. Denise learned at a routine scan in 2024 that her baby had a fatal condition. Instead of being able to receive care in Ireland, Denise had to travel to Britain. Her experience is a warning that the law is still failing people in the precise circumstances the referendum campaign asked us to address.

The problem is the current legislation's narrow and inflexible parameters. In cases of fatal foetal abnormality doctors must operate within a framework that requires a level of certainty that is simply not possible in all instances. In real clinical situations, that level of certainty may not be available. Families facing devastating diagnoses should not be left in limbo because the law demands a level of precision that clinicians cannot realistically provide. The result for clinicians is fear and hesitation. Doctors are left worried about the legal consequences of

acting. Families are left waiting for certainty that may never come, and some women are still forced to leave the country for healthcare. This is not what people voted for in 2018. This Bill would make the law more workable, more compassionate and more true to the complexity of real-world experiences of fatal foetal abnormality. It would provide clear legal space for care where there is a fatal condition affecting the foetus. It would also address the chilling effect of criminalisation of doctors who are providing healthcare in good faith. No decent healthcare system should force clinicians to practice under a spectre of fear when dealing with complex, sensitive and time-critical cases. No woman should be told in the middle of a pregnancy ending in tragedy that the Irish health system cannot care for her because the wording of the law is too narrow.

This Bill is not about reopening the referendum. It is about honouring it and taking on the recommendations of the Government's own review. Repeal was not meant to replace constitutional callousness with legislative obstruction. It was meant to ensure that women could access compassionate healthcare in their own country. We should allow this Bill to progress.

Deputy Eoin Hayes: I am proud today to support my party leader, Deputy Holly Cairns, in this Bill to implement much-needed changes to legislation governing terminations of pregnancies. There is a worthwhile history lesson we should remember in this debate. The people of this Republic made their decision on access to abortion care in 2018 by an overwhelming majority in the affirmative. Many opposed to this Bill will say that the electorate in that referendum made its decision on the basis of the terms set out in the Bill passed into law in 2018. If that is the position, what must also be acknowledged is that in keeping with the spirit of the referendum, this House agreed to reviewing the operation of the Act in a debate in late 2018. Section 7 of the 2018 Act legalising abortion in Ireland provided for review and, by implication, for future adjustments to the law. That section was introduced after the referendum, on Committee Stage via amendment on 6 November 2018 by the then Minister for Health, and current Fine Gael leader, Deputy Simon Harris. The amendment was agreed without objection and without a vote on both Committee and Report Stages. It stands to reason that all Members of the House, of all parties, agreed that a review of the legislation should be carried out, adjustments to the law made on foot of such a review and that this would be in keeping with the will of the people expressed through referendum. At the instruction of the Department of Health and under section 7 of the Act, Marie O'Shea issued her review of the Act three years ago in 2023. The Bill being introduced by my party leader today gives effect to the recommendations of that review. Upon introducing the concept of the review in November 2018, after the referendum had been passed, Deputy Simon Harris said:

It seems to me it would be wholly irresponsible for us as legislators to pass legislation on such an important issue to do with women's health and not keep it under review on the basis that our job is done. It is good practice to keep legislation under review.

He further said that it is important we check the Act, which is about access and women's healthcare and make sure it is working for women and the medical profession. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael representatives in the debate agreed with the Minister. Even Deputy Tóibín, who was present at the time, did not object to the review amendment and did not call a vote on it. He agreed with it.

There is no conceivable argument therefore that this legislation before us, based on the output of that review, is not in keeping with the will of the people or the Dáil in 2018. In fact, it is the full interpretation of the will of the people and the Dáil in 2018. Any contention to the contrary is nonsensical and revisionist. As such, it is incumbent upon us to implement these provisions as recommended by the Dáil-sanctioned and Government-commissioned review and to do so as a matter of urgency to bring this forward to Committee Stage. Anything less would be a gross dereliction of duty to the constitutional role with which we have all been charged.

Minister for Health (Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill): I begin by acknowledging the women who have had truly heartbreaking personal circumstances in pregnancy and whom I know are the motivation behind this Bill by the Social Democrats. Many Deputies in all parties, both in government and in opposition, know people who have struggled with the worst news in pregnancy. I think of all of those women who inspired the Bill, the Social Democrats' work on it and this debate. I truly respect all Deputies' commitment to raising these issues. I always vote to enable debate. I worked in government in 2017 and 2018 to support the repeal referendum.

I thank the Social Democrats Members for meeting with me last Friday, along with the State's interim Chief Medical Officer, the deputy chief medical officer and officials from my Department, to discuss the Bill. I am grateful to them for that very constructive discussion. It gave me a much better opportunity to understand exactly what was being put forward, as I had some concerns and questions about the way in which the Bill was drafted. I am always reluctant to criticise the drafting of Bills because I was a drafter in opposition for Fine Gael for three years. I know how difficult it is and I really respect that process.

I agree that most legislation can be fixed if there is agreement on principles across the Houses and through the different Stages. In this case, however, I am afraid I cannot agree in that way because the issues are based on principles, which I will discuss presently, that are so fundamental they go beyond what I can agree here and fix later. I am asking colleagues to consider a different approach with which we could potentially work. I ask them to consider whether we could, for example, facilitate an engagement with the national women and infants health programme, NWHIP, and with the doctors who are discussing the improvements made since the O'Shea report, which Deputies opposite correctly relied on in the intent and drafting of this Bill. I ask that they consider how we could create a more structured engagement with any Deputy who wishes to understand exactly what has changed and how it is working from their perspective. That offer remains open irrespective of what happens today or at any other time.

The reality is that when it comes to legislation, words matter. We are here as legislators and the courts presume that we mean the impact of the words we say. This Bill raises both significant legal and operational concerns and I have to bring those concerns to the House. It proposes five major changes to the existing legislation. I see policy difficulties with four of those changes and legal difficulties in all cases. I do not believe in my heart that those difficulties are all necessarily intended, which is why I am so careful around the question of drafting. I have done what colleagues opposite are doing, namely, brought something forward to be debated, which is the purpose of this House in many ways. However, it is also its purpose to enact legislation and I must point out the difficulties in that regard.

The first and least problematic of the five issues concerns the amendments relating to the three-day waiting period. The arguments for and against the removal of that provision have been well aired in the public domain. I personally do not see any difficulty with the requirement. That is my personal position. It is a policy choice. The HSE has advised that the current model of care is safe and that it is reliant on it, but that could change were the Oireachtas to make changes in legislation. As I said, I consider this the least problematic issue.

The only drafting issue with this proposal, which could be fixed, is that it makes reference to a statutory right to a reflection period, which does not exist. There is no reflection period that exists anywhere else. There is no such statutory right. However, that is policy and it is fixable. I will not comment further on this matter, as I have already spent longer on it than I intended, other than to make the point that a woman is already entitled, as a matter of ordinary medical law and practice, to take any such time as she deems appropriate to consider her decision on whether to avail of a procedure. I do not believe that creating a specific statutory right of reflection is helpful. It is not a panacea. As I have indicated, the issue with this proposal is just a drafting one and can be fixed.

The other issues are more difficult. The second is the proposal for a reduction in the number of doctors making decisions. That applies in two areas. First, the Bill proposes to amend the statutory language to remove the requirement for two clinicians to be involved in the decisions regarding a termination where the life or health of a mother is at risk. There are really practical and clinical reasons that the input of more than one clinician is relevant in this decision-making. Doctors work as a team. Where, for instance, a woman's life or health is at risk because of psychiatric illness, a cardiology issue or a neurology issue, that will, of necessity, see the involvement of both a cardiologist, say, and an obstetrician. That is just the practical medical reality. Removing or changing that requirement creates an uncertainty I do not believe is helpful. The courts will interpret this later and that is meaningful. I do not have time to go into exactly how meaningful it is.

In section 11, it is proposed to change the number of doctors involved in the decision about a fatal foetal abnormality by not requiring both of them to do an examination. It is a subtle nuance and there is potential for dependence on notes. Again, the practical reality is that two doctors are necessary. There would be an obstetrician involved but there would also be a geneticist or neonatologist, who would be the other doctor identifying the fatal foetal abnormality and the trajectory of it. Changing the threshold from examination to potentially including notes brings in a measure of uncertainty for the courts later. Questions might arise as to how far back the notes go. There is an extra element of uncertainty. My understanding is that Deputies opposite are trying to reduce uncertainty, not create it.

I wish I had more time to go through this but, in practical terms, the dual professional signature is a fundamental principle of safety that is widely practised in healthcare. It is a critical safety mechanism for high-risk actions and serious decisions, and this is a serious decision. I am very aware of the unintended or tragic outcomes that have already occurred where core principles of safety have not been adhered to in that way. That is the difficulty with this proposal.

In addition, legally, the Bill provides that both those sets of decisions would be based on reasonable opinion formed in good faith and based on knowledge available at the time. That language is taken from the O'Shea report. I accept it is correct and I understand the motivation

behind it. However, with all respect, Ms O'Shea is not a drafter. The good faith test is already well understood by the courts. Adding words to that introduces more complexity.

The third issue is with the ministerial clinical guidelines proposed in sections 9, 10 and 11. In short, I do not believe it is appropriate for me as Minister, or any Minister, to make clinical guidelines in any context. It is an interference in the independence of the medical profession. There may be a sort of assumption by Deputies opposite that every Minister is going to make guidelines that align with their view of the world. We already know that is not the case in respect, for example, of the heartbeat law that was introduced in Hungary in 2022. If a Minister were to bring in something similar here in clinical guidelines, it would require a woman to listen to the heartbeat before having a termination.

If the Social Democrats Members are on the progressive left, then I am on the progressive right. However, there are other Members of this House who take a very different view and I do not want any of them being Minister for Health and having the capacity to make ministerial guidelines. I do not believe we should bring that concept into legislation. I do not think it adds to what we are trying to do, which is to make things easier for women. Additionally, for doctors, it introduces more uncertainty because it says to them there are statutory rules and then there also are these ministerial guidelines. Which will the courts test? How does that work? We in this House are presumed to intend the impact of the changes we make in law, and that is the view the courts will take. I cannot support that concept. First, I do not want to create a precedent whereby we interfere in the medical profession in any area of clinical practice, whether it is obstetrics or cardiology. Second, I do not want to give a different Minister the opportunity to do something that would be very different from my world view. I do not believe it is a concept we should embed in legislation.

The fourth issue is the decriminalisation of medical practitioners. This would be a very substantial policy and legal change. At present, a doctor's decision does not have to be correct. Doctors do not have to be right; they just have to have made their decision in good faith. That is the defence. A question arises as to why a doctor who carries out a termination unreasonably or acting in bad faith should be exempt from criminal sanction. What is proposed is a blanket decriminalisation and it is not confined to the woman's treating doctor but to any doctor. That is a very significant change. It is not just a drafting issue that could be fixed.

I have only one minute remaining in which to deal with the most important issue, namely, fatal foetal abnormality. It is an extremely complex issue that raises many different ethical issues. I totally empathise with what the Bill is trying to achieve in this regard. I have met with and spoken to women who have faced unimaginable and harrowing circumstances. I want to explain why the Oireachtas took the approach of having the 28-day provision. I know these decisions are not easy. In fact, it is desperately difficult for anybody who falls outside that timeframe. It is only that I have just one minute remaining that I am not spending more time on this. I ask colleagues to forgive me for that. If I had time, I could detail some of those stories, as they have done.

I do not mean to cause any upset to anyone but the reason the limit is set at 28 days is that where there is a condition that results in the death of a live-born infant, that death nearly always occurs in the first 28 days. Those first four weeks are known as the neonatal period. Of the approximately 190 infant deaths that occurred last year, about 150 of them were within that

period. It is not a figure chosen at random. It was chosen because it is related medically to the period in which an infant is most at risk.

Beyond that, the issue is extremely complicated. Members of the Social Democrats, People Before Profit and others have argued the period should be up to a year. However, if a baby can live for two, three or four months, I do not understand how we would pick a timeline for that. I would ask Deputies opposite to pick the number of days that are appropriate beyond 28 days. I personally find it impossible to do so. Instead, the Deputies have created the idea of a fatal condition the foetus might have.

That is the most expansive position that anybody has ever taken, and not just in this House. It impacts any condition that an infant or child might have. It goes way beyond the neonatal period. A fatal condition in the foetus is also one that a child would have, and there are a whole range of conditions. We know, as Members of the Oireachtas, that for people who are living to seven, eight, nine, ten or 20, these are fatal conditions. There is no point in Deputy Cairns shaking her head at me. This is the reality. This is true, and I really regret it. I am asking Deputies to come with me, to take a different approach and to take up my offer of meeting NWHIP and debating this issue in a different chamber. I do not want to be in a space against this when I know what the Deputies are trying to do is to resolve the cases of many women who have had such difficulty, but it is complex-----

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Darren O'Rourke): Time, Minister.

Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill: -----and I need more time and space to explain that.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: I thank the Minister for her contribution and for meeting with us and the interim Chief Medical Officer, CMO, and the deputy CMO. She has gone through all of the reasons this is not going to work. She gave technical details. However, we can agree on the principle of what we are trying to achieve. We want this to go to the next Stage where we can have that in-depth discussion. We need to bring the experts before the committee. We need to bring people with lived experiences before the committee. We need to have this discussion in committee and that is why we are asking the Minister to support this Bill. I know it is complicated and complex, but the 240 women who had to travel for terminations outside the State last year do not want the Minister's empathy. They want her to legislate. They want her to ensure that no other woman has to do that and no other woman has to make the incredibly difficult decision with her family to terminate a baby that is wanted and loved. They do not want any other woman to have to make the decision to go to the UK to get the medical care that she requires. They do not want any other woman to have to make the decision as to whether to hide her baby in the boot of her car or to tell the ferry or airport that she is trying to bring her baby home. They do not want any other woman to have to leave her baby in the UK because she is afraid of bringing her baby back into the country illegally. They do not want any other woman or her family to have to go to Aldi to pick up ice - excuse me - so her baby can get home. They need the Minister to legislate. I know it is complicated, but that is the Minister's job.

I am sorry, but I cannot continue.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I thank Deputy Whitmore for her impassioned contribution. I thank the Minister for being here.

Just shy of eight years ago, we celebrated the repeal of the eighth amendment. I use the word "celebrated" in a measured way, because although this is a grave and serious issue, it was an issue on which views on both sides of the campaign to repeal the eighth amendment were deeply held. I respect the views of those who campaigned against the repeal of the eighth amendment. We celebrated because it was a milestone for women's rights and gender equality in this country. It was a tough campaign. I was chased down a street in suburban Dublin being told that I had blood on my hands. During the campaign, it was clear that the voices that spoke most clearly to the public were the voices of those women who had suffered fatal foetal abnormalities and their experience was one of the reasons that many people chose to repeal the eighth amendment.

We, as a State, built into that legislation a mechanism for review. Indeed, I contributed to that very review in my previous role. Within that review, there are clear recommendations as to what needs to be done to implement the repeal of the eighth amendment, yet this Government has failed to bring forward that legislation. So we have done exactly that. The Minister spoke about the principles that needed to be addressed. She spoke about legal and policy difficulties. She also mentioned subtle nuances. I urge her to work with us and bring this to Committee Stage so that we can work through those legal and policy difficulties, those subtle nuances, and arrive together at legislation that finally addresses this issue.

Here is the issue: it comes back to choice. I respect anybody's choice to take a three-day waiting period, but I do not respect the imposition of that three-day waiting period on me or anybody else who chooses to move ahead. Women know their bodies. They know what they are doing. They know when they make the choice to terminate a pregnancy exactly what they are doing. All that these measures represent is the hangover of an infantilistic and misogynistic approach to women's health that prevailed in this country for many decades. Indeed, in some areas, it still prevails. Women know. Women need to be trusted and to be given the choice to proceed with their healthcare and their reproductive rights in the way that they wish. I urge all Government TDs to vote for this legislation and bring it forward to the next Stage so that we can get past the Minister's subtle nuances-----

Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill: That is not fair.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: -----and legal and policy challenges. Those were the words the Minister used.

Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill: That is not fair. I said there was a fundamental problem.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: My point is that this legislation is on the books right now, ready for the House to debate it. The Minister said that it needed to be debated in other chambers. Where are those chambers? This is where it needs to be done. It needs to be debated at the health committee and in the Dáil so that we can finally legislate for what people voted for on 25 May 2018.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: I thank the Minister for being here this morning, for her detailed contribution and for meeting the party in advance of this debate. I also commend Deputy Cairns and my friends and colleagues in the party for bringing forward what is, as we have said, the wording from a report commissioned by the Government. This is what we are trying to do.

In my political naivety, I thought the days when we asked women to share personal stories of trauma in order to enact legislative reform were behind us. Notwithstanding many of the meritable contributions in the Minister's speech, we cannot ignore some of the basic limitations to the legislation as it stands. We have spoken about the recommendations and the stance of the WHO on the three-day wait and the 28-day piece, but also the criminal sanction that is faced by practitioners and the fear that creates within that occupation.

I only appeal to the Minister on one issue. Similar things seem to be being said by people on either side of the House. The Social Democrats are asking the Government to work with us on this legislation. She has pretty much said the same thing to us. She is asking the Social Democrats to work with her on this legislation.

Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill: Yes, but do not press a vote.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Did the Minister say it would not pass a vote?

Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill: I am sorry. No, that is not what I said.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: I ask for clarification.

Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill: I am asking the Social Democrats to come and meet NWHIP with me to hear more of the reality. There are not 240 women travelling because of fatal foetal abnormalities. There are some, but there are many women travelling for other reasons because there are different thresholds in the UK and Ireland. Some who are travelling will never meet the threshold in Ireland because the UK threshold is about serious handicap and others. The group of women does not number 240. It is a much smaller number. They are very case specific. Some of them will not be fixed by legislation of this kind. I am asking the Deputies for that meeting and to really get into that detail. We will never be able to fix this for every single situation. That is what I am trying to say. That is practically impossible in this context.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: What I have learned, as a still relatively new TD, is that when legislation such as this comes before the House, the Government either amends it into an abyss or it goes to the next Stage to have what I think we can all agree is something of a meritable debate. It needs to be debated further. We all have different opinions and conclusions. As part of that, we bring in the expertise and the different stakeholders and talk it through. It would be deeply regrettable to say "Goodbye" to this legislation when a committee room would be the appropriate next chamber for us all to work on it together.

That is why I again appeal to the Minister, notwithstanding what she said in her contribution, to agree that there are many points in what we are saying today that make sense and there is

significant evidence that backs that up. To me, that measure merits further conversation and legislatively that happens on Committee Stage. I again appeal to the Government to reconsider and allow the Bill to progress in order to have a debate on Committee Stage.

Deputy David Cullinane: I welcome the opportunity to debate the shortcomings in abortion services in Ireland. My priority is access for women to the services which were voted for and endorsed by the people in 2018 and the too many barriers which remain. One of those barriers is the three-day wait. Sinn Féin supports removing the three-day wait. We never supported the three-day wait in the first place. We have tabled legislation to remove the three-day wait and have always been clear that this waiting period does not provide care or support or make the service safer. Rather, it simply makes access harder.

We do, however, have significant concerns about the proposed new definition of a condition likely to lead to the death of the foetus, which is not grounded in the recommendations of the review of the Act and ignore the intention of a clear and tight definition. We are also concerned by proposals to decriminalise medical practitioners who knowingly and wilfully act illegally beyond the scope of the Act. We have a long history in this country of scandals in women's healthcare. The law is the law and medical practitioners should not be given *carte blanche* to act outside of the law.

I want to address each of these points and the other provisions in the Bill in turn. The provision of termination of pregnancy services was endorsed by the Irish people by referendum, with a clear picture of what those services would look like. The Act was put in place with a clear understanding that the legislation underpinning these services would continue to be reviewed for operational effectiveness. The review of the operation of the Act was published three years ago. It highlighted serious imbalances in access to care, significant geographic variation in access to services, the underdevelopment of regional services and barriers such as the three-day wait. My priority is that the services which were voted for and endorsed by the people in 2018 are fully operational and accessible to all women. Women should be able to access the services which were voted for democratically, yet there are still barriers for access for many, as identified in the review.

There is a postcode lottery in access to care. One of the biggest barriers identified in the review was a lack of GPs providing access to early medical terminations and the fact that regional centres and multidisciplinary teams are not fully operational. This creates a postcode lottery in access to care. Only 10% to 15% of GPs provide early medical termination services, which means fewer than ten GPs in some counties as of early last year. The review recommended a geospatial analysis of services to identify the biggest gaps. I am not aware of the Department ever conducting or publishing such a review. Maybe it exists and the Minister might come back to me on that. The review provided 75 recommendations to be worked through. Most do not require legislative change. It is important that the House receives an update on the steps the Minister is taking to improve services, to ensure access to services through community providers and to ensure hospital-based services are accessible in a timely manner. The Oireachtas did not intend for the Government to carry out a review and leave it on a shelf. The Minister for Health and the Taoiseach need to step up and implement the findings of the review. The Minister should bring forward a progress report on the consideration and implementation of the recommendations of the review.

Moving to the Bill before us, I note it proposes to remove the three-day wait, instead obliging doctors to inform a woman of her right to a reflection period, to be exercised at the woman's discretion, and I support that. The Bill proposes to replace the death within 28 days prognosis-based definition for a condition likely to lead to the death of the foetus, otherwise known as fatal foetal abnormality, with an open to interpretation, circular and untested definition, namely "that there is present a fatal condition affecting the foetus". That is not grounded in the O'Shea report and the review of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act. The Bill further proposes to remove clinical provisions for medical practitioners who knowingly and wilfully provide abortions, access to terminations or advice on terminations which are outside the scope of the Act and which are, and would remain, illegal in this State.

The Bill proposes to require practitioners or health professionals who are conscientious objectors to ensure access to abortions in an emergency. This is already provided for in the Act where there is an emergency threat to the life of the mother. This amendment, at best, seems to be redundant.

The Bill seeks to remove the requirement for two medical opinions for access to a termination on risk to life or health grounds, to allow access following consultation with a single practitioner and to require the Minister to, within six months, issue guidelines to provide clarity to medical professionals in carrying out procedures under risk to life or health in an emergency and a condition likely to lead to the death of a foetus grounds. Finally, the Bill seeks to require a further operational review of the Act within three years.

As I have set out, Sinn Féin supports removing the three-day wait for access to abortion services and replacing it with a right to a reflection period. We never supported the three-day wait. This waiting period does not provide care. It simply makes access harder, especially for women in difficult circumstances, whether they are victims of coercive control or domestic violence, rape or sexual assault or simply find out about their pregnancy too late and face timing out of access to care due to the mandatory wait. It particularly puts women who are subject to controlling or abusive partners and are from marginalised backgrounds in a difficult position because the first appointment may be the only appointment they get.

The clear feedback from women and the review of the Act was that some women were also being pushed beyond the 12-week threshold by the three-day wait, which denied them their choice to end the pregnancy. We have always said that when it comes to personal decisions such as abortion, we need to trust and support women when they are making these decisions.

We have all recognised in law and policy that women should have access to abortion services in the first trimester on the basis of their own free choice. This is the compassionate position put before the people in 2018 and it is the basis on which services have been provided since. Sinn Féin has tabled a targeted Bill to remove the mandatory three-day wait. We think that this Bill strikes the right balance. It is the right change to make. It respects women's decisions. It removes an unnecessary barrier to care. Removing the mandatory three-day wait does not provide remove a woman's ability to take more time if she wants to. That option will always remain open to her, and rightly so. Our Bill removes the requirement that the State must force every woman to wait, regardless of her circumstances, decision, health or needs. This is something that can be done quickly and should be done during the course of this Dáil term.

We fully agree with the need for robust clinically sound statutory guidelines to protect and direct clinicians in providing lawfully permissible services. The absence of guidelines was identified as a serious barrier to many clinicians providing care. Guidelines are essential to address issues identified with the operation of terminations under sections 9 and 10 relating to risk the life of the mother and section 11 of the Act where a condition is likely to lead to the death of the foetus. Terms such as "risk" and "serious harm" and the lack of reliable pathways were identified as problematic due to the lack of legal definition which asks clinicians to make philosophical judgments and puts them at risk of acting beyond the Act and illegally.

This Bill makes the same mistake with its definition of a fatal condition. We do not support the proposed definition for a condition likely to lead the death of the foetus, otherwise known as fatal foetal abnormality. This amendment is not grounded in the statutory review of the Act, which recommended a review with stakeholders to consider alternative grounds that would be clear to apply in practice and in keeping with the spirit of the legislation. The proposed definition in the Bill is untested and circular. The term "fatal" is not defined. There are no limits on it. It leaves the philosophical question of life and the balance of probabilities entirely to clinicians, which is not right and an abdication of our duty in this House. Most problematically, the amendment ignores the intention of a clear and tight definition and the process recommended by the review is ignored.

We should not insert untested and loosely drafted definitions into the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act without having followed the right process. The review recommended the convening of stakeholders, including medical practitioners, other relevant healthcare professionals, patient representatives, lawyers and, of course, women, in order to obtain a better understanding of the challenges in section 11 and ensure that the multidisciplinary foetal medicine teams are properly resourced with the appropriate skills mix.

In the context of late-term abortions for fatal anomalies we are talking about pregnancies a person wants to keep, and made the choice to keep during the 12-week period. For these pregnancies we need to work with clinicians on guidelines to give effect to the intentions of the current definition, to consider only minor amendments to that definition to improve its operation and not its scope, and to work together to improve health services for children to ensure that where a family elects to continue a pregnancy they are supported if their child is born with a condition. There are many conditions that can be recognised as fatal under the proposed definition, not because they have to be but because the services to save the child's life are not present or functioning. They are fatal because successive Governments have failed to put in place the health services those children need to survive. Many conditions are present at a higher level in Ireland than in other jurisdictions, because instead of providing families with the supports and services they need for their child to survive and thrive, they have the option of an abortion because the child has an anomaly. I do not support that. I support families who have chosen to keep the pregnancy to have the best chance for their child. I support those children being able to live a good and healthy life. We do not support any slip into the territory of abortion on possibly fatal grounds. We do not believe that disability is a ground for an abortion or that this is in any way a progressive position.

I agree that no woman should be forced to carry an unviable pregnancy. I also agree that no woman should be forced to travel for services that should be lawfully available on this island, but it would be wrong to insert such an open-ended, untested and loosely drafted definition that

puts families and children in a position where abortion is an option not because the child will not survive, but because the child might die because the State has not invested in the care the child needs.

We are concerned by proposals to remove offences for medical practitioners who knowingly and willfully act illegally beyond the scope of the Act. Abortion services in Ireland are decriminalised for an early pregnancy and otherwise for risk to the life or health of the mother or in the case of a condition that is likely to be fatal. We have a long history in this country of scandals in women's healthcare and the treatment of women and children by some parts of the health service. The criminal provisions retained in the 2018 Act are there to ensure that medical practitioners do not knowingly and willfully act illegally outside or beyond the scope of the Act. The law is the law and the medical practitioners should not be given *carte blanche* to act outside of the law. That would be ludicrous. Criminal sanctions were included in the Act to ensure that only those services endorsed by the people and by the Oireachtas are made available in this State. The way to address issues of criminalisation is through the application of clear, robust statutory guidelines on the provision of services under each different ground. That is how we balance protections for clinicians, parents and children. We acknowledge people's right to conscientious objection and the importance of protecting that, while ensuring that in emergency cases the life and health of the mother must take priority.

I am not convinced of the need for the proposed amendment on this issue. The point is already addressed in the existing law. The issue here again is a lack of statutory guidelines. We need to be very clear on this issue. When there is a risk to the life or health of the woman, there is an obligation on medical practitioners to try to save her life. We need to avoid any repeat of the tragedies that happened under the old system, like what happened to Savita Halappanavar. Her story is part of why we have the legislation we have today. In a repeat of those circumstances there should be no barriers or objections to saving a woman's life.

It astounds me that the Bill clearly goes far beyond the recommendations of the review. It disrupts the consensus-based approach that brought about repeal and presumes to rip up many of the safeguards that were presented to the people in order to convince them to repeal the eighth amendment in the first place. A genuinely constructive approach to improving services for women would have involved engagement across the Opposition to support the targeted Bills that are on the Order Paper for removing the three-day wait, tabled by me, Deputy Coppinger, and others, who have been trying to be constructive in removing the three-day wait period.

This Bill has no democratic legitimacy. It is not productive. It is not designed to become law. It proposes to significantly undermine the legal framework that was put before the people. Tremendous work was done by the committee on the eighth amendment and then by the health committee of the Thirty-second Dáil to bring this legislation together and to deliver services for the women of Ireland, which also addressed the concerns of people on safeguards and protections, in particular, for children with disabilities. We have approached this constructively.

We will work constructively across this House on the recommendations of the review, which need to happen to ensure the services we voted for are fully operational and accessible so that women who choose to avail of an early-pregnancy abortion have access to GP-led services; that where there is a risk to life the mother is prioritised; and to ensure that where there is a fatal condition affecting the foetus that women are not forced to carry unviable pregnancies,

but that where a child can live and the family has elected to keep the pregnancy during the 12-week period, that the child is given every chance to survive and indeed thrive.

Deputy Ann Graves: I welcome the opportunity to speak on an issue that affects women's reproductive health right across the State. I acknowledge that we have come a long way. We have a lot done but there is a lot more to be done. We are in a society now that is far more caring and considerate than the one I grew up in, but we had to fight every step of the way for what we have. From the contraception trains in the 1970s, the campaign against the eighth amendment in the 1980s, criminalisation in the 1990s, right up to the campaign for women's right to choose in the noughties, we had to fight every single step of the way. I was proud to stand with women in making the changes on many of these campaigns.

The 2017 Citizens' Assembly on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution was hugely important in moving the debate on, with 64% of participants voting in favour of unrestricted access to abortion and substantial support for the 12-week gestational limit. The referendum that followed was a turning point for women in Ireland. Finally, they could access reproductive healthcare, including abortion, without being criminalised or ostracised. Unfortunately, the legislation passed by the Oireachtas imposed a three-day wait for an early-pregnancy abortion. The review of the operation of the Act was published three years ago. It highlighted serious imbalances in access to care, significant geographic variation in access to services, the underdevelopment of regional services and barriers such as the three-day wait. It is time for us to make further progress.

One of the biggest barriers identified in the review was the lack of GPs providing access to early medical terminations. This creates a postcode lottery in access to care. Only 10% to 15% of GPs provide early medical termination services, which is less than ten in some counties. The review recommended a geospatial analysis of services to identify the biggest gaps. Sinn Féin supports the abolition of the mandatory three-day wait for an early-pregnancy abortion. We introduced legislation that would remove the mandatory three-day wait for access to an abortion during early pregnancy. It would represent practical and compassionate change. It puts women in a difficult position and it is not compassionate to those who suffer rape or sexual assault, those who learned of their pregnancy late or those who were subject to controlling or abusive partners for whom the first appointment may be the only appointment they can get.

We are concerned by proposals in the Bill to decriminalise medical practitioners who wilfully act illegally beyond the scope of the Act. We have a long history in this country of scandals in women's healthcare. The law is the law and medical practitioners should not be given *carte blanche* to act outside the law.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: I welcome the opportunity to have this debate. It seems clear to me that while the referendum and the legislation that followed it was a watershed moment, it does not represent the end of the discussion by any manner or means. It also seems clear to me that further reform is needed - reform that is evidence-based, thoughtful and compassionate - that will deliver better, less stigmatising access to abortion for women who need it for what it is, that is, healthcare.

Sinn Féin supports removing the three-day wait period and replacing it with a right-to-reflection period. I welcome the opportunity to debate the shortcomings that exist in abortion

services in Ireland, of which there are many. My colleagues have mentioned the postcode lottery. It is undoubtedly the case that in large parts of the country women are not in a position to access abortion services. That clearly needs to be addressed.

The three-day wait period, which Sinn Féin did not ever support, creates an unnecessary obstacle. It puts women in difficult situations, in particular women from minority backgrounds, or perhaps most of all those who are in a coercive control relationship, who may experience domestic abuse.

11 o'clock

Therefore, accessing any appointment is a challenge, not to mention having to access frequent appointments or multiple appointments. Our priority is access to services, which were voted for and endorsed by the people, and too many barriers currently remain. Tá gá é sin a réiteach.

The proposals to decriminalise medical practitioners who knowingly and willfully act illegally beyond the scope of the Act is an issue that we find problematic and troubling. Unfortunately, we have a long and troubling history in this country of scandals in women's healthcare right up to recent years. The law needs to be clear and there should not be *carte blanche*. The provisions in this legislation could have significant unforeseen and unintended consequences. We believe there is scope and a need for constructive engagement to ensure thoughtful legislation to address the issues and in particular to ending the three-day wait, which is an unnecessary obstacle to services.

Deputy Marie Sherlock: My thanks to Deputy Cairns for bringing forward this Bill, which the Labour Party supports wholeheartedly. Compassionate care for women in real difficulty has been an issue for our party for many decades, long before it was mainstream for people to be talking about this. Indeed, many in the Labour Party were ostracised for many years. It is important to say at the outset that progress has been made over recent years in terms of the greater number of maternity units that are now providing access to termination of pregnancy. We know from this legislation that Deputies Cairns and Whitmore and others have brought to this House, that we still have a journey to travel.

When two thirds of all voters cast their vote in favour of repealing the eighth amendment eight years ago I passionately believed that they were not voting for a situation that would continue to see over 1,500 women travelling for healthcare in subsequent years. They were not voting for the continued criminalisation of healthcare professionals or for couples with much-wanted pregnancies being forced into impossible circumstances due to the uncertain 28-day rule. In 2023 the latest available data available from the UK Department of Health and Social Care showed that 240 women from Ireland travelled to the UK for termination of pregnancy. I believe the people in this country voted to stop exporting our Irish problem abroad. We voted to ensure that women could get the necessary healthcare here and yet they are still having to travel. They are having to travel because of very specific difficulties and flaws within the legislation.

When we voted eight years ago the legislation was put in place. People voted to take abortion, termination of pregnancy, and reproductive health out of Bunreacht na hÉireann and put it into the hands of the Oireachtas where representatives of the electorate could respond to the challenges or the issues that emerged. That is what we are doing here today. It is very

regrettable to hear the Minister come in here and sympathise and acknowledge the issues and yet bring forward no plan or proposal as to what she is going to do.

The electorate eight years ago backed a process where we would have a legislative review after three years. Marie O'Shea's report was a year-long process. It was detailed, methodical and expert led with extensive consultation with over 7,000 submissions. It detailed professional academic research into the experience of service users. To my mind this report has been undermined and ignored by this arrogant Government. There was a commitment that the Government would have the review. It took way longer than necessary to publish that review and three years on we have had nothing. There is a key question for the Minister today. The Minister has said she is going to fix the three-day wait. Why is the Minister not bringing forward her own legislation into the Dáil? While all very welcome, frankly it is not good enough to be offering meetings. Why is she doing that now? The Minister has been backed into a corner and this Government has been backed into a corner where it has no answer on commitments that it made to the Irish electorate that it would have a review and act on that review. There are accusations out there that those of us in the Opposition are now trying to change the goal posts. In reality, it is actually the Government trying to change the goal posts by failing to respond to Marie O'Shea's very detailed recommendations that were issued over three years ago. That is the undemocratic part of what we are talking about here today.

With regard to the three-day period, we know from talking to doctors and to women that it is an unnecessary, impractical and stigmatising barrier to accessing the care that women need. When women go to their GP to say that they want to terminate their pregnancy they have already thought long and hard about it. They do not need to have a time to reflect. It is downright demeaning and degrading to be told go away for three days. While we acknowledge and respect that the Social Democrats have brought forward a particular mechanism with regard to the three-day wait, we in the Labour Party would be actually in favour of abolishing it altogether. It is much more straightforward. The World Health Organization has said very clearly that mandatory waiting periods can have the effect of delaying care - and I know that is the intent of is being proposed here - which can jeopardise women's ability to access safe and legal abortion services. Luxembourg and the Netherlands have entirely removed mandatory waiting periods. It is also important to say that we have overstretched GPs out there. From talking to many GPs, I know that they want to be able to support and help those women but finding those appointments within the three-day period is extremely difficult. If the Minister will not accept this Bill, we need her to bring forward her own Bill as soon as possible.

With regard to the 12 weeks, again we know from so many women and from doctors how women time out unnecessarily from the 12-week limit. Marie O'Shea was very clear about the barrier put up by the 12-week gestational limits and that there was no provision for the completion of the incomplete termination of pregnancy, where medicines had already been taken. There were women who had undertaken consultation but then fell out of the 12-week period. There is no provision for them in the Act and we need to see a change in that. On the criminalisation of those providing care, we have an utterly bizarre situation in this country where those trying to provide abortion care have the prospect of criminalisation hanging over them while those who obstruct and disrupt can act with impunity. These are not my words, they are the words of Marie O'Shea in her report.

With regard to the 28 days, of course as medicine and science develops there is always going to be an ambiguity and a lack of certainty about the length of time for a fatal foetal abnormality but I believe that when people were voting in 2018 they voted to trust women and particularly to trust doctors. We have to listen to the clinicians out there who tell us about the grave difficulties in having that firm cut-off period of 28 days. We in the Labour Party believe this needs to be looked at.

I have been really struck over the past 18 months by the women who approached me telling me their stories and their successful stories of going through the Irish health system. There are good things happening out there but it is absolutely unacceptable for 240 women to be travelling abroad because they cannot get the care here. This needs to change. I commend the Social Democrats on bringing forward this Bill.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I welcome the Bill and the opportunity to speak in this debate. I used to work for a TD who sat on the Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution. I remember when that legislation was going through and how politically difficult it was. I also remember all the stuff that went into the legislation in order to get the legislation through the Dáil and to get the referendum passed. While the eighth amendment referendum brought us in out of the cold and stopped us being so abnormal and so cruel it was never meant to be a ceiling. It has not gone far enough.

I welcome the intention of this Bill. As Deputy Cullinane alluded to, we never had a consensus approach to these things. This country had to be dragged kicking and screaming by activists. Somebody had to die. Savita Halappanavar had to die in 2012 before this country would move on this issue. While I welcome the Bill I think that in many ways it does not quite go far enough. We will still have women who are going to be forced to travel and the narrow distinction around the 28 days puts doctors in such an unenviable position. It is a no-win position. We know the 72-hour clause is paternalistic and we know why it was put into the legislation.

The fact is that when we are too prescriptive when talking about a very narrow distinction around fatal foetal abnormalities and very severe non-fatal foetal abnormalities, somebody always gets lost. Somebody always falls through the cracks and somebody is always forced to travel elsewhere to get the healthcare they need. I have had people come to my clinic who, nine years on, are still absolutely traumatised. The Government has the O'Shea review, which has been published. The recommendations are there. It falls to an Opposition party to bring forward legislation to deal with that, because the Government does not have the political gumption or courage to implement those recommendations. To be fair, the Social Democrats have had to come in here on a Wednesday morning and use their Private Members' time to deal with this matter. That is ridiculous.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I thank the Social Democrats for bringing forward this Bill, which People Before Profit supports. It really is the bare minimum the Government should be doing to implement the recommendations of its own official review of the abortion law. The review recommended decriminalising abortion, reviewing the treatment of fatal foetal anomalies in order that women in this terrible situation are not forced to travel and abolishing the patronising and medically useless three-day wait. The Bill mostly does all of that. There are details that could be ironed out on Committee Stage. We would prefer to abolish the three-day wait entirely

rather than making it optional. Women are perfectly capable of taking as much time as they need to make their own decisions without needing for that to be legislated for. We also favour deleting section 23 in order that abortion is fully decriminalised in line with other medical procedures.

People Before Profit would go further. Neither this Bill nor the official review actually gives pregnant people the right to choose. That right is still strictly time limited, ending abruptly at 12 weeks. That is regardless of when the woman finds out they are pregnant or even if they know that they pregnant at all. A relationship could break down after 12 weeks. Intimate partner violence - which happens in the case of one in eight pregnancies in Ireland - is more likely to begin during pregnancy. The woman could lose her job or become homeless. One of her other children could be diagnosed with a serious illness. She could find out that the foetus has a severe but non-fatal anomaly that means their child would need around-the-clock care for their whole life. None of that matters as far as our abortion law is concerned. Twelve weeks and that is it. After 12 weeks pregnant women in Ireland are still treated as vessels with no right to bodily autonomy, even though the foetus will not be viable for months. After 12 weeks, pregnant people are still forced to travel. The Government refuses to act. By 2030, over 1,300 women will be forced to travel. We have to stop that happening. We need a renewed abortion rights movement to do it. Just like Trump in the US, the far right here, the conservative politicians in Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Aontú and Independent Ireland and many Independents want to take away women's hard-won rights. They want to turn them back into handmaidens. We have to take the fight to them, and that means fighting for the right to choose and nothing less.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: People Before Profit believes that it is a woman's right to choose and that we should trust women to make choices about their bodies, lives and futures. That is it; anything less is not good enough as far as we are concerned. However, we understand the logic behind the Social Democrat's Bill. It takes us at least a step forward from where we are in that it is essentially trying to make provision in line with the review that was promised when the referendum was passed, which the Government has and which it has refused to act on. On that basis, we are happy to support the Bill.

The three-day waiting period is an insult and is exacerbating the difficulties in accessing termination that women in the country are having to endure. The criminalisation is an absolute disgrace. Associating women's right to have a termination and to control their own bodies with some sort of criminal act is an absolute disgrace and should be struck from the Statute Book.

Regarding the issue of fatal foetal abnormality, the fact that women and couples, when they have a wanted child but when it has a fatal foetal abnormality, have to go to Britain for abortions is absolutely disgraceful. My ex-partner and I lost a child to fatal foetal abnormality. We are strongly of the view that it is up to parents as to how they deal with that situation. If they feel they cannot go through the trauma and they need a termination rather than face it, that is their choice, and it should happen here. The idea that people are to be sent abroad still is an absolute disgrace.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: On behalf of the Green Party, I am pleased to support this Bill. I thank Deputy Cairns for bringing it forward. During the 2018 referendum, I joined with representatives from other political parties, Independents and people who have never been

involved in a political campaign before in our local Together for Yes organisation in Dublin West. The central case we made on every door as we campaigned was that Ireland needed to listen to women and respect their decisions about their bodies. When the referendum was passed decisively, Ireland understood that we were finally listening to women. However, the continuation of the three-day rule does not do that. Instead, it carries on the paternalistic view that women do not know their own minds.

Those who are going to vote against this Bill this evening have to ask themselves who that vote will serve? It will not serve the women of Ireland. We know from work done in the National Maternity Hospital and through Women's Aid that pregnancy is a high-risk time for women who are in controlling or abusive relationships. If a woman gets out of her house to see a doctor, is she going to get a second opportunity to come back in three days' time, knowing that she is in increased danger? We know it is difficult to get GP appointments in many parts of the country right now. What about women who are at the edge of the 12-week period? Those three days could be enough to force them to bring a pregnancy to full term or see their healthcare provider be criminalised for giving them access to abortion pills. I cannot think of another healthcare issue where a person's bodily autonomy is so blatantly ignored. We have to ask ourselves why the decisions that women make about their own bodies not be trusted.

I welcome the fact that the Government is permitting a free vote this evening. However, I have real worries that the concerns the Government has raised in the media about this Bill will be used subsequently to delay and ultimately derail the core policy goal behind it. Such an approach cannot be accepted. It is vital that this Bill gets the support of Dáil Éireann and that it is not sidelined and left to rot in committee. It must be engaged with. If the Department has concerns, let them be fleshed out on Committee Stage. We need a commitment from the Government, and particularly the Minister, that a positive vote on this Bill tonight will see the Government engage seriously with the question of removing the three-day wait, bringing this matter back to the Dáil rapidly in order that this paternalistic treatment of women in our law can finally be ended.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Eight years ago, we were pounding pavements and having thousands of conversations. We won the most important right to bodily autonomy for women in this country in history by means of the efforts of a grassroots movement. Now, some people seem to think that they can roll back that right. We are seeing signs of this even in the Dáil today in some of the comments being made.

I want to talk about what the Government has said about legal nuances. In the context of someone travelling in the case of a fatal foetal abnormality, there never should have been a distinction between fatal foetal abnormality and severe foetal abnormality in the first place. There is no such distinction in any other country. It is unscientific because doctors cannot predict it with surety. In other countries, they are just abnormalities. Because of cowardly and conservative politicians and in order to get Simon Coveney and others to agree to vote for repeal, that distinction was put in place here. However, that is still no reason to vote against the Bill. Let us be clear, parties and individuals opposing this Bill favour forced birth because, basically, they are saying that anyone who is pregnant - outside of the existing strict criteria - should just be forced to continue with the pregnancy but that there is also the safety valve of the UK and other countries. I was very disappointed but not a bit surprised to hear Deputy

David Cullinane say that he does not agree. Who cares if he does not agree? It should not be his decision to tell a pregnant woman what to do with her life and her situation.

I found it very arrogant of Deputy Cullinane to stand there and say that. I was not surprised because I saw Sinn Féin rushing through a Bill here last Thursday on a three-day wait. I had a Bill on the three-day wait. It is great that Sinn Féin has one eight years after repeal. I knew it was doing it. I feared that and my cynicism proved correct that it would not vote for this Bill tonight. Sinn Féin would say it has its Bill and they did not need to vote for this Bill. It is cynical. It is conservative. It is a shift to the right by Sinn Féin-----

Deputy George Lawlor: Hear, hear.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: -----because it supported Bríd Smith's Bill in the previous Dáil and now it is responding to the far right and other individuals who criticised it on the vote recently. Now, it is circling the wagons and women's rights have to pay the price. It really is shocking but it is good to bring clarity for people as to where parties stand.

Let us be clear: decriminalising is to prevent women being criminalised as well for taking an abortion pill after 12 weeks or whatever in their bedroom. However, it is also to get rid of the chilling effect that prevents doctors from acting to save lives and save health, and it is also forcing doctors to send women abroad with abnormalities because they are not deadly sure. That is why it is decriminalising. Stop pretending that it is protecting women and, really, that nonsense where it tries to say that it was because of that. It is very disappointing to hear that Sinn Féin is going to basically scupper this Bill tonight. We have to put pressure on it to change tack.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: Hear, hear.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Darren O'Rourke): We will move to the Independent Technical Group. The first speaker is Deputy O'Flynn.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: There is a moment in politics where the language we use in this Chamber becomes so sanitised and so carefully engineered that we risk losing sight of what we are actually talking about and debating. This is one of those moments because today we are not debating an administrative change or paperwork. We are debating whether the State should remove one of the last remaining safeguards before deliberation of ending an unborn human life. Before this House votes to dismantle that safeguard, we should ask ourselves some very uncomfortable questions. Why are the Social Democrats so determined to remove even a three-day reflection? If abortion is such an unquestionable, clear decision, or a very easy case, then we must also ask why HSE figures show that 10,000 women did not return after the initial consultation of the three-day waiting period between 2019 to 2024. That is 10,000 women; 10,000 moments when somebody stepped back; 10,000 moments when doubt entered that room; 10,000 moments when women realised that they needed more support or more time or that there were other options available to them; and 10,000 moments when a life had been saved. That matters, and it is important we put that on the record.

Let us stop pretending that this debate exists in a moral vacuum. Last year alone, more than 10,800 abortions took place on this island. That is over 10,000 unborn children, not statistics, not medical episodes or procedures and not lines in a spreadsheet but human lives. It is tiny hearts that beat, tiny hands, tiny faces - children who under other circumstances would be here today playing in classrooms and parks, celebrating birthdays and growing up in Irish families.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: Disgraceful.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: Yet, there was an argument before this House that does not remark on the tragedy of the loss of 10,000 human lives. The argument is that there is too much time to hesitate and we must remove that time. If the position of the Social Democrats is a moral certainty, then the question for it is why is it afraid of three days? That is three days for reflection, three days for people to speak to their family, three days to seek counselling and three days to escape the panic, fear, coercion or pressure that person may be put under. The reality is that for many women facing crisis pregnancies, those decisions they are making are not in calm circumstances. Some are very frightened, some are abandoned, some are financially desperate, some are under intense emotional pressure and some believe they have no supports or no alternatives available to them. Instead of this House building a society that says we will help them, stand beside them and be there because they and their child matter, the answer increasingly offered by the State is remove the pause and accelerate the process.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: I am a father and a grandfather and also a public representative. As a public representative, father and grandfather, I support families and people in all their decisions. I have listened to the debate today. I have listened to the debate outside the Chamber. We have to listen to everyone and all their concerns. The concerns I have come from the people I have listened to. HSE data show that between 2019 and 2024, 10,426 women who attended the first abortion appointment did not return on the third day. That means that some of those people may have left the country to have an abortion. Some of those people had the children. Regardless of what decision people made, our choice here is to support them and give them the time and support they need. That is the job we have. Whether we agree with it or not is not the point. The point is that we support people in the decisions they make.

A person has a three-day wait to make a decision to do something. If it is a financial issue or if they are in a relationship they do not want to be in, give them the three days to reflect and see if the supports are there. If they want them or if they do not, then that is a decision they have to make themselves. Regardless of what decision they make, I am here to support them.

My position is that I am a pro-life person. Regardless of anyone's issues, I will be there to support them as a person on the decisions they make. My choice is my choice but I support everyone in their choices. That is what we all should do.

Deputy Michael Collins: This Bill will widen the grounds for abortion after a baby is diagnosed with a life-limiting condition. Currently, the law allows abortion if the baby is not expected to live longer than 28 days after birth. This would be changed to allowing abortion if there is a fatal condition affecting the foetus, which is a more broad and general phrase. It is hard for most of us to imagine just what it means for parents who had been happily looking

forward to the birth of a new baby to hear that something is seriously wrong. Scans and tests can do a lot to diagnose and predict what to expect but they are not crystal balls. It can happen that mistakes are made in diagnosis. Abortion is not something that can be undone, and the couple whose baby boy was aborted in Holles Street after they were wrongly told by doctors that the baby had a life-limiting condition have spoken about the interminable sadness and grief they live with every day. How many other unborn babies, like baby Christopher, have lost their lives under Ireland's new abortion laws following a misdiagnosis? A child's chance at life, even during a short lifetime after birth, can be incredibly significant for parents to be able to meet their child alive and spend time as a family, maybe even to bring their child home briefly. Even with a correct diagnosis, medicine does not have a crystal ball to be able to say with confidence how long a particular child will live. For many babies diagnosed with trisomy 13 or trisomy 18, for example, it is a very short time but sometimes they can have longer and a better quality of life than what they were told to expect. Parents in this tragic situation deserve the best of support and care throughout the rest of their pregnancy and their child's life and death, at whatever point that comes. Irish hospitals have a wealth of experience in palliative care for babies to keep them comfortable. Instead of normalising abortion, we should be making this kind of support available and known to those who need it.

Deputy Peadar Kirby: Last year, there were 10,852 abortions in Ireland. That is the lives of 10,852 individual living human beings that were ended last year, and that is the highest figure on record. It is equivalent to 400 classrooms of children, and it is absolutely heartbreaking. In 2018, there were 2,879 abortions and since that law was deregulated, the number of abortions in this country has surged. It is incredible. So high now is the rate of abortion in this State that is affecting the birth rate. For sure, the housing crisis and cost-of-living crisis are also affecting the birth rate but the birth rate is collapsing in part because of the high abortion rate in this country.

Abortion is a massive decision. It is irreversible. A child cannot be brought back. It can also lead to a lifetime of regret for the mother. In the case of any big decision, reflection is key. There are very few elective procedures that can be done in one day. People cannot get a mole removed or cosmetic surgery or be sterilised without a wait to reflect. We also know that three-day wait period is actually working for families. We know that 10,000 mothers attend the first abortion meeting and they did not attend the second one.

There are thousands of children alive in their homes today as a result of that three-day wait period. When the abortion review was being discussed in the health committee in the previous Dáil, I asked the chair of that review a direct and important question. I asked her, before she recommended getting rid of the three-day wait, whether she had spoken to one woman who had decided to keep her child and take those three days to reflect and she admitted that she had not spoken to one woman who had taken that time. That is an incredible admission and it completely undermines the evidential nature of the review itself. One in six mothers who attended their first abortion appointments did not attend the second one and I have no evidence that the Social Democrats or any other political party here has spoken to those women to ask them what their views are on the three-day wait.

I also want to talk about the so-called "chilling effect" in terms of criminal penalties. That is a fiction in this country. The opposite is actually the case. Baby Christopher was a fully healthy unborn child. His life was terminated at 16-weeks gestation. His parents were wrongly

told that he had a fatal foetal abnormality, and it was not an accident. This was not a mistaken diagnosis in this situation. Their child was taken from them. There have been no efforts, by the law or this Government, to follow up in any way in relation to that. Baby Christopher is not unique. Many other women and mothers have lost their children in similar situations.

Eighty-five percent of mothers have abortions for socioeconomic reasons. There is nothing in this Bill to provide economic supports to mothers so that they can raise their children to their full potential. There are dozens of women giving birth in this country homeless.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Darren O'Rourke): Go raibh maith agat.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: There is nothing in this Bill to provide supports to those mothers who need a home.

We were told eight years ago to accept the democratic will of the people. I would ask these parties to do the same.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Darren O'Rourke): I move to other Members. First up is Deputy Grace Boland.

Deputy Grace Boland: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate. This is an issue that evokes deeply held and personal views across Irish society and it is important that we approach it with sensitivity, compassion and respect for differing opinions. There will be strongly held views expressed in this debate, and I respect that. However, I believe as legislators that we have a responsibility to carefully consider the evidence presented in the comprehensive and evidence-based O'Shea report, the improvements made since the report, and the lived experiences of women, families and clinicians.

While aspects of this Bill may require amendment and careful scrutiny, I believe that the essence of what it seeks to address deserves debate and consideration by this House and the health committee. I say that for the following three reasons. First, this is fundamentally about women's healthcare. We know there are women in Ireland who are still being forced to travel abroad for care in cases involving fatal foetal abnormalities because clinicians cannot provide certainty within the narrow legal definitions contained in the 2018 Act. As a mum to two daughters, I do not believe that compassionate care should stop at the airport gate. Second, the O'Shea report concluded that aspects of the law were not operating as intended and were causing real distress to women and clinicians. Third, the O'Shea report questioned whether the mandatory three-day waiting period was evidence based and recommended that it be optional.

Figures have been cited here today regarding women who did not proceed with a second appointment. However, it is important that we are careful and evidence-based in how we interpret those figures. We do not know why they did not proceed. It may be that they miscarried, travelled, exceeded gestational limits or experienced other barriers accessing care, and we know that those in coercive relationships and in the postcode lottery that our healthcare system is have unequal access to healthcare. That is why this issue warrants examination by the health committee and further examination by this House.

Deputy Barry Heneghan: I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. In my opinion, there is one simple choice. Do we trust women?

This is a very personal decision, it is a healthcare decision and women must be placed at the centre of it. An abortion is not something any woman or any couple enters into lightly, and by the time that decision has been reached, there has already been reflection, and there has already been discussion, fear, emotion and heartbreak. This is why the mandatory three-day waiting period is wrong.

For many women in my constituency, this was a huge issue that they spoke to me about on the doorsteps. The reflection has already happened, so this requirement can feel infantilising. It can feel like a judgment on them for coming to a decision about their body. For many women, those three days occur during an incredibly painful time. Also, there are the people who are financially unable to leave the country. We are just punishing them. The reflection period can push women further along medical timelines and reduce the options available for procedures of care.

I welcome the Bill's decriminalisation of healthcare workers who are helping these women.

We must remember that every one of these circumstances is different. Some of them might be facing huge stress or in abusive relationships where they are forced into an act that they do not want to do. Do we trust women or not? The only person who can fully understand the woman is the woman herself.

We should welcome this Bill and the opportunity it presents to bring in enactments and change, as we said during the referendum. Dublin Bay North, which is my constituency, had over 500 campaigners and the largest turnout and delivery of "Yes" votes in the country. We won by a three-to-one result in favour of repeal. To all the campaigners, I say, "Go raibh maith agaibh."

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I have listened to this debate continuously this morning. Indeed, I remember it so well eight and nine years ago.

I suppose I have to say I am pro life and I think that when a baby is born, it is the most majestic, natural and beautiful thing in the world. I am lucky that, in my time, Eileen and I have had six children, and now we have eight grandchildren.

We have to think of the baby in the situation they are in and we have to talk about them. I believe they have a right to live, and to wait three more days to give the mother a chance to reflect on her position is not too long to wait. That is my honest, humble belief.

I have nothing personal against the proposers of this motion but I cannot agree with or subscribe to it.

There are many couples in the country and, indeed, in the world who would love to have a baby, and when they cannot, at least to be able to adopt one.

I cannot agree with this Bill. I am sorry, but I have my own personal beliefs. I think the baby is entitled to a chance to get a shot at this world.

Deputy Carol Nolan: I will be opposing this Bill not merely on the grounds that I have profound conscientious difficulties and objections with the legislative intent driving it, but also because I sincerely believe that if it was implemented, it would represent an impoverished health policy that would fail to protect women and, of course, the lives of the unborn children that it will impact.

In fact, it was on the basis of information released to me through numerous parliamentary questions that we can confirm that the three-day waiting period prior to having an abortion has played a critical and life-saving role in the lives of thousands. In fact, over the five-year period since the law was introduced, 10,426 women did not return for a second appointment after the three-day waiting period. This was between 17% and 18% of women.

I have to be clear. From where I stand, any attempt to eliminate the three-day reflection period can now be seen for what it is - a morally reckless extension of an abortion ideology that many people find deeply troubling. Why the clamour for more and more abortion? Why the rush to annihilate all protections in the law for the baby in the womb? The Irish people did not give us a blank cheque to go on eliminating all protections for the unborn child until no such protections exist at all. To claim that they did is fundamentally flawed.

As political representatives, we should be prioritising the provision of positive support for women in unplanned pregnancy, including access to practical assistance and counselling, rather than seeking to weaken the existing protections.

No woman should be rushed into a life-changing decision but I am of the view that all children born and unborn have a fundamental right to life.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I, too, am opposing this Bill. I recently listened to the leader of the Social Democrats speaking on RTÉ radio about the importance of listening to women's abortion experiences. I want to ask Deputy Cairns this question directly today. Before bringing forward this Bill to abolish the three-day wait and widen the grounds for late-term abortions, did she accept or ignore the request to meet women who deeply regretted their abortions? Did she take the time to speak to women who benefited from the three-day reflection period and ultimately chose to keep their babies? These are not unreasonable questions. Pro-life groups and others have asked those questions in recent days and nowhere have I seen Deputy Cairns or anybody from her party answer them.

It is well documented from replies to parliamentary questions that thousands of women have availed of the three-day wait and have gone on to keep their babies. With that evidence before us, I cannot fathom how any party would seek to abolish such a life-saving provision. There are 11,000 abortions taking place in Ireland each year, which is an unbelievably sad reality, yet today a political party in this House is seeking to remove one of the last provisions that offers a small glimmer of hope that the life might be saved.

We are still in the first half of 2026 and already two men have received lengthy prison sentences for their involvement in coercive forced abortions. These cases and other evidence show that the number of coercive abortions is rising at an alarming rate. Will the Social Democrats rush to scrap the three-day wait instead of working with others in this House to try to deal with the issue of coercive abortion? We have soaring abortion numbers, including coercive abortions, and we need to deal with that issue also.

Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Niall Collins): As my colleague the Minister, Deputy Carroll MacNeill, has done, I too acknowledge the women and families who have had heartbreaking personal circumstances in pregnancy and who have been the motivation behind this Bill. There are, of course, many perspectives involved in the issue of termination of pregnancy services. As legislators, it is important that we facilitate open and frank discussion and consideration of issues. We must respect the input and views of all in this House. Constructive debate is always helpful.

I do not need to repeat all of the information the Minister has outlined but I will aim to make some critical points. The Government is committed to increasing access to safe termination of pregnancy services. In this regard, considerable progress has been made. I refer to the comprehensive body of work being undertaken by the national termination of pregnancy service improvement group. Work arising from the independent review of the legislation, the O'Shea review, and the HSE-commissioned review of section 11 of the Act, the Regan review, is being progressed across ten dedicated work streams.

Significant service development has taken place since the publication of the reviews. All 19 maternity hospitals now provide termination of pregnancy care, supported by designated clinical leads and co-ordinators. More than 490 community providers are delivering early medical abortion. The national governance structures have been strengthened through the relevant structures and governance group. A national electronic termination of pregnancy dataset has been established to support service improvement and workforce planning. Education and training activity has expanded, with multidisciplinary education, foetal medicine study days and workshops, and the development of patient information leaflets. A programme of work is also under way to provide a suite of national clinical guidelines and patient information booklets.

The feedback received directly from clinicians indicates that the service is working well. This is particularly significant if we take account of the fact that this was a new service built from the ground up. While it is acknowledged that a number of women continue to travel abroad for termination services, this figure has significantly reduced from 3,053 in 2017 to approximately 240 in 2023. As the Minister outlined, women travel for a variety of reasons, not all of which are related to fatal foetal abnormality.

I acknowledge the motivation for proposing this Bill. Nonetheless, as drafted, it will not achieve its stated objectives and ultimately may prove counterproductive. As the Minister pointed out, the amendment as drafted to remove the mandatory three-day waiting period has the potential to cause problems for existing medical law, but perhaps that is an issue that could be explored further.

On the issue of clinical guidelines, the HSE, in consultation with the relevant professional bodies, is the competent authority to develop such guidelines. It has the requisite knowledge and experience. Moreover, this process is already established. A national clinical guidelines programme of work has been agreed between the national women and infants health programme of the HSE and the Institute of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland. In March of 2021, Professor Keelin O'Donoghue was appointed as clinical lead for guideline development in maternity and gynaecology, responsible

for the review update and production of national clinical guidelines in relation to maternity and gynaecological services.

It is impossible not to be deeply affected by the stories in the cases where there is a fatal foetal abnormality. However, I must stress that the proposed amendment would not bring clarity to the law. Rather, it has the potential to create ambiguity on which conditions would qualify and could lead to wide variation in its interpretation and application. I am sure that this is not the intention of Deputy Cairns or her party colleagues. Furthermore, it would include genetic conditions that are fatal later in life. This marks a significant policy shift and a huge departure from the commitments given to the Irish people prior to the repeal of the eighth amendment.

The proposal to decriminalise medical practitioners would represent a very substantial policy and legal change. A medical practitioner would no longer be subject to criminal sanction under the law even in instances where a termination had been carried out by acting unreasonably or acting unreasonably and in bad faith. Moreover, it would substantially weaken the powers of the committees established to review decisions to refuse terminations under sections 9 and 11 of the 2018 Act. The requirement that the conscientious objection would not override professional obligations in medical emergencies is already effectively and coherently addressed in the 2018 Act.

In conclusion, nothing is solved by politicising this very sensitive area. It does not serve one woman and it would not save one child's life. The Minister has indicated her willingness to engage constructively on the issues raised in the debate. We urge the Social Democrats and other Members of this House to take up that offer. By doing so collectively, we can do right by all of the women in Ireland.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: Gabhaim buíochas le Holly Cairns as an reachtaíocht seo a thabhairt chun cinn. I thank Holly Cairns for bringing forward this legislation. I thank all the Deputies who have spoken during this debate. I take the earlier contribution by the Minister for Health in good faith. However, what is missing from what the Minister said is any commitment to bring forward legislation to address the very serious flaws in the existing legislation that were identified in the review. Also missing from what the Minister said was any commitment that these legislative flaws and gaps would actually be addressed. We have received no firm commitments from the Government today that it will actually do anything to fix the very serious issues identified in the review. The Minister said that the situation of women being forced to travel abroad would not be fixed for every situation. She did not say that she would fix the very grave situation of fatal foetal abnormalities where women are still being forced to travel to the UK in the most horrific circumstances, as my colleague Jennifer Whitmore spoke about earlier.

I want to summarise the current situation. In 2018, an overwhelming majority of Irish people voted to repeal the eighth amendment. This explicitly gave the Oireachtas the remit to legislate for abortion. It also explicitly included a commitment from the Government to review the legislation. The barrister Marie O'Shea, who conducted the review, said that vulnerable women who continued to be forced abroad for terminations were being treated like criminals.

She said that a lack of action on the many legislative recommendations in her report meant that some pregnant women are being left to face profoundly sad conditions. The review found

a number of very serious flaws in the legislation, including that doctors find the law unclear and fear clear criminal sanction, leading to defensive medicine and denial of care. The prospect of criminal sanction and adverse media scrutiny has likely led to women being denied care. Criminalisation is not theoretical; it is actively harming patients.

The mandatory three-day waiting period has a physical and psychological impact on women. It is particularly onerous for people in marginalised groups and those living in rural areas. The waiting period is not neutral. It causes measurable harm and pushes women past the 12-week limit. It is worth noting that the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women has called on the Irish Government to abolish this mandatory three-day waiting period.

It is also worth saying that middle-ground voters in the referendum were particularly concerned about women who needed terminations for medical reasons being forced to travel abroad, and they wanted to change this. Despite the review commissioned by the Government, which was published more than three years ago, what we have is inaction. It is clear today from the Minister's comments that this inaction will continue.

Deputy Rory Hearne: I thank Deputy Cairns and my Social Democrats colleagues for bringing forward this Bill. It is not a simple area of legislation but our job as legislators is not to shy away from the difficult conversations and to respond to the difficult realities that citizens and people in this country are living through. This is a deeply emotional topic. As a father and a partner, I have experienced the pain of pregnancy loss. I have close friends who had to travel due to a fatal foetal abnormality. They had to put their child in a cardboard box in the car and bring it home on the ferry. When Independent Ireland talks about tragedy and trauma, what about the tragedy and trauma inflicted on the more than 200 women, their partners and others who go through this?

The reality is that our families, people we know and friends in our communities are having abortions because they choose to and they need to. That is the reality. This proposal and legislation are about providing abortion care to women who need it. A vote against this Bill is a vote against a law that fully respects the bodily integrity, autonomy, equality and dignity of women. This is about trusting women. It is about giving women their autonomy.

The Act, as it stands, imposes an unnecessary mandatory three-day waiting period for abortion care. The legislative review, the O'Shea report, recommends the removal of section 23 from the legislation. I spoke to a researcher involved in that review who pointed out that the need for the removal of the criminalisation of abortion is because it is a reason that GPs are not opting to provide the care that is needed.

Independent Ireland and Áontu also made an accusation relating to women in homelessness. No one has pushed for action on women and children in poverty, in homelessness, in domestic violence and with disabilities more than the Social Democrats. That is just a red herring, trying to draw attention away from what this legislation is actually putting forward.

The O'Shea review was informed by the ICGP and the Institute of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, and represents the recommendations of practitioners for best practice in healthcare provision. To enact these recommendations would follow the principle of evidence-based policy, which is at the core of what the Social Democrats are about. This Bill is drawn

from good practice, as recommended by healthcare providers, legal experts and, most importantly, the women and patients themselves. Abortion care is about time-sensitive healthcare. The imposition of a mandatory three-day wait is in direct opposition to that.

Deputy Holly Cairns: We all know that this law is causing harm, and we have a responsibility to change it. We know women are being hurt by the gaps in our legislation in maternity hospitals, on overnight ferries and in hotel rooms in England, far away from their loved ones. Everyone in this Chamber knows about it, and everyone in this Chamber needs to address that reality.

We have heard repeated references today to caution, to limits and to concerns about changing the framework too much. There also needs to be caution about the harm caused by inaction, concern for the women who continue to fall through the cracks in this legislation, and limits to how long that evidence can be ignored, because none of these issues are new. The problems with the 28-day rule, the mandatory waiting period and the criminalisation of doctors were all identified years ago but nothing was done.

There is a tendency, when abortion is discussed, for there to be an undercurrent of suspicion - suspicion that if barriers are removed, women and doctors simply could not be trusted. I was shocked today that the Minister for Health and Sinn Féin are in favour of criminalisation. When politicians create obstacles in abortion care, it is women who suffer. The continued existence of criminal penalties sends a message that abortion is something morally wrong, something dangerous, something outside the bounds of normal healthcare, and that affects how a service develops. It affects how clinicians feel about providing care. It affects stigma. It affects access. You cannot build a genuinely supportive healthcare system while simultaneously threatening doctors with a 14-year prison sentence. The World Health Organization is clear that it does not agree with this.

People who fought for repeal will be stunned at the approach that Sinn Féin is taking. I am stunned too. Putting forward a proposal for the bare minimum - removing the three-day wait - Deputy Cullinane said that this strikes the right balance. I have to ask: for who? It is safe to say it is not the women who are forced to travel for a termination for medical reasons. Deputy Cullinane went as far as to say that our legislation lacks democratic legitimacy. That is an absolutely outrageous thing to say. It is based on an expert review of the law.

Irish people expect a healthcare system based on science and compassion, not ideology and shame. The public also expects the Oireachtas to respond when flaws in the law become obvious. That is what this Bill seeks to do: to address clear and identifiable legislative gaps. That is why I am asking Members today not to shut down this debate on Second Stage. If Members believe that parts of this legislation can be strengthened, then come forward with amendments. If Members believe that safeguards should be clarified, make those arguments. However, refusing to even engage with reform when we already know the harm being caused is irresponsible.

The women directly affected by these laws deserve better than that. They deserve a Dáil that will take this issue seriously because, at the end of the day, women will do what they need to do in order to access a termination. The question is whether we ensure they can do that safely in Ireland, or whether we continue to force them abroad; whether we listen to women who told us that the law failed them, or whether we choose to ignore them again. I encourage

the Minister, if she means what she says, and if she actually wants something to change, to come forward with something concrete on what she would do about that. I would encourage a Committee Stage debate.

Question put.

An Ceann Comhairle: In accordance with Standing Order 85(2), the division is deferred until tonight's voting bloc.

Before we move to Leaders' Questions, I welcome the teachers and TY students from the Salesian College in Pallaskenry, County Limerick. They are with independent Councillor Tommy Hartigan from Adare-Rathkeale municipal district, who travelled with the group as a past pupil of the school. They are most welcome. There are also a number of staff from Mallow General Hospital here with Deputy Eoghan Kenny. Deputy Cathy Bennett would like to welcome the exchange students from Monaghan and also Monaghan u3a.

12 o'clock

Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Our ambulance workers should not have to strike to be heard by the Taoiseach. They should not have to stand on a picket line to fight for fair pay, recognition and basic respect, but that is what they were forced to do yesterday. They were left with no other option because the Government has failed to deliver improved pay for the incredible work, vital skills and life-saving expertise they bring to work every single day. Paramedics were asked to step up and to take on advanced training to modernise the ambulance service, and they did what was asked of them. In typical Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael style, however, the Taoiseach washed his hands of his obligations and left them hanging - not for a week or a month, but for six long years. The Taoiseach's response to the 24-hour stoppage means that we face escalating stoppages next week and the week after. His failure to intervene has real consequences. He says to use the industrial relations mechanisms of the State, but he knows that there is a deadlock and, without intervention, this could take months to resolve.

Yesterday, there was a significant impact on ambulance services, with even longer waiting times. The Taoiseach cannot sit this one out. His inaction risks walking the country into a summer of crisis, with rolling strikes week after week. People do not want that. They are really worried. They want this resolved fast. Paramedics do not want this. They want to be at work saving lives. This is not any regular industrial dispute; this is our ambulance service. It is a service critical to people's well-being, their safety and their health.

I do not know what the Taoiseach sees when he looks at a paramedic, but I know what I see. I see someone who shows up, who is there for you, who has your back in your most vulnerable moments and who gets the job done. Yet, they are denied fair pay. They are taken for granted and disrespected by the Government. That is at the root of this crisis. The Taoiseach needs to recognise that reality, he needs to listen and he needs to be active in fixing this.

Caithfidh an Taoiseach freagracht a ghlacadh agus teacht ar réiteach don ghéarchéim sa tsuirbhís otharcharranna. Seo fadhb a chruthaigh an Rialtas. Caithfidh an Taoiseach gníomhú,

idirghabháil a dhéanamh chun cúrsaí a réiteach go tapa agus tuilleadh stailceanna a sheachaint. There is a crisis in our ambulance service. The Taoiseach's complete and utter inaction over six years has deepened that crisis. It is unacceptable for him to now look the other way. Standing on the sidelines simply will not cut it. The Taoiseach is supposed to be in charge, so he should take charge. There is a week before the next strike. I urge him not to waste that time. He should act, intervene, step in and help sort this out.

Deputy Máire Devine: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: First, I have always acknowledged the critical role that those who work in the National Ambulance Service play in our health service. The Deputy said she does not know what I see when I look at a paramedic. I was critically involved at an earlier time, as Minister for Health, in the professionalisation of the first responder service. I have the greatest and highest of respect for the transformation that has occurred. It has been a good transformation. We have modernised the first responder approach in medicine and in health. That is critical in terms of the acute service, but, more importantly, it is critical in terms of patient outcomes and the outcomes of very serious accidents or developments or cardiac arrests or whatever. The first responder is key. The fact that we have professionalised and modernised that is a good thing. We have always acknowledged and the State has always accepted that pay structures need to be modernised. I refer to the previous engagement at the WRC. I said this to the Deputy yesterday. It is very dishonest of her to say that this has been ignored for six years. That is not the case. Negotiations took place. There was engagement at the WRC. It concluded with significant outcomes, in particular, the State offering pay increases of between 3% to 14% linked to reform. This was on top of the 9.25% increase under the current public service agreement. While union leadership did recommend this proposal to their members, it was rejected by staff following a ballot.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Exactly.

The Taoiseach: That is not ignoring something for six years.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Yes, it is.

The Taoiseach: How can the Deputy, with any credibility, come into the House and say that this was ignored for six years, when, clearly, there were negotiations and an outcome? There were negotiations between the unions and the HSE. The unions recommended it. The members voted against it. Dialogue is the only route to resolving this. I am of the view that it will get resolved, but it has to be resolved through dialogue. The 24-hour work stoppage concluded this morning. The HSE and the NAS made every effort to minimise the impact on patients, but we do know that there were significant delays in ambulance response times. That did cause distress and upset to those who were depending on the ambulance service.

I also acknowledge the engagement of SIPTU and Unite in contingency planning in advance to assist in reducing the risks to patients. It is recognised and welcome that, on a number of occasions, the National Ambulance Service staff returned to work to support the management of critical cases. I acknowledge that and their desire to ensure patient safety and continuity of

emergency care being the overriding priority. The HSE and the Department remain ready and available to re-engage through the WRC or the Labour Court processes. I urge SIPTU and Unite to return to those mechanisms in the interests of patients, staff and the wider public.

An tslí is fearr chun é seo a réiteach ná go mbeadh plé idir an HSE, SIPTU agus Unite chun an scéal seo a réiteach agus an tseirbhís a chur ar ais i bhfeidhm go hiomlán. Admhaím go bhfuil bunathruithe tar éis tarlú maidir leis an tseirbhís. Tá an Rialtas sásta glacadh leis sin agus déileáil leis. Rinneamar é sin cheana féin, agus tá súil agam go mbeimid in ann é a réiteach tríd an WRC agus an Labour Court. I urge all involved to get back to the industrial relations machinery and use the WRC and the Labour Court to get this resolved.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Taoiseach's response reflects his lack of urgency on this question. He is quite happy to simply take a *laissez-faire* approach and hope that others will sort this out. He knows that for the past six years, throughout this process of modernisation, ambulance workers have been left understaffed to the point that they have very deep safety concerns. Those concerns are well-grounded. He has left them overworked. So many of them are burned out that there is now an issue around recruitment and retention in that very service. He has also left them underpaid.

Yesterday, those workers were on the picket line. If the Taoiseach maintains the position he has articulated today, we will face next week, the week after and the week after that an escalating crisis in the service. That is not good enough for the workers concerned and it is certainly good enough for the public and the citizens who rely on these workers for a life-saving service.

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

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I urge the Taoiseach again to stop being a spectator-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach to respond. Time is up, Deputy.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: ----- to intervene and assist in a resolution on this matter.

The Taoiseach: Again, the Deputy is mischaracterising my approach to this. This is a very serious issue. The Deputy knows in her heart of hearts that this has to be resolved through the industrial relations machinery. She knows that. In every single public service dispute that can occur, taoisigh will not be getting involved. In my case, there is a proper way to do this. You cannot have a situation where we ignore completely the informed, sophisticated and experienced people we have in the Labour Court or in the Workplace Relations Commission. That is how these disputes get resolved. The Deputy knows that.

We have also invested very significantly in the ambulance service. Overall funding is up about 41%. That is up €83 million between 2022 and 2025. In three years alone, it went up 41%, to €285 million. Staffing is up - 588 staff.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Jesus, do not. They are completely understaffed.

The Taoiseach: There has been an investment of €126 million in the ambulance fleet and there is a further investment of €20 million planned-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: So there is not a problem.

The Taoiseach: -----for 2026.

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

Micheál Martin: There has been substantial investment in our ambulance service and there will be more.

Deputy Holly Cairns: In the run-up to the last general election, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael were in panic mode.

In an effort to distract voters from the Government's failure to deliver they began splashing the cash, giving nearly everyone in the country a one-off payment which hit bank accounts in the week leading up to the election. Not just that, but a range of cast-iron commitments were made to the electorate. Chief among them was a promise to cap the cost of childcare at €200 a month. We were told that childcare costs were at the top of Fianna Fáil's agenda, while Fine Gael promised to publish a plan to cap costs and deliver a public model of childcare within the first 100 days of office.

A full 475 days later, where are we now? Childcare costs have not come down by a single cent. Families with young children are still paying enormous sums for childcare. That is if they are lucky enough to even get a childcare place because it is almost impossible to get one, especially for babies between six and 12 months of age. This means thousands of women all over the country having to take unpaid maternity leave so they can care for their babies. It is stressful, it is a struggle and it is hugely expensive.

In an interview with Gavan Reilly on Monday the Taoiseach refused to commit to reducing childcare costs in the next budget. It was extraordinary to witness, given all of the pre-election bluster. The reality is that our childcare system is broken but, instead of reforming it, the Taoiseach wants to continue with business as usual. We have the resources to transform childcare services, rolling out a public model that would be accessible and affordable. It would mean the State treating childcare with the level of seriousness primary and secondary education get, recognising that investment in early years and the first few years of a child's life pays dividends over a lifetime.

The Social Democrats was the first party to publish a plan for a public model of childcare. We did that two years ago, detailing how we would set up a public childcare model to acquire private businesses that wanted to sell, because we know there are businesses that want to sell. Just this week, one of Ireland's biggest childcare operators, Tigers Childcare, was acquired by a large UK company, Kids Planet Day Nurseries. That deal was worth €75 million. That is a drop in the ocean of the surpluses available to this Government but the grim reality is that this Government, which is awash with cash, lacks both vision and ambition. The Government is

incapable of investing the money wisely and reforming our public services, driving down costs for families, transforming people's lives in the long term for the better.

Why will the Taoiseach not commit to reducing childcare fees in the budget and where is the plan to roll out a public model of childcare?

The Taoiseach: In terms of childcare more generally, there has been very significant progress made in childcare in the last number of years. Again, Deputy Cairns will not acknowledge that, but it is the reality in terms of both reduction of costs and, indeed, the increase in the numbers of children availing of the various programmes we have. In terms of the national childcare scheme, about 277,000 children will be supported this year. That is an increase of 27,000 children in just one year. Income thresholds are rising from September of this year, from €34,000 and €68,000, ensuring more low- and middle-income families qualify for higher levels of support. Some 105,000 children continue to benefit from two years of free preschool under the ECCE programme and the access and inclusion model now supports a record 8,400 children with disabilities, ensuring access to mainstream early learning and childcare. Core funding now exceeds about €420 million. That is a 62% increase since 2022, with 93% of providers signed up. After subsidies, parents in many instances now pay no more than €198.70 per week for a full-day, 45-hour place.

We have more to do and we want to reduce the fees even further. We are going to continue to work on that and the forthcoming budget will be an opportunity to improve the situation in terms of the cost of childcare and also, of course, in terms of payments. Regarding human capital and people who work in childcare, we have focused on that in particular in the last number of years, and this year's core funding allocation includes about €45 million ring-fenced to support improved pay for early-years educators and school-age childcare practitioners where new employment regulation orders are agreed. We achieved a milestone in the last Government by agreeing such a regulation order and the most recent employment regulation order delivered an average 10% increase in minimum pay rates, benefitting over two thirds of the workforce. The pay-related negotiations are conducted through the joint labour committee, with Government backing the outcomes financially through the core funding.

For the first time ever, the State is now directly supporting the creation of new childcare capacity through a State-led building, acquisition and delivery programme targeting areas of greatest need, including places for children under three years of age and in rural and disadvantaged communities. There is €135 million in capital investment available over the next five years, with up to eight buildings to be selected for investment in 2026.

There has been steady progress made. In terms of the broader issue of State-led childcare provision, childcare has evolved over the last 30-odd years, beginning, actually, in the Department of justice under the new opportunities for women, NOW, programme. It has evolved through both community playschools, private operators and some-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Taoiseach. You will have to come back in.

The Taoiseach: I will come back in.

Deputy Holly Cairns: The Taoiseach seems to just think it is par for the course to make these big election promises to people and then completely, unashamedly renege on them afterwards.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Holly Cairns: He seems to think that plámáising the electorate and promising things is just part of electioneering. It is not. People believed the Taoiseach when he said there would be a reduction in childcare fees. People believed this Government when it promised to roll out a plan for a public model of childcare. I just hope that people watching will judge this Government not on its empty promises in the lead-up to the next election but on its actions now. The Taoiseach says I will not acknowledge progress and is talking about workers in this sector. Does he acknowledge that workers in the childcare sector have the same level of training and qualifications as other teachers but get paid minimum wage and in the summer months have to sign on? Where is the progress for workers in this sector? Does the Taoiseach acknowledge that without a public model of childcare, without any actual childcare at all for so many families, we will never reach gender equality and that this stifles women's careers? It blocks them from getting back into the workplace. The Taoiseach lists off his script of things there as if that is progress.

The Taoiseach: I believe in childcare for the development of the child primarily. Anything we do in the area of childcare or early education should be about the child as the primary issue, actually. I know a lot about Montessori and I know all about early education because I was involved in it and I had Green Papers and so on. Maybe people should examine the Social Democrats' proposals and the lack of substance in them, the lack of detail, the lack of flesh on the bone.

Deputy Holly Cairns: I think you should examine them.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Cairns is now suggesting we can seamlessly move from a model we have developed over years through community-----

Deputy Holly Cairns: I did not say seamlessly. Did you read our proposal?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Cairns.

The Taoiseach: You are saying that and you are holding up the prospect that we can, with a click of the fingers, seamlessly move into a-----

Deputy Holly Cairns: You obviously have not read the proposal.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, the rules are the same for you as everyone else.

The Taoiseach: I did not interrupt you, Deputy Cairns, in fairness. I never do interrupt you. Every time I say a few home truths, you all get a bit agitated and have to heckle back.

Deputy Rory Hearne: Home spins.

The Taoiseach: The bottom line is this: the Social Democrats do not do detailed policy propositions.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: That is rubbish.

The Taoiseach: That is the bottom line. They are talking about promises and commitments. The bottom line is a lot of what the Social Democrats say as a party lacks that substance and that detail. You cannot, overnight, move from where we currently are into a full public model. You just cannot do that and you should acknowledge the honesty of that proposition.

An Ceann Comhairle: Your time is up. Deputy Paul Murphy.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Fianna Fáil's former leader and Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, has engaged in disgusting racism in Dublin Central, saying we have "too many" immigrants and saying, "The ones I worry about are the Africans", and that, "We can't be taking in people from the Congo and all these places." He said he worries about the next generation of Muslims. Bertie Ahern doing it makes the agenda very blatant: scapegoat immigrants and divide ordinary people. Why? So that nobody blames Bertie Ahern, Fianna Fáil and the landlords and developers Fianna Fáil has allowed to profit from the housing crisis.

People from the Congo did not take corrupt payments from developers to blow up the property bubble. They were never found by a tribunal to have been untruthful in explaining how €400,000 in today's money passed through their bank accounts. Muslim children did not crash the economy, causing years of misery and austerity for ordinary people. Unlike Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, they never rolled out the red carpet for developers and vulture funds. They are not the ones who sowed the seeds of the current housing disaster and they were not the ones who refused to maintain council flats and then voted to increase council rents. All of this is an act of mass distraction. From what? From the horrendous conditions many people in Dublin Central are forced to face every day. Right across Dublin city there are council tenants living in conditions that nobody should be asked to live in.

Yesterday, in Sheridan Court on Dorset Street, we met a single mother with two children with additional needs. She is three months living without usable water because it is scalding hot. She has to bring her children to her mother's house in Fairview to bathe them. Her bedroom is severely damp and mouldy. I am holding up a photo of her bathroom - we can see the mould. Another woman is sleeping in the living room as her bedroom has been rendered uninhabitable due to leakages in the ceilings and walls. This is a photo of the hole in the wall of her bedroom. Another resident's ceiling collapsed in places in January. Her flat is not in a livable condition but she has nowhere else to go. Her ceiling can be seen in this photo. The only work done for the people in Sheridan Court has been superficial. However, it is not just Sheridan Court; it is right across Dublin city.

To add insult to injury, Dublin City Council has hiked these people's rents by 30%, an amount that many of them simply cannot afford. Councillors from Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Labour and the Green Party shamefully voted against a budget amendment that would have

stopped that rent hike. I have two simple questions for the Taoiseach. I want answers to them. First, will he commit to the residents of Sheridan Court and other flats around Dublin city that this treatment will not continue and that people in 2026 will not be asked to live like this? Second, will he support a reversal of these unfair rent increases in Dublin city and drop his agenda to hike council rents right across the country?

The Taoiseach: In the first instance, we have a very clear asylum system in this country which is fair and robust. I do not approve of any commentary that would in any way undermine any particular ethnicity or any person with a particular ethnic background. I have been very clear about that. My understanding is that the former Taoiseach, Mr. Ahern, has resiled from those comments and says he has no issue with people who come through our asylum process. I want to be very clear from my perspective and my party's perspective that we do not approve of those specific comments. They were in a conversation which was subsequently published. It was not, therefore, a distraction process by anybody here because no one could anticipate that any commentary of that kind would be in the public domain. Be that as it may, our position is very clear. We have a fair and robust asylum process which has accelerated a lot. The Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, has outlined that. Then we have a broader migration narrative. People come from Europe, the EFTA countries and beyond, who work in our economy and our health service. We have many Irish citizens with different ethnic backgrounds who play a very full and meaningful contribution to Irish life.

Regarding the broader issue of housing, this Government, in particular over the last number of years, has substantially step-changed the provision of social housing. This year, up to 9,000 were built, compared with very low numbers four or five years ago. There has been a very substantial step-change in the provision of public housing itself. Significant funding is also made available to local authorities, and particularly Dublin City Council, in respect of regeneration, refurbishment and maintenance. In the first instance it is a matter for Dublin City Council to make sure its housing stock is properly maintained and refurbished. We establish local authorities. We give them powers and remit. Anytime they do anything then, the Dáil - or elements of the Dáil - in a reflex wants to come back in and say that local authority does not have any space or parameters in which it can develop policies itself. These are elected representatives of many parties, including the Deputy's, and they have to organise and run their councils in a sustainable manner. That is a matter for the councils. Government does not dictate every single item of local authority policy. What we have tried to do in the last while is to say to councils that they need to zone more land for housing. I do not know whether the Deputy agrees with that but we believe councils need to do this. We need more space for local authority housing, social and affordable housing, and affordable rental as well. That is the most fundamental-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach. He will have an opportunity to come back in. I call Deputy Murphy.

The Taoiseach: -----way to meet the housing needs of people in Dublin Central, and, indeed, across the country.

Deputy Paul Murphy: On Bertie Ahern, I will just say this. What people say when they do not think they are being recorded is actually more valuable than what they say when they know they are being recorded. It suggests a dirty game used on doorsteps by Fianna Fáil to divide and rule ordinary people, and to have them not blaming the people the Taoiseach represents - the developers, the landlords, the people who get rich from the housing crisis. Instead, it is better to blame the people from Congo or wherever else.

Regarding the council flats and the rents issue, the Taoiseach cannot have it both ways. He is the Taoiseach; the leader of a party which has councillors. He has a responsibility and a connection with the votes, for example, to increase council rents. Does he stand over those increases or not? They are not doing that out of nowhere. It is a nationally driven project. We can look at the Government's programme for Government increasing council rents. We can look at this new programme, which has not been published yet, which points to massive increases in council rents. We can look towards the plan to merge cost-rental and social housing.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank Deputy Murphy. The Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Paul Murphy: The other thing is the Department. The Department pulled the plug on Oliver Bond. It is the Department-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach will now respond.

Deputy Paul Murphy: -----that has pulled the plug on regeneration. The Government cannot wash its hands of it and just say it is the council.

An Ceann Comhairle: The same as everybody else, the Deputy's time is up. The Taoiseach, please.

The Taoiseach: First, that was an unacceptable comment the Deputy made. That is not the Fianna Fáil approach and it is not Fianna Fáil policy. By the way, the Deputy is not shy himself in terms of mischaracterising people, spinning and deliberately exaggerating positions of different politicians on an ongoing basis. You are no angel yourself when it comes to politics, and do not pretend that you are.

Deputy Paul Murphy: You will not catch me saying racist things, even if you record me secretly.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, please.

The Taoiseach: The other problem is on councils. I have been on a city council. I have always divided the council between those who genuinely want to govern or run a city, as opposed to those who just oppose everything and never voted for a budget in their life. Did the Deputy every vote for a budget in his life on a city council?

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: No.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I was never on a council.

The Taoiseach: He probably did not.

An Ceann Comhairle: They are rhetorical questions.

The Taoiseach: Yes, but your party, I mean. Those you represent. They never do.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: They never do.

The Taoiseach: You want more and more, and more services. Services here, services there, but when it comes to the annual budget, you guys never vote for them.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Never.

The Taoiseach: However, other politicians have to step up with a bit of guts and courage to vote to make sure a city runs. That is the difference between the Deputy's politics and the politics of the majority-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: It takes a lot of courage to increase rents on council tenants.

An Ceann Comhairle: Time is up Taoiseach. I call Deputy Gogarty.

The Taoiseach: That is the fundamental point I would make. By the way, the city council did not pull funding-----

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

The Taoiseach: -----from Oliver Bond flats. That will be sorted out very quickly.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: We have talked a lot about energy security, which is a very important issue, but I want to raise another issue that affects every household in this country and that is our food security or, more accurately, our lack of it. The Minister for agriculture describes the Government's Food Vision 2030 as strategy for a world-leading sustainable food system, but it is not a food security plan. In fact, the evidence shows that Ireland will not be able to sustain itself indefinitely without major agriculture and dietary change. We can do this the hard way or the easy way. At the moment, we are 233% self-sufficient in meat and 300% in dairy. Teagasc tells us we produce enough protein for 30 million to 36 million people, but that does not mean Irish families would have access to the food they need if imports were to be disrupted by a war or pandemic. What people buy every week is bread, cereals, pasta, fruit, vegetables, oils and all kinds of food that is largely imported. Only 10% of our land grows crops in this country. Some 90% of it is grass. Modern Irish beef and dairy farming depends

on imported fertiliser, feed, fuel and machinery parts. What would this mean for ordinary families? After a two-week scenario, supermarkets would begin to show gaps in fresh fruit and vegetables. Bread would become harder to source because we import most of the milling wheat. Prices would rise. Choice would collapse. The weekly shop would suddenly cost more and people would buy less. After two months, pig and poultry products would become scarce because they rely almost wholly on imported feed. Dairy output would begin to get tighter. There would be more empty shelves. Families on lower incomes would be hit more because, as prices rise, the better-off would use their relative purchasing power to get what is available. After 12 months, fertiliser shortage would reduce grass growth and silage yields. Farmers would cull lower yield animals. Milk and beef output would fall. Ireland would still have all this calorific meat-based protein but not a balanced healthy and affordable diet. The Taoiseach is someone who is into healthy eating, and I am a vegan so I have to be, but households would have to shift to whatever is available. Grow your own might increase massively in gardens but it would not have the scale, so after five years we would have had to adapt massively.

As I said at the start, we can do this the easy way or the hard way and expand our horticulture and tillage now, reduce our livestock intensity and have a national food security plan. We have a massive opportunity to expand plant protein production. Fava beans, for example, will fix nitrogen in the soil. We can produce our own plant protein and our own plant milks but also make the soil healthier for other forms of agriculture.

The Teagasc tillage initiative scheme and the protein aid scheme have shown that farmers will grow more crops if the incentives are right. We need an actual food security strategy. I do not believe we have one.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy very much for raising this very important issue. We probably need to situate this in a European and global context rather than just in a narrow national context, although I take the Deputy's point that there are vulnerabilities in terms of the importation of a range of foodstuffs and that we need a plan regarding food security on the island. Our dairy and meat industries are probably more carbon efficient than others across the globe. We export to about 170 countries, so we feed a lot of people by means of the dairy, beef, lamb and pig industries. That is a factor which speaks to European food security and food security in Britain, where a lot of Irish produce is consumed. Globally, we use a lot of our technology and expertise to help sub-Saharan African countries with climate-resilient crops and so on.

I accept the Deputy's basic premise that we need to do more in the context of horticulture and tillage. We need to look at incentives to give us greater security and capacity in that respect. The Minister for enterprise recently announced a scheme to bring flour milling back into being here. Schemes that can guarantee farmers a market or an outcome in respect of a product are important.

I do not mean to digress, but I was at a Diageo facility earlier in the week. I was interested to learn that 10% of the barley grown in the country is used by Diageo. That is quite extraordinary. About 5% of Irish dairy is used to produce Baileys, which is exported all over the world. We are part of a global food supply chain.

The Deputy has highlighted a weakness when it comes to tillage and horticulture. The dominance of meat and dairy is, to a certain extent, related to global supply chains, markets

and the returns achieved. We have to work on ring-fencing good returns for tillage and horticulture into the future. Land pricing is a factor in that regard. We need to systematically identify potential weaknesses that would cause problems if global events were to restrict the supply of vital imported foodstuffs or general foodstuffs we currently import. We have seen that in the Ukrainian war, which could have had impacts on Africa as a result of the blockade in the Black Sea. Türkiye and other countries had to intervene in that regard. We see it now in an energy context in the Middle East. I accept the Deputy's general proposition that we need to be very alert to the issue of food security because we are vulnerable to global events.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: I am not trying to cause panic, but we need to be prepared. We have seen the virus on the boat in the Canary Islands. What if it was a more resilient and transmissible virus? What if the Iranian war or other conflicts prevented us from getting as many boats to this country? That is the issue. Food Vision 2030 is based on exports and farm income diversification. It is not about having a national food security plan. My understanding is that there is such a plan in the Netherlands. Even within an EU context, we need a contingency plan in case something happens. That is why we need a strategic food reserve as well as our strategic oil reserve. That means giving grant aid to farmers to allow them to engage in diversification. As the Taoiseach said, a lot of this produce could be turned into animal feed if we do not need it. However, we need some homegrown food stability. I would like to see an actual food security plan.

The Taoiseach: That is fair. I will engage with the Minister for agriculture on the Deputy's overall point regarding a national food security plan. There is merit in that. In recent years, the former Minister of State, Pippa Hackett, and the then Minister, Deputy McConalogue, were very involved in supporting organic farmers. In that context, €256 million was allocated to support organic farmers. That resulted in significant five-year growth and a 5.5% increase in organic production up to 2025. About 5,500 farmers are now engaged in the organic farming scheme. That is up 223%. We have made a lot of progress on the organics side, which is related to this issue in terms of capacity. I take the Deputy's overall point and appreciate the constructive manner in which he put it forward.

Ceisteanna ó na Comhaltaí Eile - Other Members' Questions

Deputy Brendan Smith: I have previously welcomed the substantial and much-needed increase in investment in special education. The establishment of additional special classes and autism spectrum disorder units and the provision of additional staffing resources are positive developments in the context of overall education provision in our country. More investment is needed to establish more special classes. I commend the work of the Minister of State, Deputy Moynihan, and the Minister, Deputy Naughton. The chief executive of the NCSE, John Kearney, and his colleagues are very determined to make more progress in this area.

The Taoiseach may recall that I have previously raised with him and with other members of the Government the existing inequity and the disadvantages suffered by smaller schools due to the difficulty they have in reaching the required enrolment threshold for special classes. As I pointed out previously, this inequity impacts severely on schools that are under the patronage

of the smaller churches. Such schools generally have small enrolments. This enrolment threshold also impacts severely on other smaller schools which, in most instances, are located in what are rural and, sometimes, remote areas. We are all aware of children having to travel too far to access special classes. That is far from ideal for pupils or parents. I again appeal for the enrolment threshold to be amended. A new model of system for the establishment of special classes is needed now. It is necessary to properly support smaller schools and schools under the patronage of the Protestant and smaller churches. Those smaller schools want to cater for all their pupils in the best possible way. The legitimate interests of those schools must be addressed.

Children need to be facilitated with appropriate school placements as near to their homes as possible and, if at all possible, with their siblings. Regrettably, the current model has detrimental effects on our smaller schools. I am aware of instances where families who have a child in a special class in a larger school have transferred a sibling or siblings to that larger school. Pupils leaving their own catchment areas can impact on the viability of small schools in the longer term. I fully understand the strong and legitimate wish of parents to have their children attend the same primary school. There must be an alternative way to improve access to local schools. If additional resources are needed, they should be provided. In rolling out the much-needed additional investment in special education, the Department must ensure that those welcome decisions and measures do not cause problems in the long term for our smaller schools, in some instances threatening their very viability. We cannot emphasise strongly enough the need to have siblings attend the same school.

The Taoiseach: I thank Deputy Smith for raising what is a fair and important point. I know this is something he has worked tirelessly to improve. The current threshold of six pupils for a special class at primary level with one teacher and two SNAs was introduced in 1998, when I happened to be Minister for Education and Science. We introduced a model of this kind for the first time and brought SNAs into mainstream education. Since then, the model has supported an enormous expansion of special education provision. Of course, the Deputy's point is that it might not always work for small rural schools. He mentioned instances where it has not and has particularly identified the issue of siblings and families attending the local school. We do not want children with additional needs having to travel unduly long distances simply because their local school cannot reach a threshold. The concern is specific and legitimate. The Department probably needs to look at this to identify both the scale of the problem and what the issues are, and how one would go about dealing with the latter.

The Deputy's point is that if a small rural school cannot reach the enrolment threshold of six children with additional needs, then those children may be denied a local placement, forcing families to deal with long daily journeys and often separating children from their siblings in the same school. That is an additional burden on families.

The preference has been for the National Council for Special Education, NCSE, and the Department to consider opening special classes in medium and larger primary schools. The issue when it comes to smaller primary schools has been more challenging. Of the 504 new special classes sanctioned so far by the NCSE for the coming school year, 330 are at primary level. More than one third, or 139, of those will be opening in primary schools with eight teachers or fewer. Of those, 69 will be opening in primary schools with four teachers or fewer. That is a significant number in itself. We need to drill down into the detail of this in order to

try to identify the need and what, potentially, the response could be. This does demonstrate that the NCSE will sanction special classes in our small primary schools where there is a level of need and where there are schools with available accommodation and a willingness to open new special classes. The new inclusive special class model introduced this year is an example of an innovative step in this space, allowing 12 students to be supported in existing special classroom where space is constrained.

As of now, this may not meet the Deputy's point about the rural school threshold, but the inclusive special class model is a more innovative approach. It may provide a route to try to deal with the issues the Deputy identified. It will take a bit more working out, but-----0

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: -----that may provide some opportunities into the future.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I thank the Taoiseach for his reply. I previously mentioned to the Taoiseach the case of Cavan No. 1 National School in Cavan town, which is under the patronage of the Church of Ireland and which has done exceptional work in providing a top-quality education for children from different denominations and of different nationalities. Inclusion is at the very heart of all activities in the school, and the work of the principal, Sabrina Richardson, her staff colleagues and the board of management is to be strongly commended. The principal has outlined in great detail to the NCSE and the Department of education the urgent need the school has for a special class. This school has also been waiting far too long for approval from the Department for basic improvement works which are urgently needed. I ask the Taoiseach to use his good offices to request that Department give urgent consideration to issuing approval in respect of the school's applications for the establishment of a special class and for the emergency works.

The Taoiseach may recall in 2011 or 2012, he along, Michael Moynihan, myself and others campaigned very strongly against the proposal by the then Minister for education to change the pupil-teacher ratio, which would have-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Brendan Smith: -----impacted very severely on schools under the patronage of the smaller churches. We must ensure that policies do not impact severely on small schools.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy again for his question on the Church of Ireland school in Cavan town and the special class issue. I am conscious the Minister of State, Deputy Moynihan, is in the Chamber as well. I take it he will have taken on board what the Deputy said.

On the emergency works application, there were some issues with the current proposal because it was well in excess of the minimum scope under the emergency works scheme. However, the Department of Education and Youth emergency works scheme team will work with the school to provide a solution that addresses the root issue the school is experiencing.

There is hope for flexibility in that regard in order that the issue might be resolved for the school.

I will talk to the Minister of State, Deputy Moynihan, and the Minister, Deputy Naughton, with a view to making sure that we can meet positively the request from the school in terms of a special class.

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

An Ceann Comhairle: I remind Members that they have one minute for questions to the Taoiseach and that he has one minute for answers. If their questions are longer than 60 seconds, they are asking them in the wrong forum.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The October budget, which was worth €9.4 billion, left disabled people €1,400 worse off in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis. For months, disabled people and their advocates have told their stories of choices between heating and eating. They have appealed to the Government again and again to deliver a cost-of-disability payment immediately, but it has ignored them. The Government's consultation process is a distraction. It has stated that it needs to figure out what a cost-of-disability payment should be. However, it has had a report on the matter in its possession for five years. It knows what the additional cost of disability is. Disabled people cannot wait. The Government refused to give them an emergency cost-of-living payment and now it is asking them to wait for a permanent payment. That is not acceptable. They are under pressure and are struggling now. The Government needs to listen and to act with urgency on this matter.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy is wrong in her presentation. The budget for specialist disability services has increased 50% since 2023. We increased a range of payments in the most recent budget that will positively impact on people with disabilities. We did not proceed with once-off measures across the board. The Deputy has mischaracterised that, of course, in her usual fashion.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: No, I have not.

The Taoiseach: The bottom line is people want permanent and sustainable action. Consultation is not a distraction. I am appalled at the Deputy's presentation. Organisations representing people with disabilities want to be consulted and insist on consultation. It is regrettable that the Deputy would describe consultation as a distraction.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: A "For Sale" sign has gone up this week on the Christian Brothers monastery building on Synge Street in Portabello in my constituency. The property has a guide price of €3.75 million. For some time, I have been calling on the Minister for education to ensure that this building will be retained for educational use by the existing four schools on the street. Indeed, I have also called on the Christian Brothers in this regard. The area suffers from an acute shortage of local school places, particularly places where students can receive education trí Gaeilge. The Minister, Deputy Naughton, has said in response that her

Department has no intention of acquiring the site, which is regrettable. Earlier this week, adults who were the victims of child sex abuse had to get an order from the High Court to compel the Christian Brothers to disclose the names of alleged abusers and members of the order in order that they could be sued. The Christian Brothers are still using controversial legal strategies to keep redress beyond the reach of those to whom it is owed. Now we are seeing the Christian Brothers selling what could create a world-class public educational campus to the highest bidder. This will be a commercial sale, with no conditions attached.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: Whether they will use the proceeds to compensate victims of abuse, we do not know.

An Ceann Comhairle: Time is up, Deputy Bacik. Prepare in time. The Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: I am asking the Taoiseach to intervene with the Minister for education in order to ensure this building remains in public usage as an educational campus-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, your time is up. You need to prepare in time.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: -----or at the very least that the money to the Christian Brothers is used to pay victims.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is taking absolute advantage and is using her colleagues' time.

The Taoiseach: I do not run the Department of education. The Minister and the Department have to make assessments as to what is needed in any given locality, and they have clearly made an assessment in this case. That said, the money realised from the sale of this property should be ring-fenced and put into a fund for redress.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: Hear, hear. Exactly.

The Taoiseach: That is what should happen here. The Department, as the Deputy knows, is examining all of that in great detail.

Deputy Eoin Hayes: This morning, the Taoiseach opened a cost-of-disability summit. Immediately prior to him doing so, the Minister for Social Protection was on “Morning Ireland” and refused to commit to a cost-of-disability payment in the forthcoming budget. Over the past month, the Government refused to introduce targeted energy credits that would benefit people with disabilities. Earlier this year, it refused to support my motion for an emergency payment for people with disabilities. In that debate, the Minister for Social Protection refused to acknowledge the lived experience of people with disabilities choosing between heating and eating. Shockingly, in an appalling act of cruelty, the Government cut the incomes of disabled

people by €1,400 in the budget. It has been 30 years since a cost-of-disability payment was first mooted. Will the Government commit to its introduction in the forthcoming budget?

The Taoiseach: If you go back over the past two to three years, you will see that there has been exponential growth in various payments right across the board, including the disability allowance. That growth was higher than anything in the preceding years. That is the reality. In terms of the cost-of-disability payment, it has to be defined and worked through. There is a lot of detail involved in this; it is not just a matter of saying that we should do it this way or that way. There are issues around definitions, who benefits and so on. Meanwhile, we did increase the domiciliary care allowance by €20 again this year. We did the same last year. Disability allowance core payments went up substantially as well. The whole process is about arriving at a situation where we can develop a proposal. The Minister will have a proposal in July on foot of the consultation process that is taking place. That will then be fed into the Estimates negotiations for the budget.

The Minister has to respect the negotiations that will ensue for the Estimates for next year for his Department but also all other Government Departments-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Seamus Healy. The time is up Taoiseach. Deputy Healy is on his feet.

Deputy Seamus Healy: I should not have to ask this question but, of course, Irish Water has no respect for customers, so I do not have a choice. Tipperary town, with a population of more than 5,000 people, has been on a boil water notice since 12 February. There is an information blackout from Irish Water. Despite the efforts of the public, local radio and local and national public representatives, we still do not know when Uisce Éireann will be able to provide a safe water supply for the town. For ten weeks, the only information that could be extracted from Irish Water was the initial post on its website about the boil water notice. Eventually, on 1 May, it confirmed that new wells would have to be drilled. There were no further details and there has been silence since. All the time, families and businesses are buying bottled water. Can the Taoiseach establish for the people of Tipperary town when a safe water supply will be restored to the town and what plans Uisce Éireann has to do this?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising the issue, which is clearly of huge concern to the people of Tipperary town. I do not quite understand what he means when he says there is an information blackout. I am sure that could not be the case.

Deputy Seamus Healy: It is the case.

The Taoiseach: I will communicate to Uisce Éireann that it needs to provide comprehensive information to the public so that they understand fully the challenges, difficulties, and the pathway to the resolution of those challenges and difficulties, no matter how challenging the required works are, which wells have to be drilled, or whatever else has to happen. Full information should be available to the public and we will communicate that to Uisce Éireann.

Deputy Michael Collins: Local Link has been a game-changer for many communities throughout the country. I pay tribute to all those who have helped to deliver the service but, alarmingly, in recent times, new services where tenders were sought and received have been unable to run due to funding constraints. Services from Dunmanway to Clonakilty, Grange to Timoleague, and Bantry via Kealkill to Macroom were put out to tender seven or eight months ago. They were tendered for and now they have been told there is no money to run the services. This, coupled with the NTA's stubborn resistance to including small additional loops in populated areas like Castletownsend, Mizen Head, Rinvile and Oranmore in Galway, or on the extension of the Mayo anseo rural link from the Louisburgh, Killeen, Drummin and the Roonagh harbour hinterland is leaving people deeply frustrated. We found out last week that over €500 million of National Oil Reserve Agency, NORA, fuel tax has not been spent and remains in Government funds. Will this money be spent on these new transport services?

The Taoiseach: I appreciate that the Deputy is praising Local Link. I remember that it is the Deputy's *bête noire*, former Minister, Eamon Ryan, who introduced Local Link. Deputy Collins rather shamelessly at the time hopped on the bus and presented it as his own initiative in west Cork. He is always adept at local politics. Local Link has turned out to be very effective and very impactful. I pay tribute to our former colleague, Eamon Ryan, and give credit where it is due, for supporting that. The Minister, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, has continued his support for it. There are always limits to public expenditure in terms of what we can do in any one year but this is a programme that is working for people on the ground in rural Ireland. It has a significant impact on increased socialisation and facilitating movement. We have included a recent €750 million package to support its operation with regard to the increased fuel costs. I will alert the Minister, Deputy O'Brien, to Deputy Collins's continued interest in Local Link.

Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil: Kilcock in County Kildare is the fastest-growing town in the county and one of the fastest-growing towns in the country. There was greatly welcome news that DART+ west will be extended to Kilcock, which is extremely welcome. However, the only bus service at the moment is the Bus Éireann 115 service. There have been many issues with it. Previously, Dublin Bus went to Maynooth. I am trying to get across the need for Dublin Bus to be extended to Kilcock. It is a wider issue for the commuter belt in Dublin, particularly those areas that are growing exponentially, and the need for additional bus capacity, particularly in light of people reducing the number of cars at home and how we are relying more on public transport. Dublin Bus has a bigger role to play here. I have met the NTA and Dublin Bus about this. I ask how the NTA and Dublin Bus are working together to deliver public transport for the commuter belt, Dublin in particular, and obviously Kildare and Meath.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this and for his strong advocacy for the fastest-growing town in Kildare and the country. Kildare is growing apace. I will talk to the Minister about the 115 bus service and the role for Dublin Bus more broadly with regard to extending its remit, and of course the NTA, which oversees the whole route development programme.

Deputy Brian Brennan: I am looking for an update on progress regarding the Wind Turbine Regulation Bill 2025. I am fully aware of our responsibility to reach our 2030 targets but is the construction of these monstrous turbines close to many rural villages really the best option for these communities? Should we prioritise solar panels and financially tweak the already-

successful schemes so that every house, industrial premises, and farm shed can avail? Should we focus on the incredible untapped potential of offshore wind farms? Today, not 1 kW is being produced on the Irish Sea as progress is tied up with planning issues. By addressing these issues, villages such as Craanford in County Wexford will not have to accommodate these turbines, which are the height of the Spire in Dublin and span the length of the pitch in Croke Park. We know we have to reach our targets but the way we are going about it is simply wrong and we must take into consideration the communities there.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising the issue. The Planning and Development Act 2024 replaces the ministerial guidelines with national planning statements. The existing section 28 guidelines, including the 2006 wind energy guidelines, remain in force until replaced. The Department of Climate, Communications and the Environment, as the lead policy Department for renewable energy, supports the development of the national planning statement. That will include environmental reporting, public consultation, EU obligations, and matters such as setback distances, noise and shadow flicker. A focused review of the wind energy development guidelines is informing the new national planning statement. That national planning statement will address noise, setback distances, shadow flicker, community obligations and dividends, and grid connections. A strategic environmental assessment and public consultation will be carried out in line with EU requirements. That is currently under way.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: When the Taoiseach entered politics, people were able to buy a family home for £50,000. Now house prices in Galway have exploded. They are up by almost 50% in the city and more than 60% in the county since 2020. Buying a home now costs over €140,000 more than it did a few years ago. In five years of the Taoiseach's so-called affordable housing scheme, not a single affordable home was delivered in Galway. Now, finally, the Government has announced 33 affordable homes. Does the Taoiseach know that the prices being charged for these houses are up to €450,000? Does the Taoiseach agree that his own political legacy from when he first entered politics to his role in a Government that crashed the economy to now is a housing crisis, unaffordable rents, the collapse in homeownership, and many young people who see no future here because of the housing crisis?

The Taoiseach: I do not accept the Deputy's proposition at all but the key point is that people who are looking for housing is the top priority of this Government and indeed the previous one. It is interesting that our supports for first-time buyers are having an impact. The percentage of first-time buyers has been steadily increasing from 26% of all household buyers in 2015 to 40% in 2026.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: Percentage of homeownership.

The Taoiseach: That is a huge increase. That is because of the help to buy scheme, the first home scheme, and the derelict and vacant housing grant schemes, which are helping first-time buyers. The costs are too high but the only answer is supply. We need more and more supply. We need fewer people and political parties objecting to housing to make sure that we have sufficient housing to provide for the younger people in the country. That is the target and objective of Government across social, affordable, and private housing.

Deputy Louis O'Hara: We have a real problem in Athenry with capacity on public transport services to Galway. The NTA and Iarnród Éireann have stated that there is no funding in place to maintain the 6.50 a.m. train to Galway beyond August of this year. This is a vital service for those who have work commitments early in the morning in the city. It has been 18 months since the previous bus service to Galway ended and since the NTA approved the public service obligation, PSO, for a replacement service but the NTA is saying it does not have funding in place from the Department to establish this service either. I cannot stress enough the frustration the current transport situation in Athenry is causing for commuters. Rail services are dangerously overcrowded. More than 1,300 people have signed my petition to maintain the 6.50 a.m. service and establish a new bus service.

I o'clock

We need more services, not cuts. The Government speaks constantly about sustainable transport and getting people out of cars, but my constituents are being denied viable alternatives. Will the Taoiseach commit to ensuring that the funding is provided for these services?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy, but just before I respond, I want to welcome the group from Laois, Mountmellick and Portarlinton who are in the Public Gallery, accompanied by Deputy Fleming. They are very welcome to Leinster House.

In terms of the train service from Athenry and the budgetary situation, Deputy Dolan has spoken to me about that as well. We are engaging with the Minister for Transport. That service is working and has worked very effectively. In terms of additional services, there has been substantial expansion of public transport and rail services, but we do need more. We are continuing, through the national development plan, to provide for the expansion of public transport more generally and particularly with a focus on Galway. There have been some good planning decisions in Galway that have come through An Coimisiún Pleanála with the ring road and, indeed, the port and other developments as well.

Deputy David Cullinane: The horrendous fire in Tycor in Waterford city was obviously devastating for local residents, but most especially for the social enterprises, small businesses, service providers, a school of music, and a company that provided costumes for theatre. Much was lost. I met many of them yesterday. I know that the Minister was in, but I also met them afterwards. They have a number of asks. The first is that everything possible be done to get them back on their feet and get those businesses up and running again. I spoke to the CEO of Waterford City and County Council this morning and he said that what was needed was a fund that should be administered by the local authority. Money has to be put on the table. That could enable supports to be given to those organisations quickly.

They also need premises. There was a real sense of community among those people. They have been working together for years with a mix of social enterprises and service providers. Can Enterprise Ireland and the IDA look at sites that would be appropriate?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising the issue, and I appreciate his genuine commitment to this. I saw him there yesterday and I know the Ministers of State, Deputies

Butler and Cummins, and all the public representatives in Waterford are obviously shocked at the impact of this fire, which has been terrible. The dislocation of so many groups and people has equally been very profound. It is very serious.

The CEO was in touch with the Minister of State, Deputy Butler, in terms of the fund idea. The Minister, Deputy Peter Burke, was down yesterday. The Minister, Deputy Browne, has also been there. We are working through a humanitarian approach. We are looking to pull that proposal together with a view to seeing if we can progress it as an option. There are also the questions of alternative premises for quite a number of the organisations involved and of working with State agencies. There are a lot of people working there but there are also disability services. It is quite shocking and devastating what has happened to the people. Every effort will be made to try to help those in distress at the moment.

Deputy Paul Murphy: *The Currency* reported today that, at the height of the genocide in 2024, the Department of trade authorised the export of €20 million euro worth of military-capable so-called dual-use goods, not just to Israel, but specifically to the Israel Defense Forces, IDF, or Israel's Ministry of Defense. What on earth was the Department doing sanctioning the sale of these goods, potentially for military use, to those organisations involved at the time of the mass slaughter of Palestinians? Did the Minister know anything about it at the time? Did he sign off on it? Did the Taoiseach know anything about it? Does this not make the case for full sanctions on Israel and for no trade with this apartheid and genocidal state, which is contained in our Bill that will be debated tomorrow?

The Taoiseach: First, I have not read that article in *The Currency*. I will read it before commenting. Second, it does not justify a full trade boycott with Israel because we need to work out what the implications of that would be for Irish jobs and workers in particular. The Government favours a suspension of the European Union-Israel trade association agreement, which at the moment gives preferential tariffs to Israel. A full-on boycott and divestment could have serious implications for Irish jobs and companies as well. We need to just figure that out so that people can make informed decisions and not make them on the fly.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Will the Taoiseach join me in condemning the racist abuse that Suad Mooge, the recently selected Dublin Rose, received simply by virtue of winning the competition? She was subjected to racist abuse because of the colour of her skin. I understand that she grew up in Sligo and then went to school in Terenure, which is in my constituency. I happened to listen back to her on "Liveline" yesterday and it was a personality explosion listening to her. I listened to the resilience that she has to display on a day-to-day basis through her whole life. We would not tolerate the level of racist abuse that she faced if it was happening on the streets daily. She faced this volume of racism because it was on online platforms. Let us blunt be about this - those online platforms are monetising the hate and racism. We are doing a lot in these Houses and in Europe to protect children. What can we do to protect people like Suad Mooge and some of our incredible sporting heroes who faced the same level of racism in that online sphere?

The Taoiseach: I join with the Deputy in condemning those racists attacks on the Dublin Rose who has been selected. It is absolutely appalling and there should be no tolerance of such

racist abuse of any person in Ireland, or anywhere for that matter. Again, all of us in the House need to reflect on this. I recall in the last Dáil that there was legislation on hate speech, which eventually ran into a roadblock politically because others suggested that it undermined free speech and so on. To be honest, the Dáil collectively shied away from some aspects of that. We did bring in the additional penalties for criminal convictions and so on. At least it was done in terms of assaults and that. However, there is a huge issue, and the Deputy is correct in terms of the monetisation of this. I am reading some stuff on the by-election in Dublin Central that is quite appalling. Stuff just appears online irrespective of the candidate, and it is just appalling that this kind of stuff can happen. We need to collectively address it.

Deputy Marie Sherlock: Yesterday marked something of a milestone for the health service. For 50 days in the past three months, the number of delayed transfers of care has exceeded 500 patients across acute hospitals. For 50 days, there have been over 500 people waiting and ready to leave acute hospitals but cannot. They need step-down care, specialised beds, home care packages and nursing homes. These people need care that would cost a lot less than being in an acute hospital bed. Of course, all of this is taking place at a time when the HSE has overspent for the first quarter of this year, the Minister for Health is telling us that we need another €300 million in the health service for this year and the medical board at University Hospital Limerick is saying that there is a very real risk to patient safety there right now. When I talk to hospital managers across the country, they are telling me of closed step-down beds and repeated business cases being submitted but going nowhere.

Are alarm bells going off at the moment with regards to the health budget and the needs that are there? What plans does the Minister specifically have for step-down beds?

Minister for Health (Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill): I thank the Deputy. I have not said anything about a supplementary budget. That was reported based on last year's, so I have no idea where that is coming from.

Taking the case of Limerick, there were 20 delayed transfers of care there yesterday. Over the past ten days, Limerick has ranged from having 15 people on trolleys to 70 people on trolleys, at an average of about 30 to 40 each day. I was in Clare on Monday. The community supports are just as important in Clare to take the pressure off Limerick as anything else and I noticed that, on the same day I was in Clare talking about the development of care there, the Limerick doctors were highlighting patient safety issues. The reality is that if someone turns up to the medical assessment unit in Ennis in the morning and needs an urgent CT scan, it will be read by a radiographer in Limerick, but if someone turns up to the medical assessment unit in Ennis in the afternoon instead of the morning and needs an urgent CT scan, it will not be read by the radiographer in Limerick. Instead, the patient will be transferred by ambulance to the emergency department in Limerick to have the scan there. There are still things that do not make sense and need to be fixed. Processes need to change to take the pressure off Limerick and other hospitals. A big part of that is investing in the community and step-down beds, as the Deputy said.

Deputy Noel McCarthy: I have raised this matter on several occasions since my election to the House. It concerns the idle IDA site in Fermoy on the grounds of the former Fitzgerald Camp Army barracks. Although it is a serviced site close to the Cork-Dublin motorway, it has

unfortunately remained without tenants for nearly 24 years since being handed over to the IDA. In addition, there have been no recent expressions of interest to operate on site.

This continues to be a major disappointment to the people of Fermoy and the Blackwater region, given the site appears to be perfectly suited for investment. I highlighted this fact with the Taoiseach as recently as January. He said he is familiar with the site and that he would talk to the IDA and seek clarity on its development potential. I, therefore, ask the Taoiseach whether there is any update from the IDA on possible proposals being considered. I thank the Taoiseach for the interest he has already taken in this matter.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy again for raising this. On the last occasion, I said to him that sometimes we have to be patient but I accept that 24 years is a long time. Often, it depends. The IDA will bring people to various sites. Ultimately, it is up to companies to decide the location of any particular site. I will engage with the IDA to see whether it has any different plans for the site. It would be a big boost to Fermoy if we could attract a foreign direct investment, FDI, company to that particular site. It would make a significant difference to the economy of Fermoy. That is the balance. It could be used for something else, such as indigenous enterprise and so on, but that would cut off the prospect of FDI.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I thank the Government, particularly the Minister of State, Deputy John Cummins, and the Minister, Deputy James Browne, for the excellent work they have done in progressing planning exemptions on modular homes. I take issue with some political commentators and people in the media who refer to them as beds in sheds. This is highly insulting to the excellent and reputable Irish companies that are producing these modular homes. If only they knew what they are talking about. The BER rating of many of these modular homes will be far superior to bungalows built as recently as 20, 25 and 30 years ago. In other words, they are a comfortable place for people to live for a period of time. I am not trying to say that it is a housing solution for everyone for all time but it is at certain times. It will be positive. I again thank the Minister and Minister of State involved. It has been dragging on for quite a while, however. When can people look forward to the necessary legislation being put in place, so that local authorities can allow these exemptions to go ahead?

The Taoiseach: I agree with what the Deputy has said. The use of that language is deliberately demeaning to undermine what is an important initiative. It is not a silver bullet in and of itself but we have many different people looking for different types of accommodation in the country. This provides a further option. As the Deputy said, we are looking at buildings and modular units that are quite modern in terms of their configuration and so on. People have used the term "sheds" and all that for naked political reasons as opposed to any informed assessment of what is happening and what potentially will happen. I will ask the Minister and Minister of State to talk to the Deputy again but my understanding is that there has to be a degree of screening in terms of the various environmental aspects to this, planning and so forth. We will be moving on this quickly. The decision has been taken.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: I have a letter from retained station officer, John Molloy, from Dunleer fire station. It was sent to the Taoiseach. It states:

I am serving retained station officer with Louth County Council due to retire in a number of weeks on 24 May 2026. At 62 years of age, I do not want to retire, nor am I ready to retire. All assistant chief fire officers can stay until 70. All county council outdoor working staff can stay to 70. I am pleading with you to put something in place in the interim to allow us retained fire fighters to stay until the age of 65. This was done previously for age 62 on the basis of health checks. There are approximately 300 retained fire fighters due to retire at 62 over the next year. It is going to come into legislation eventually to keep us to 65. Please step in and do the right thing. The gardaí are extending the retirement age. I served in the army for 22 and a half years and joined the fire service for 20 years within a week of leaving the army. I have given everything to this country. We do not want to be on social welfare. We are very experienced fire personnel who want to remain and pass on to our knowledge and experience to younger firefighters.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy will have to learn to read faster. I call the Taoiseach to respond.

The Taoiseach: We should acknowledge that we have made a lot of progress on this. In the previous Government, we went from 55 to 62 across all the uniform grades. That was significant. We will keep all of this under review. I cannot make any specific commitment to go to 65 today or anything like that.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: Could there be an interim solution?

The Taoiseach: There are issues we have to take on board in terms of the nature of these professions and the work that is involved. We have come a long way from 55 to 62. That simply has to be acknowledged. It is and will have an impact on the Defence Forces and the Garda. While I did not catch his name, I appreciate the public service the gentleman-----

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: He is John Molloy.

The Taoiseach: I appreciate the public service John has given to the country. That is accepted. These are issues that we will continue to keep under review.

An Ceann Comhairle: We have two Members waiting. We have taken the number of Members required but we will take the remaining two Members. I ask them to be brief.

Deputy Ryan O'Meara: The community sports facilities fund, formally known as the sports capital grant, is very popular in north Tipperary and north-west Kilkenny. I will be hosting an information evening with the Minister of State with responsibility for sport, Deputy Charlie McConalogue, on Tuesday, 26 May at 8 p.m. in Littleton in the Moycarkey-Borris Community and Sports Centre. It is in conjunction with Senator Imelda Goldsboro from south Tipperary and local councillor and Littleton man, Councillor Sean Ryan. The previous Government delivered record funding for sports clubs across Tipperary. I have two questions on behalf of the clubs I represent in north Tipperary and north-west Kilkenny. First, when will applications open? Second, how long after applications close do we expect grants to be awarded?

The Taoiseach: I thank Deputy O'Meara for raising this issue. Clearly, he has assembled a formidable Tipperary team for that public information meeting that will involve both Tipperary and north Kilkenny. I anticipate it will be this year. Hopefully, we will be in a position to open for applications in the next month or two. It is a vital scheme that reaches into communities. Across the length and breadth of the country, we can see the impact of this scheme, with first-class sporting facilities in communities and clubs from all different codes. It is important that we can facilitate the applications again this year.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: The student council from Scoil an Linbh Íosa in Prosperous is in the Public Gallery today. Those students have written this question directly. I am merely reading it out for them. It is their words. They ask:

We do enough work in school. Our teachers agree. Children, families and teachers are so busy in the evenings. We want to promote well-being and nurture our hobbies and skills as children. There is no expectation that adults bring their work home, so why must children? Will this Government consider putting an end to homework for primary school children?

The Taoiseach: When I was Lord Mayor of Cork, one of the great privileges I had was to give a half day and give the homework off. Unfortunately, the Department of education came down on that practice after I left my job as Lord Mayor of Cork. As the Minister for education, I repeated the act.

To be more serious, education and learning have evolved a lot. We know that children learn more through play in many instances than just through formal academic rigor. We do not want to dictate to schools across the length and breadth of the country but we think schools, particularly at primary level, should factor that into curriculum development. The teacher in me says that doing the odd bit of homework reinforces the message and makes sure that students have picked up and absorbed what was taught in the class.

An Ceann Comhairle: Time is up, Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: The students asked that question to me as Taoiseach rather than as a teacher, however.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is a very good question.

The Taoiseach: We have evolved a lot.

An Ceann Comhairle: For this evening, both the Taoiseach and I combined-----

The Taoiseach: The homework is off.

An Ceann Comhairle: There is no homework this evening for the students.

The Taoiseach: Is that for me too?

An Ceann Comhairle: It is not for you.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 1.19 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 2.22 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 1.19 p.m. and resumed at 2.22 p.m.

Message from Select Committee

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Select Committee on Health has completed its consideration of the Public Health (Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products) (Amendment) Bill 2026 and has made no amendments thereto.

National Safety Camera Strategy: Statements

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Seán Canney, to the Chamber. Before we proceed with the statements, I welcome those in the Public Gallery who are looking down at us today. I particularly welcome Councillor Mick Delaney from Tullaroan. Joining him are active retirement groups from Kilkenny and Laois. You are all very welcome. I hope you enjoy your day with Councillor Delaney here at Leinster House. The group members had a lot of questions for me on the statements we are about to make. I was questioned sensibly on it and the need to have the cameras spread all over the country. They have a point of view as well, which they got across. I now call on the Minister of State to make his opening statement.

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Seán Canney): I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle. I too welcome everyone in the Public Gallery to listen to the statements today. I welcome the opportunity to address the House and to update Members on the recently published National Safety Camera Strategy, and on road safety matters more generally. My colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Collins, will deliver the closing statement.

As many Deputies will be aware, the last five years have seen an increase in road-related fatalities and serious injuries. Last year was a particularly dark year when, tragically, 188 people lost their lives on roads, the highest total in a decade. While we have made great strides since our first national road safety strategy began in 1998, that progress is now in the past and we must do more to restore the downward trend of fatalities and serious injuries on our roads. Each death and serious injury impacts not just on the victim but on their family, their friends and the wider community.

The four main causes of fatalities on our roads have been consistent over time and remain: speeding, distraction, not wearing a seatbelt and intoxicated driving. All four come down to driver behaviour and personal responsibility on the part of road users. Tackling dangerous behaviours can be addressed through road safety education and public awareness campaigns, enforcement of road traffic laws, improved engineering of our road spaces and longer-term legislative reform. We are working on multiple fronts to address these problems. Let me be

clear that this Government is committed to improving road safety and reducing fatalities and serious injuries.

The current national framework for road safety is set out in the Government's fifth Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030, which was launched in December 2021. The strategy aligns with EU and UN targets and is based on the safe system approach, which is forgiving of individual human error. It aims to reduce road deaths and serious injuries by 50% this decade, and to achieving Vision Zero, which is as close as possible to zero fatalities or serious injuries on Irish roads, by 2050.

The phase 2 action plan under the road safety strategy was published by my Department in July of last year for the period 2025 to 2027. This action plan comprises 12 primary transformative actions and 77 support actions. Delivering the action plan is a collaborative effort involving my Department and the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, together with An Garda Síochána, the Road Safety Authority, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, the National Transport Authority, the Courts Service, the Medical Bureau of Road Safety, the Health and Safety Authority and local authorities.

Deputies will note that there are many experts across a range of partners collaborating to take action and deliver positive road safety outcomes, and I assure the House that progress is being made. Key deliverables for this year include passing the national vehicle and driver file Bill 2025 to allow local authorities to resume accepting and processing collision data. The next road traffic Bill is also under development to advance programme for Government commitments around graduated speed limits, penalties and the camera enforcement of mobile phone and seatbelt offences. We are also addressing the long-standing issue relating to repeat renewal of learner permits, with regulations coming into effect this November. These are examples of actions well under way and progressing at pace.

On 29 April I published the first national safety camera strategy, which provides a framework for increased deployment of cameras across the road network in urban and rural locations. The use of cameras has been proven to reduce speeding and improve driver behaviour, and I am confident that implementation of this strategy will help us achieve our road safety targets. The strategy is a culmination of an extensive programme of work which was delivered under the phase 1 of the action plan for 2021-2024. Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, was tasked by my Department to develop a new safety camera strategy and TII served as chair and secretariat to an inter-agency working group that developed recommendations in this area. In addition to TII and my Department, the members of the working group include the Department of justice, An Garda Síochána, the National Transport Authority, the Courts Service, the Road Safety Authority and Dublin City Council. The work of this group built upon the findings and recommendations of the November 2023 report of the working group on camera-based enforcement of certain traffic offences. The group was not tasked with making proposals on the number of cameras to be deployed across the road network. Rather, in developing the strategy the working group focused on: mapping and understanding the current system, roles and responsibilities; analysing lessons learned from previous camera initiatives in Ireland; exploring best practice in other jurisdictions; assessing the optimal inter-agency partnerships for successful delivery; and formulating recommendations which were presented to the road safety leadership group.

The working group identified and assessed potential options for delivering road camera systems and a draft report was submitted to my Department last year. Following this, my Department conducted a series of bilateral meetings over the subsequent period with stakeholders who would be tasked with implementing the strategy. The increased deployment of safety cameras in the coming years is a key action to be delivered under the phase 2 action plan. This priority action is being delivered collaboratively by road safety partners and aligns with commitments in the programme for Government.

The national safety camera strategy focuses on speeding, red light running and bus lane infringements, with flexibility for the enforcement of other types of offence in future. Undoubtedly, speeding remains a serious safety concern on Irish roads. An RSA behavioural research study in 2025 showed that over 50% of drivers found it acceptable to exceed speed limits by up to 10 km/h and almost 30% of drivers found it acceptable to exceed the limit by more than 10 km/h.

This behaviour leads to dangerous road traffic collisions, often resulting in fatalities and serious injuries. Cameras are proven to be an effective deterrent in changing behaviour. As outlined in the strategy, according to a meta-analysis, average-speed cameras significantly reduce the number of collisions, with the overall number estimated to fall by 30%, and fatal and serious injury collisions by 56%. A similar comparison with fixed cameras indicates that they have significantly reduced collisions by approximately 20%, and fatal and serious injury collisions by 15%.

The National Safety Camera Strategy provides the required framework, with partnerships and responsibilities associated for the successful deployment of road safety cameras across the State. Effective delivery of a deployment programme will necessarily require collaboration by multiple State agencies ensuring appropriate use of skills and expertise. This includes An Garda Síochána, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, and the National Transport Authority, NTA. This approach was developed by the inter-agency working group led by TII and was agreed by the road safety leadership group, which I chair, and which is driving implementation of the Government's Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030. Under this agreed approach, TII will be responsible for the management of fixed and average speed cameras, in partnership with An Garda Síochána, which will continue to be responsible for the enforcement of camera-detected speed offences. The NTA will assume the primary responsibility - both management and enforcement functions - for urban traffic management offences. This approach builds on well-established road safety relationships, ensuring that we continue to see effective enforcement of road traffic laws, which is a key pillar of road safety.

This strategy provides a clear framework to strengthen the use of safety cameras in a way that is targeted, evidence-led and proportionate. Ultimately, the challenge is to change road user behaviour. Improved detection and enforcement of road traffic offences will promote better and safer driver behaviour and help protect all road users. A delivery focused camera enforcement oversight group comprising key stakeholders is being established to implement the National Safety Camera Strategy. Membership of the group will include senior leaders from An Garda Síochána, the NTA, TII, RSA, the Courts Service and the local authority sector. The detail of both TII's and the NTA's expanded roles will be developed with the assistance of the group and resourcing requirements will be considered for An Garda Síochána, TII and the NTA in conjunction with parent Departments. The oversight group will: co-ordinate the

activities of agencies involved in camera operation; collate, analyse and report on data on performance, for example, compliance and payment rates; keep the safety camera handbook up to date; undertake or task research to move forward the goals of the proposed new structure; and engage with my Department and the Department of justice on legislative, policy and funding matters. The group will agree its terms of reference and work plan to ensure successful implementation of the strategy. This includes agreeing at its first meeting an immediate set of short-term actions to start implementation. I expect the first meeting of this group to take place in the coming weeks. The group will report progress to the road safety leadership group. In addition, my Department will continue to work closely with all road safety stakeholders to ensure that the National Safety Camera Strategy is fully implemented.

In developing the strategy, the inter-agency working group, chaired by TII, also developed a corresponding safety camera handbook. This sets out the process to be implemented when selecting locations for safety camera deployment and currently it sets out the process for the selection and prioritisation of speed cameras and red-light cameras. The handbook has been designed in such a way as to allow for additional chapters for other camera systems to be added in the future. It follows an evidence-based approach, so that cameras are located where they have the greatest potential for collision and casualty reduction. It should also be noted that individual agencies and offices remain responsible for their core functions, including deployment of cameras across the road network. This remains the case in the interim period before the strategy is fully implemented. With regard to current camera enforcement activity, I can assure the House that this has increased across the road network since late 2024. An Garda Síochána, with the assistance of TII and local authorities has deployed nine new static safety cameras in nine counties across the road network. In addition, three new average-speed cameras have been deployed in Cavan, Mayo and Meath, bringing the total in use to five average-speed cameras in operation. Complementing these additional cameras, An Garda Síochána, through the mobile safety camera programme, delivered under contract by GoSafe, provides 9,000 hours of monitoring on our roads each month. This has increased from 7,500 hours in 2024. From 1 January An Garda Síochána introduced 390 new safety-camera zones, including 55 community request safety-camera zones, bringing the total to 1,901 safety camera zones nationwide.

My focus as Minister of State and the focus of my Department and of all the road safety stakeholders we work with is on the delivery of phase 2 of the action plan. This was developed by experts, is based on Irish experience, and considers best practice in other countries. Our focus must be on the delivery of these agreed actions. In that regard, the publication of the National Safety Camera Strategy is another step towards delivering this work. The use of safety cameras has been proven to reduce speeding and improve driver behaviour. I am confident that safety cameras will be an effective deterrent to motorists speeding and will further enhance the enforcement capabilities of An Garda Síochána. The increased use of cameras can help us achieve our road safety targets, including working towards Vision Zero. I look forward to hearing from the Deputies on this important topic.

Deputy Pa Daly: Every day we step out into a world of movement with cars rushing to work, cyclists weaving through traffic and pedestrians crossing streets in hope and in trust. The road connects us but too often it has become a place of tragedy, a tragedy that is preventable. In the Twenty-six Counties there were 190 deaths last year. With the proper infrastructure,

enforcement and resources, we can save lives but the Government has failed on three fronts. The National Safety Camera Strategy represents an opportunity to rectify the mistakes of the past but I fear that it may fall far short. Everybody wants to improve road safety and prevent tragedy on our roads but what is being presented here simply does not meet the urgency of the crisis we face. Let me be clear: the automated enforcement cameras can play a role in saving lives. International evidence shows they reduce collisions and serious injuries but the reality is that this is not a fully-fledged strategy. At the moment, it is a framework and is not ready for delivery. That matters because we are in the middle of a road safety emergency. I have said how many people lost their lives on Irish roads last year. It was the highest figure in a decade and nine of those were in my county. Deaths across the European Union fell by 3% but fatalities here rose by 7%. Since 2019, the divergence is even more stark. Since then, road deaths in Ireland have increased by 31% but across the EU they are down by 15%. Europe is saving lives but Ireland is going backwards.

When the Government asks us to support the strategy, we must ask whether this a serious effort or whether a serious effort been made to date. When we examine the details, the shortcomings are obvious. There are no clear timelines for roll-out, no measurable targets, no KPIs and no cost-benefit analysis. In other words, there is no way for this House or the public to hold the Government to account for its delivery. Of more concern is the failure to address fundamental legal questions. The strategy acknowledges and effectively sets aside critical issues around data protection, enforcement powers and evidential standards. These go to the very heart of whether the system can function and ignoring them will not make them go away. It will simply create the conditions for delay, legal challenge and possible failure down the line.

We also have a model here that could lead to unnecessary complexity and confusion. Under the strategy, responsibilities are divided between TII, An Garda Síochána and the NTA.

That may look like collaboration, but where is the accountability and is there a possibility of duplication or bureaucratic inefficiency?

We cannot ignore the reality of our current enforcement system. Under Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, roads policing has collapsed. This matter was dealt with by the Joint Committee on Transport this morning. There are 400 fewer gardaí working in road traffic than there were 15 years ago, according to PARC Road Safety Group. The latter stated that in 2009, there were 1,046 members of what was then known as the Garda traffic corps. By December 2025, the number of personnel had fallen to 647. In some regions, the number of gardaí involved in road policing has halved since 2009. There are 40 fewer vehicles tied to traffic units compared with that time. Most crucially, in 2007 - and this is a very interesting statistic - there were over 20,000 checks at the side of the road in respect of people driving under the influence. Last year, there were fewer than 5,000 such checks, which represents a 75% reduction.

We also heard from Dr. Sheila Gilheany from Alcohol Action Ireland at the Joint Committee on Transport's meeting this morning. She stated that alcohol is factor in 35% of deaths on Irish roads. In places like Australia, the number stands at 14%. The answers are obvious, because we are not tackling this matter in the way we did back in 2007. The number of stops and checks is in free fall. In the context of the gardaí we do have, there are serious issues as well, which we saw outlined in the Crowe report. That report not only made it clear that roads policing was under-resourced and ineffective but also that there are other issues.

It is important to note that the collapse in roads policing has occurred as the scope and scale of the responsibilities have increased. We have more cars, heavier traffic and more complex road risks than ever before, yet the number of gardaí expected to do the work to address this has decreased. We are not going to deliver safer roads with fewer gardaí, fewer Garda vehicles and limited technology. For example, gardaí had to wait seven years to access the roads policing mobility app, which includes vital information such as motorist penalty points and court disqualifications. They are still awaiting access to further information, including driving licence photographs and people's signatures. That is not good enough. Against that backdrop, what confidence can the public have that this expanded system will actually be enforced? There is also a real risk that increased automation will overwhelm the under-resourced, underfunded system by overloading the fixed charge notice process and creating backlogs of appeals. This is not just about cameras; it is also about capacity, and capacity is already overstretched.

Even if all of that were resolved, we must ask another question. Is enforcement alone enough? The answer is "No". The transport committee has repeatedly heard that cameras are effective, but only as part of a broader approach that includes better road design and stronger policing. Better road design is particularly important at a time when we are dealing with an increased number of cyclists being killed or seriously injured on our roads. Without these measures, the impact of the strategy will be limited.

We must recognise that fatalities are only part of the story. The number of serious injuries may be significantly under-reported. Between 2020 and 2024, over 11,000 people were hospitalised compared to only 7,400 recorded by gardaí. This is the true cost. There is a question over the data that are there. The context is a rising death toll, a worsening European situation and a system under strain, and what we have is a document that gives rise to more questions than it answers. We do not want more frameworks. We need to know that when cyclists, drivers or pedestrians take to our roads or footpaths, they will get home safely. We need a plan that is detailed, legally robust, properly resourced and ready to deliver, but we also need more gardaí and more visibility. Everybody knows that when there is more visibility on the streets, the number of public order offences decrease. There needs to be more visibility at the times of day that road traffic fatalities and serious injuries actually occur, which is late at night and on country roads.

Deputy Louis O'Hara: Speeding is one of the leading causes of road collisions in Ireland. Last year, 2025, was the worst year for road fatalities in more than ten years and road collision statistics show that there is a growing trend that Irish roads are becoming less safe. Last year, an Garda Síochána recorded 190 fatalities on our roads and over 1,000 people being injured as a result of collisions. Each statistic represents a life lost, a wider family devastated and demonstrates the constant work needed to make our roads safe for all who use them.

The deployment of speed cameras and speed monitoring systems is one tool that can tackle speeding and that can make our roads safer. This strategy has been long overdue but, regrettably, it appears to be more of a scoping exercise rather than an implementable plan. When we look into the actual detail of the strategy, it appears that the Minister and his Department have no willingness to reform the operation of speed cameras and that they are committed to sticking with the same failed multi-agency approach. This comes at a time when the Government is spending millions of euro on a contract with the GoSafe company for the

provision of mobile speed camera vans. In 2024, the State paid almost €18 million to GoSafe for the provision of approximately 58 speed camera vans. This works out at the State paying roughly €31,000 for the operation of each speed camera van per year. I would seriously question whether that represents value for money.

This strategy also rules out the possibility of An Garda Síochána taking full ownership of the deployment and operation of speed cameras. There was no detailed cost evaluation within the strategy to merit this decision, and it appears that the favoured operation models are just an exercise in the Minister of State making minor changes to a system that is fundamentally not working. Sadly, this lack of ambition on the part of the Government is yet another example of how it is not taking road safety seriously enough. Before Christmas, the Minister of State backtracked on the Department of Transport's plans to reform the Road Safety Authority, RSA. This followed the publication of the Indecon report in 2024 that recommended splitting the RSA into two separate bodies, one with responsible for road safety and one to oversee processes such as driver testing and the national car test, NCT, service. Months on from this decision, we are no closer to seeing any reform of the RSA.

When we see road collision outcomes going in the wrong direction, it is clear that something has to change but the Government does not seem to get it and all the while, more and more people are involved in road traffic collisions. There is clearly a need for action in the way this Government approaches road safety policy and in the way it implements road safety measures, including the deployment of speed cameras. This national speed camera strategy is a missed opportunity to deliver real reform in the area of road safety. I call on the Minister of State to deliver meaningful action in this area that ensures that there is effective speed detection that reduces the risks on our roads and that this is done in a cost-effective way for taxpayers.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy. I understand Deputy Ahern is sharing time.

Deputy Ciarán Ahern: I am sharing time with Deputy Lawlor.

As we are discussing this issue today, I am thinking of Fiona Holland, who was a teacher in Scoil Maelruain's Senior National School in Old Bawn in my constituency. She tragically passed away last week following a road accident in Terenure. Fiona played a huge role in her community and was loved by her students. I know what a huge impact her loss has been and will be on her community. My thoughts today are with her family and friends and the staff and pupils in Scoil Maelruain.

We are going in the wrong direction when it comes to road safety and have been for some time. We made a lot of progress in the early 2000s and 2010s, but somewhere along the line we seem to have got complacent and we are seeing a reversal of the trend. We need to take a holistic approach when it comes to road safety. It involves a number of overlapping elements, including planning, investment, road infrastructure and design, public transport provision, rural connectivity, driver behaviour, the overall coherence of Government policy and, of course, enforcement of the rules of the road and the realistic prospect that dangerous driving will be caught. I have long said that traffic cameras have a pivotal role to play, particularly in terms of influencing driver behaviour. To be fair, the Minister of State has acknowledged on a number

of occasions that driver behaviour has increasingly become an issue, but it is in that context that I find the whole safety camera strategy just a little underwhelming.

Not only are there serious weaknesses in and omissions from the strategy, there is also a striking lack of ambition. The strategy itself admits that speeding remains widespread on Irish roads. It cites RSA research showing that 77% of drivers speed and that a majority of motorists consider modest speeding as being socially acceptable. That is pretty alarming given the trends in road deaths here. The strategy also acknowledges the proven effectiveness of camera enforcement. It cites evidence showing that average speed cameras can reduce fatal and serious injury collisions by up to 56%. If the evidence is that strong, why is the strategy so timid? Why, after years of rising fatalities on our roads, are we dealing with a document that appears to be more concerned with governance charts than administrative structures? The former have a role to play but are not more important than measurable outcomes.

The strategy repeatedly promises future consideration of further measures instead of immediate concrete delivery. One of the clearest examples of this is the continued absence of any meaningful progress on seat belt and mobile phone detection cameras. The Government has repeatedly stated that these technologies are being considered. When members of the Opposition have asked questions about timelines or implementation, however, we have been told to wait for this National Safety Camera Strategy. The strategy has arrived, but it provides virtually no clarity. The document merely states that mobile phone and seat belt detection cameras may be introduced in future once legislation is in place. There is no timeline. There is no implementation roadmap, no legislative schedule and no delivery target. There is nothing. At a time when distracted driving has become one of the greatest dangers on our roads, the Government is still stuck at the stage of consideration. We know the reality. We see motorists every day scrolling through their phones at traffic lights, texting and watching Netflix on motorways. People are driving while visibly distracted, and we have got these TV-like displays in newer cars that add to the mix. We know the devastating consequences that driver distraction can cause.

Likewise, seat-belt non-compliance continues to contribute to deaths and catastrophic injuries on our roads. I note that the strategy says its focus is primarily on cameras to detect speeding, people running red lights and committing offences relating to bus lanes, but we need a holistic approach to road safety. I cannot get my head around why mobile phone use and seat belt non-compliance would not be included, particularly when the technology is available and when we know the impact of those offences.

The absence of any meaningful targets or performance indicators is a major weakness. For a strategy that references Vision Zero and reducing the number of fatalities, it is astonishing how little measurable ambition is included. It says nothing about how many cameras we need or how many we hope to have by a certain date. If, for example, we were to have a similar number to Sweden, we would need approximately 430 traffic cameras nationwide.

There is nothing in the strategy about how we will measure its success or failure. There are no concrete deployment targets, no annual benchmarks, no performance indicators and no measurable timelines for expansions. Basically, there are no means by which we can hold the Minister of State to account. Instead, we are given vague references to incremental progress and modelling exercises. The closest the strategy gets to setting a target for cameras is where it states "it could be feasible to aim to implement 10-20 new camera locations each year initially

... [while appreciating] that ... other European countries have considerably more cameras." That is about as weak an ambition as I can imagine. At that rate, comprehensive national coverage would take decades. Without clear key performance indicators, KPIs, the Government will always be able to claim the strategy is progressing regardless of outcomes. We need measurable targets and to monitor performance that we can say that the cameras are seeing success and changing driver behaviour, if speeding is down or if the number of people break red lights reduces. Unfortunately, we will not know that based on the model that is being outlined in this strategy.

Under this strategy, a number of new roles are assigned to local authorities. The strategy states that local authorities will help identify sites, conduct feasibility assessments, liaising with landowners and support implementation, but where is the discussion of resources and funding? Presumably, these new responsibilities will require new staff, but there is no mention of that in the strategy. Local authorities across Ireland are already overstretched. Many engineering and roads departments are operating under severe staffing pressures already. Councils are being asked to deliver active travel projects, housing infrastructure, flood mitigation, public realm improvements and road maintenance. That is all great, but it is all being done with finite resources. The strategy casually assigns additional responsibilities without explaining how these responsibilities will be supported. We are fully behind greater decentralisation, but what we are increasingly seeing is responsibility being decentralised while resources are not. Local authorities are essential partners in road safety delivery but council workers will be looking at this plan and thinking how the hell are they supposed to take on these new responsibilities if they are not getting any additional investment or staffing.

One of the more confusing aspects of this strategy is the extraordinary lack of clarity around governance and institutional reform. The document repeatedly refers to phases 1 and 2 implementation. Nowhere are those phases defined in terms of timelines. We have no clarity on when phase 1 will end and phase 2 will begin. We have no measurables, so we do not know what sort of milestones need to be achieved in phase 1 before we move to phase 2. To add to the confusion, the strategy splits responsibility for safety cameras across two public agencies, namely Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, and an as-yet-unnamed agency, and the Garda, with these different bodies managing various elements of the system. This is basically a rejection of the international evidence and best practice guidance that a well-resourced centralised authority is needed. It is further complicated by the strategy working group recommending, in the long term, the establishment of a new public body to achieve the full ambition of the strategy and take on the responsibility of both public bodies that will be responsible for cameras in the short term.

I do not know how this reconciles with the Minister's row-back on the commitment to establish a new road safety authority to take over certain functions of the RSA. Is this a row-back on the row-back? What will it mean for the RSA into the future? This strategy proposes the potential creation of another major body in the road safety space without any meaningful explanation of how it will fit within the wider institutional landscape.

Deputy George Lawlor: With the Leas-Cheann Comhairle's blessing, I welcome the boys and girls from Castlebridge National School in Wexford. It is a historic place in Wexford. In fact, the Castlebridge team was the first Wexford team to win an all-Ireland hurling

championship. The Leas-Cheann Comhairle, being a Kilkenny man, will no doubt look at that fact with envy.

The measures that were taken over the years in relation to road safety were working. If we look at the figures for 2018, we can see that, tragically, there were 139 road deaths. That was the lowest in modern times. The number of people killed in one year on Irish roads 40 years before that was 628. I refer to these tragic figures to indicate to the Minister of State that the measures we were taking in terms of enforcement of seat belt use, drink-driving and safety and in bringing the people along with us were working. When we put the resources into combating deaths on our roads and improving road safety, they actually work. In the context of a road safety camera strategy, it is essential that we roll-out static cameras.

I want to raise again - the Leas-Cheann Comhairle will be familiar with this - the static camera in Glenmore in County Kilkenny, which is causing turmoil for thousands of people. You are in a 100 km zone, you arrive at an 80 km speed sign and you do not have time to slow down safely and correctly before you are right on top of the camera. Hundreds if not thousands of people, the safest of drivers, have been caught for speeding and given points. People are coming to me saying that it is not so much the fines that break their hearts. These are individuals with unblemished licences who are being issued with points. I ask for the Minister of State's personal intervention on this. The camera is welcome. This is an issue of signage. The road is dangerous but, we need to ensure fairness for people.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The students from Wexford are very welcome.

Deputy Michael Murphy: I welcome the publication of the National Safety Camera Strategy. I do so not only as a TD but also as Chair of the Joint Committee on Transport, for which, as the Minister of State will be aware, road safety has become one of the most urgent and consistent issues for discussion. As the Minister of State will be aware, in recent months the committee has undertaken a focused programme of work in this area. Of course, that is against the backdrop of a continued increase in road fatalities, with the most recent figures confirming the highest number of deaths in recent years. There were 190 lives lost last year. Fifty-eight have so far been lost this year. I personally thank the Minister of State for his close co-operation with the committee's work. The Minister of State is due to appear before the committee in the coming weeks. Of course, every statistic represents a family and a community dealing with devastating loss. I mention also the serious impacts that extend far beyond fatalities, including long-term disability, loss of employment, family trauma and mental health impacts.

Only today, the joint committee heard evidence from Alcohol Action Ireland that Ireland has the lowest rate of roadside breath testing in the European Union. That should concern every one of us in this House. We must, therefore, recognise a very simple truth, that technology alone will not solve the road safety crisis that we face.

Nonetheless, I want to be clear. We can and should invest in cameras, in enforcement technology and in data-led interventions. Cameras detect speeding. They can identify people running red lights and support safer driving behaviour.

3 o'clock

That is why this strategy is so important and most welcome. The expansion of fixed safety cameras, average speed cameras, red light enforcement and a broader use of intelligence enforcement technology represents a significant step forward. International evidence shows us that these measures can reduce collisions and save lives. We had 200,000 road traffic offences last year with 126,000 related to speeding, of which 45,000 were for exceeding the 100 km/h speed limit.

I acknowledge the work being done across the Government, in particular by the Minister of State, Deputy Canney, and the Minister, Deputy O'Brien, and by An Garda Síochána, the RSA, local authorities, victim advocacy groups like PARC, and many other organisations and NGOs to modernise our approach to road safety. However, if we are serious about reducing deaths and serious injuries on our roads, we cannot consider or treat this strategy as the silver bullet. While it is important, the reality is that cameras do not pull over impaired drivers or detect drunk or drug driving on the roadside. We know from evidence this morning that alcohol is a factor in one third of all fatalities. Cameras do not replace Garda roads policing units operating in our communities, on rural and regional roads, and at times when dangerous behaviour is most prevalent.

That is why any serious road safety strategy must include a substantial strengthening of our roads policing unit, which currently stands at in the region of 650 members. Back in 2010 when we had 1 million fewer cars on the road, I believe it stood at 1,050. More gardaí assigned to our roads policing unit is crucial. It means greater roadside testing capability and stronger enforcement against drink driving, drug driving and insurance offences. It means ensuring that enforcement is visible, consistent and nationwide.

Of course, enforcement alone is not enough. Road safety begins with road design and too many of our roads are unforgiving, particularly in rural areas. There are junctions that people fear using every day, roads without safe walking or cycling infrastructure and communities divided by dangerous driving conditions. That is why we need sustained investment in safer infrastructure. We need greater delivery of low-cost safety-improvement schemes, which is crucial. We need safer junctions, better lighting, traffic calming, pedestrian crossings and segregated cycling infrastructure. We need to continue to invest in active travel. Better and safer walking and cycling infrastructure not only supports climate and health goals but it saves lives.

I assure this House and the Minister of State of the focused work that is ongoing by the transport committee. We intend to provide leadership by identifying concrete actions and making strong recommendations to the Government and other relevant agencies, including key actions that can be implemented in a timely manner. We all agree that we need urgency and, above all else, delivery. Every statistic in road accidents represents a person, a family and a community devastated. While I welcome this strategy and the positive role that technology can play, I believe we must now match that ambition with stronger enforcement, better investment, better planning of infrastructure, better co-ordination and political will. I again acknowledge the strength of that political will in the Minister of State. If we do that, this strategy can become part of a genuine turning point in road safety in Ireland.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: I am glad to have the opportunity to speak in today's debate. Central to all of this have to be the victims of road accidents. My own dear mother-in-law, Mary

Fehilly, passed away around 18 months ago and it just left the family feeling hollow. What I have found every day since is that you very much tune into the radio when you hear of an accident up the country. Heretofore, you would hear an awful report of a life lost on the road and feel a bit disconnected from about, but now it very much connects you to those families and the tragedies that others are experiencing around the country. Central to all that we speak about today must be the families impacted by deaths and lifelong injuries on our roads.

I sit on the transport committee and the Minister of State has been quite good to engage with us. I thank him for everything he is trying to do in the Department. He has been a very progressive and energetic Minister of State in taking on his portfolio.

There are a few points I wish to specifically raise. Of course, we are talking about the automated speed-detection cameras. They are very effective on the M7 motorway near Birdhill as people leave Limerick heading for Dublin, a road I often travel. They detect people speeding and lead to penalty points and convictions. They also ensure that a lot of people slow right down when they see them. Unfortunately, when they reach the other side of those speed cameras, they tend to speed up again. That kind of technology needs a more nationwide roll-out, which I would certainly welcome.

Recently, the Minister of State was very kind to meet with a delegation that I had brought here to Leinster House to discuss the N68 road, which leaves Ennis, heads out to west Clare and passes through a village called Darragh. In that vicinity there are many entrances and exits onto a national road. It might be called a national road, but it very much has local usage. It has a shop, local school, sports pitches and a litany of entrances into and out of houses and farmyards in that area. The Minister of State met Mairéad Collins, Michael Fitzgibbon and Kevin McNamee here in Leinster House. They brought maps and brought forward proposals. Since then, I understand that Clare County Council has also brought a submission to him. What is the status of that? There has been a €2 million allocation to that stretch of the N68 at Darragh for pavement overlay on the road. While all roads can do with a touch-up and resurfacing, this road could do with some of that money being syphoned over to road safety measures. I would love to hear something on that front.

The N85 road, also in County Clare, is the main spine road that goes from Ennis into the north of the county. Every single day, thousands of people travel on that road, heading back to the Cliffs of Moher. The Cliffs of Moher are now Ireland's premier tourism site and there is a huge amount of pressure on that road, which was never built for that volume of traffic. The road has recently been highlighted by Councillor Shane Talty from Ennistymon and supported by Councillor Joe Killeen. Michael Vaughan, a prominent hotelier in Ennistymon, has also been flagging this. They really want to bring to the Minister of State's attention that, in spite of some significant events happening there next year, including the Irish Open and the Walker Cup, there is no plan to do something significant on this road. It is not fit for purpose at the moment, yet we next year expect the world and its mother to travel back through that north Clare road - the N85 - heading for golf events.

The future mobility campus in Shannon in County Clare is testing a whole load of new technologies that could be used for road safety. The city of Aachen in Germany is a really good example where the entire Ford fleet of cars are geofenced, so if the speed limit is 60 km/h, the car is forced by geofencing to slow down to 60 km/h. No matter what the driver wants to do, he or she is compelled to stick to the speed limit that by technology. Indeed, some Irish people

are pioneering this technology. At some time, I would love the Minister of State to come to the future mobility campus and embrace some of these new technologies.

I wish him well in his Department. As I said, central to everything we do here have to be the victims of those awful accidents that are becoming far too frequent on our roads.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: This debate must first of all reflect on the carnage on our roads in 2025, a year in which 185 lives were lost in crashes and accidents. This was the highest fatality rate in over a decade. It was a year in which we saw the previous trends of progress in this area not just stalled, but actually reversed. That momentum of tragic reversal has continued in 2026.

I think everyone here recognises that safety cameras are not a silver bullet, but they can help to make our roads less dangerous. In the context of that ongoing tragedy on our roads, the delay in the publication of this report was really baffling. We know that the draft report was submitted to the Minister of State in May last year. That is a year ago now and that year has been a very dark one for road safety in our country. This is something I have raised in the Chamber and in the committee on a number of occasions. Instead of the emergency roll-out of technology that we know works, we saw a year of bilateral meetings and a review. However, while the Minister of State was reviewing this document, our roads were becoming increasingly lethal. That vision zero goal, Ireland's commitment to eliminating road deaths by 2050, becomes less like a target and more like a mirage when the primary tool for enforcement is stuck in a departmental inbox for a full calendar year.

I believe the strategy that has been published falls short in a number of key areas.

The primary and most glaring issue is that there are no timelines for the implementation of the strategy. In particular, it is clear that this strategy, if it is to work, requires significant legislative changes to deliver on its key elements, yet there is no commitment to a clear legislative timeline to do that. I am not clear why the Government would publish a strategy of such significance without tagging on a clear timeline with it, given the extent to which it has already been delayed and the urgency with which everybody speaking in this Chamber today is going to treat this particular matter. A strategy is just a beginning. There needs to be a clear commitment to deliver on it. Without timelines attached, it is hard to see where that commitment becomes apparent.

Bearing in mind the urgency with which I believe the roll-out of safety cameras must be treated, I would like to highlight a couple of areas in my constituency and around the country that some of my Green Party colleagues have flagged with me and that could be changed for the better by the introduction of these cameras. In my own constituency, I would point to the Kempton estate, just off the Navan Road and close to the Ashtown roundabout. Residents seeking to exit the estate onto the Navan Road, or pedestrians trying to cross the road to get to a bus stop or access the Phoenix Park, are put at risk by cars that are speeding, but in particular by cars running red lights at that junction. This location would be perfect for red light cameras. I read through this report, which gives us a brief history of red light cameras and of a pilot that was done in 2015, but there is no clarity on how residents in Kempton, or residents in hundreds of other areas that would benefit from this technology, will actually see an improvement in their situations because of the publication of this report.

Let us not forget that, in January, the National Transport Authority confirmed that, pending a decision on the strategy that has just been published, it will not proceed with developing camera enforcement at a small number of isolated locations, including proposed sites in Dublin. Therefore, the delay of the publication of this report is the reason the NTA is delaying rolling out enforcement cameras around the country, including in Dublin. Now that the strategy has been published, what will happen next? Is the Minister of State going to indicate to the NTA that he backs red light cameras - not just that he is verbally backing them, but that he will be coming through with funding as well? When will residents in Kempton and the hundreds of other places around the country that could benefit from these cameras see a tangible result from the publication of this report, which has been delayed for so long?

In inner city Dublin, there is a specific need for these cameras to keep vital public transport moving, and I would cite the Luas in particular. The Luas green line is experiencing delays in crossing the quays due to drivers remaining in yellow boxes. The Luas cannot get through and, of course, given the length of the Luas, it ends up blocking everything. Targeted enforcement of yellow boxes via cameras would prevent this. Similarly, on the red line, cameras are needed where Luas junctions intersect with car traffic to prevent encroachment on the line, which has previously led to crashes where full trams have been taken out of service.

At Doyle's Corner in Dublin 7, for example, one of the busiest intersections in the city for bus and car traffic, there are issues with red light jumping, putting pedestrians at risk and delaying bus routes. Similarly, at the bus gates on the quays, we have seen repeated instances of cars intermingling with buses and slowing down public transport. This is mirrored in other bus lanes, such as the southbound lane from Broombridge.

Moving to the home county of the Minister of State, at Eyre Square in Galway, the high volume of pedestrians makes it particularly dangerous when a car runs a red light. Cameras are needed to keep pedestrians safe. The Newcastle Road-N6 intersection is also noteworthy because that junction gets a high volume of cars travelling in both directions. Galway has planned for bus gates to be rolled out as part of BusConnects, whenever that is fully funded. It will need camera enforcement to ensure those bus gates are obeyed and that the issues we are seeing in Dublin, which I have already cited, are not repeated. The city council has not yet said how this will be enforced, but the view of my colleague, Niall Murphy, is that there should be cameras to ensure smooth movement of public transport through the bus gates.

These are just a couple of examples of areas where cameras could make a real difference to making public transport more efficient and, in particular, increasing road safety for all users. The Government needs to offer that clarity on timelines and actions. It is important to note, that in the EU context, we are real outliers in this regard. As of today, we have just nine static cameras and five average speed camera zones in operation across the entire road network. We can compare that to France, which has over 4,000, or the UK, where these types of cameras have been part of the fabric of roads policing for decades. In comparison to those countries, it is clear that we are trying to police a 21st century network with 20th century tools. Static cameras are a significant improvement in technology over mobile vans. They are visible and predictable and they preclude behaviour like slowing down for a speed van before speeding up once it is passed. They change behaviour on our roads by being consistent, and that changed behaviour goes on to save lives.

The people in my constituency and the other areas I have mentioned will not be protected by a strategy that just exists as a PDF online. We need to see three immediate steps. The first is a definitive roll-out timeline. We need to know exactly when the next 50 cameras and beyond will be operational, not "in the coming months", but with specific dates. Second, we need to see increased roads policing. Cameras are a force multiplier, but they cannot replace the physical presence of gardaí. The decline in the number of dedicated roads policing members must be reversed. Third, we need transparency in revenue and safety objectives. Too often, speed cameras are viewed as revenue raising rather than as the safety devices that they primarily are. We must proactively communicate the safety gains made through the use of cameras. We must ring-fence the revenue earned from them directly for road safety and better infrastructure.

We have the means to make our roads safer, we have the data that tells us where the accidents happen and we now have this strategy. What we have to ensure now is the delivery of this strategy. The 185 families who were in mourning in 2025 are looking for us to act. We need to take that action now.

Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil: I acknowledge the work of the Minister of State, the NTA and other bodies in establishing and creating this national safety camera strategy. After a period of improvement and positive trends in relation to road deaths, which were 472 in 1997 and dropped to 137 in 2021, that trend is now reversing. There were 190 deaths in 2025 and 175 in 2024. It is critical that action be taken to improve road safety for citizens across the country.

With regard to the new governance, the Garda is responsible for the enforcement of camera-detected speed offences. What is critical is that those locations be examined properly. I am thinking of Kildare, in particular the N4, and I am sure the Minister of State has seen this when travelling from Galway to Dublin. Time and again, we see speed vans in hidden locations, particularly on motorways. We see drivers putting their foot on the brake extremely quickly to try to avoid detection, with all the danger that causes on the motorway. It is something An Garda Síochána needs to be very reticent to do. It has to be admitted that it is bad driver behaviour to be speeding on a motorway or any road. However, I have seen instances, particularly in poor weather, where the location of the speed cameras can cause additional danger to road users. I ask An Garda Síochána and all bodies to be mindful of that.

One point in the strategy is the establishment of the camera enforcement oversight group, which will be extremely welcome in its role in co-ordinating operations, data, research and policy needs. What I would ask, and what I have not seen in the strategy, is that there would be a feedback loop from public representatives and the public at large. That would be extremely welcome and helpful to the work of the oversight group. The members of An Garda Síochána see the black spots and understand where particular incidents can happen. However, members of the public also have historic knowledge of bends and bad turns, which would be quite useful.

That is something that should be looked at in respect of this particular strategy.

Looking at the scope of enforcement, I welcome the fact that there is a focus on speeding, as well as red light offences and bus lane offences. However, this all comes down to poor and bad driver behaviour. I think we all acknowledge and realise that. This is not excusing any of that bad driver behaviour, but what we have seen, in large urban settings in particular, is traffic congestion. I look at Kildare, Maynooth, Kilcock, Celbridge, Leixlip and Naas. Nearly every

town in the county is growing exponentially and the traffic is growing with it. It causes great frustration to everybody. I think of young parents under severe pressure trying to pick up one child from one school and then get to another school to pick up the other kid, for example, if they are in a boys school and a girls school.

Traffic congestion adds to bad driver behaviour. As I said, I am not excusing in any way, shape or form bad driver behaviour, but we have to understand the reasons behind bad driver behaviour. It is not just people acting out of badness. A lot of the time, it is due to stress, time and whatever it may be.

Galway is a good example of a city that is growing exponentially. There is talk of progressing the ring road there, which is great news for the people of Galway. A ring road is now being built in Maynooth. In Celbridge, a second bridge is needed. Leixlip is completely congested as well. When we are building out and building more homes and communities in these towns, what is crucial is that we build the physical infrastructure, particularly the road infrastructure, to go with it. If we do not, then we have seen the evidence that it leads to bad driver behaviour. I would ask that this be considered in the future.

Deputy John McGuinness: I want to immediately draw the Minister of State's attention to some of the issues that are faced in my constituency of Carlow-Kilkenny. I feel that is the most effective way of contributing to this debate. Earlier, I had the privilege of welcoming a group from Tullaroan with Councillor Michael Delaney. Councillor Delaney and that group discussed in great detail the matter that we are now discussing. They brought to my attention a number of concerns that they had. They wondered, and rightly so, if the technology was there to identify the registration plate on a vehicle, why could it not be used to cross over and check the insurance, tax and so forth. Where stands that in relation to legislation or implementation?

People who live along stretches of road where they experience the speed and the dangers of speed, and sometimes the accidents that occur out of that, would like to see something done. They cannot understand why there is such an inordinate delay in dealing with all of this. Static cameras were mentioned by Deputy Lawlor in relation to Glenmore and the N24. It is a fact that the cameras work, but signage is necessary as you come into that stretch of road. I ask that there be some crossover with the councils or TII to ensure that there is sufficient notification on the road to indicate the speed, request a reduction in that speed and say that the cameras are there. The same could be said for the road into Dublin from Kilkenny. These signs are hugely important and contribute to the type of driver behaviour that we want to achieve, which is to act within the limits, drive responsibly and acknowledge the law. Glenmore is a particularly busy road. Work is to be done on that road. The signage, which the Minister of State might come back to me on, is essential.

When the former Deputy Shane Ross was a Minister, he came to visit Kilkenny. He looked at the road from Kilkenny city - the Waterford Road - out to the roundabout, particularly at Danesfort. I have lobbied the council, TII and the current Minister to take action on that stretch of road, which has seen a number of fatalities. Danesfort GAA Club is hugely active there and a real anchor in the community. It is a very busy junction, but in spite of all of that, they refer to figures and analysis that simply do not give any indication of what is really happening on the ground and the real fears that people - residents and road users - in the area have.

Likewise, it is the same thing in relation to the R704, the Mullinavat road to New Ross. The local residents have complained over a long period about the 2.4 km of road that is dangerous and requires signage, work and prevention in terms of the speed that vehicles are travelling. Sean Maher, a local activist, wrote to me about this - not to just complain, but to suggest ways by which this could be dealt with. Again, the local authority has been lobbied for immediate action. That has not happened. It has to go through a long, convoluted process to get to the point where an acknowledgement is given of the dangers that exist and then the work is required thereafter. If the Minister of State could shorten the process and give due consideration to local people and their complaints, it would help greatly in our work to assist the Minister of State to ensure that there is greater safety on our roads.

Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan: I want to bring to the Minister of State's attention a road in south Kilkenny, the N25. For years, there has been a campaign to put safety measures in place on this road. It is welcome that the cameras have been put in place, but cameras alone are not going to solve this road. It needs huge attention. I bring to the Minister of State's attention the fact that TII has said that there is enough signage and notice going towards where the cameras are. Numerous people have contacted me and I have driven the road. There is not enough signage coming into the road. People are heading for the boat in Wexford. They are coming close to where the cameras are, but the cameras are getting them before they know it. It is dark and they are going down for the boat. They are not seeing the signage. They have driven the road the year before. One lady got three points. By the time she reaches where the signage is, she has already reached the camera. She cannot slow down in time for it. She has never been a bad driver, but she is getting caught. She got three points going to the boat on her holidays. Guess what? On the way back, she got another three points. There are numerous cases of people, not just from Kilkenny, but from Wexford and Carlow. Anybody travelling along that road is getting points on their licence. The signage is not good enough.

I welcome cameras. The people in south Kilkenny welcomed these cameras, but it is unfair that people do not have enough signage coming into where the cameras are. People are using that road maybe once a year to go on their holidays, and all of a sudden, it has changed. I find that very unfair.

The other side of it is that cameras alone will not solve the issues on these roads. This road in particular has a huge volume of traffic on it.

It was never built for that traffic. I ask the Minister of State to look into these. I am sure he will find there has been a huge volume of penalties on that road. I urge the Minister of State to look into this. The drivers are going into a 100 km/h zone. For anything over a reasonable rate, those points should be taken off them. It is unfair when there is not enough signage going into it.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I have to say I found the previous speaker's contribution strange, to put it mildly. For the Sinn Féin speaker to be trying to circumvent speeding on our roads when we see the dangers that are on our roads is incredibly bizarre, to put it mildly.

In any event, I welcome the publication of the National Safety Camera Strategy and congratulate the Minister of State on his continued efforts to use modern technology to address what is a major issue in Ireland today. In my constituency Irish Rail has already commenced

a strategy at the Merrion Gates DART crossing for camera-based enforcement for road traffic offences, specifically, red-light offences for crossing that rail crossing. This was launched in January of this year and it marks the first time in over a decade that automatic cameras have been deployed to detect red-light violations. These cameras ensure that motorists who breach traffic signals face meaningful penalties, including fines and penalty points. I have no difficulty with a motorist who seeks to fast track across the crossings facing a penalty for this. I find it very strange that any parliamentarian would seek to defend, like the previous speaker did, a motorist who drove at over 100 km/h and is facing penalty points because they did not see the sign, even if they are their constituents. In any event, this scheme is also being rolled out on Serpentine Road and Sandymount Avenue and on the other side of the River Liffey Irish Rail is also doing it in Sutton and Coolmine. I hope these cameras are installed as a matter of urgency because the evidence shows these measures work. In 2015 there was a pilot at the Luas crossing in the city centre and that reduced red-light breaches by half during a six-month trial.

I also want to emphasise the necessity for interoperability. Irish Rail is trying to protect against cars going through the rail crossings but where the Merrion Gates cameras are currently placed means they are perfectly primed to also prevent heavy goods vehicles using the Strand Road when they are not supposed to. It is illegal for heavy goods vehicles to use the Strand Road yet a report from the council in 2021 found that 130 heavy goods vehicles daily were travelling northbound on the Strand Road. It would not take much for those cameras to also be used to detect and criminalise that offence. I ask the Minister of State to look into improving the interoperability of cameras that are already in place so they can detect other road offences.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I thank the Minister of State for facilitating the statements here today in relation to road safety and the use of cameras to deter and detect traffic offences. The number of deaths and serious injuries on our roads is far too high. I am sure the major progress we made as a country over recent decades to reduce the carnage on our roads has been mentioned many times today already. Unfortunately, we have seen a reversal of that in recent years, with 190 deaths in 2025. As a Government we need to work with all stakeholders, including the Garda, the Road Safety Authority and local authorities, to reduce the injuries and deaths on our roads in every way possible. I want to focus on pedestrian safety, which is very important. In total, 41 pedestrians lost their lives on Irish roads last year. Pedestrians are particularly vulnerable road users.

I want to focus on the use of cameras at signalised junctions and pedestrian crossings to address the breaking of red lights, which is a very serious offence that can have catastrophic consequences for pedestrians. The benefits of introducing further the roll-out of cameras to reduce the incidence of this offence is very important. I ask the Minister of State to move to introduce cameras as quickly as possible at signalised junctions and pedestrian crossings to act as a deterrent and detect offences of red-light breaking when they take place at crossings.

In addition, I ask that we consider our approach in terms of the consistency of pedestrian crossings because we have a myriad of different types of pedestrian crossings. We have controlled crossings, uncontrolled crossings, signalised crossings and zebra crossings. There is a wide range of them. It is important we develop a degree of consistency around our pedestrian crossings and that in itself will help with road safety and pedestrian safety. The final

point I wish to make is the importance of having raised tables at pedestrian crossings to deter offences and slow down vehicles. This is critically important. It is an essential safety element.

In terms of the core issue of cameras, it is a modern technology we need to be using to greater effect to reduce deaths and injuries on our roads, particularly in the interest of pedestrian safety. That is one of the key tools we can use. We have not used it yet as a country. Other countries are using it. We need to step up to the plate to do that.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: I welcome elements of the National Safety Camera Strategy in terms of expanding our safety camera network to 1,900 zones and targeting the high collision black spots. However, we cannot ignore the sheer scale of the violations occurring everywhere in my constituency and elsewhere. We need a lot more cameras and enforcement after it is handed over to TII. Equally, we have to look at the smaller roads and local authority areas also.

Let us look at bus lanes, for example. An Garda Síochána issues over 6,000 fixed-charge notices a year to drivers unlawfully using these but there is no real deterrent. A survey by *irishcycle.com* on Westland Row near Leinster House recorded nearly one car per minute blatantly breaking bus-priority measures. To combat this massive volume, a strategy launching at just one or two pilot locations is completely inadequate and the €60 fine for blocking a bus lane is no real deterrent. It is happening all over and it is not about people turning 50 m from a filter lane; it is selfish and dangerous driving, so we need serious penalty points.

Constituents also have a serious problem with the breaking of lights, again, not just on regional roads. The covert traffic monitoring conducted by RTÉ "Prime Time" recorded more than 60 dangerous red-light violations in just an eight-hour window across a tiny handful of junctions. That is death and injury waiting to happen around every single corner. We need the automated safety of these measures but until the strategy delivers widespread cameras everywhere instead of tiny pilots on just regional and national roads, it will be inadequate.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Mia Lily Keogh O'Keeffe was a 16-year-old girl. She was struck by a red Mercedes when she was walking her dog across a pedestrian crossing in Navan this February. The driver fled the scene and it was a horrific accident. Seven other people were killed that same weekend. Mia Lily was a wonderful, well-liked young girl and she had her whole life in front of her. Her life has been stolen from her. The family is suffering profound grief. The mother has said she will never be whole again. This was no accident. The reality is that this was a killing that was caused as a result of a number of different factors. For sure there was the driver involved but the road itself is not up to scratch in terms of protections.

This is a really important point that the Minister of State and the Government are missing. Most road safety projects protect people from normal driving behaviour. They do not protect people from abnormal or dangerous driving behaviour. If the Minister of State goes to most countries on the Continent, in small towns and villages every single entry point will have some kind of road traffic measure. It will have a chicane, it will have ramps or it will have some staggered-type lanes which will slow traffic right down. In both cases of normal behaviour and dangerous driving behaviour, people are protected. That is not happening in Ireland and, truth be told, until that happens a lot of the talk that happens in here will be hot air because we are still going to see people being killed on a regular basis.

There are many parts of my county where the junctions, roads and bridges are simply not safe to drive through. They are not safe to drive through and they are being allowed to exist in that state by councils and the Government. Until the Government means business in fixing those junctions, narrow roads or bridges we are going to see more deaths happening in the future.

The last point here is that we can have all the rules we want in terms of road safety but if we do not have the gardaí to implement them we are on a hiding to nothing. In 2009, there were well over 1,000 road traffic gardaí in this country. Now, there are just over 600. That is a measure of how seriously this Government takes it. The Government needs to increase those numbers if it wants to protect life.

Deputy Michael Collins: Nobody disputes the need to save lives on our roads. Where there are real black spots, enforcement has its place. Let me be very clear that rural Ireland cannot be treated as an afterthought here. People outside of our small towns and cities rely on their cars every single day to walk, to farm and to bring children to school because public transport simply is not there. This strategy must not become another layer of penalties and surveillance on already stretched rural motorists. Camera locations must be based on real actionable data, clearly justified and signposted, not a cash cow for Government with cameras hidden away to catch people out. Instead of just fining drivers, Government needs to invest in safer roads, fix dangerous junctions, improve surfaces and protect communities.

I refer to the painting of the white lines; they are scandalous in my constituency. On most of the roads, you cannot see where the middle of the road is. Even at a junction in Drimoleague, people have been on to me for the last year asking that a square box be painted because people are driving from a minor road onto the main road and they do not see it. Nobody seems to care. We are always asking why there are accidents or more accidents there? The reason is a lack of funding. The road in some parts of west Cork mean you simply have to drive onto the other side of the road to avoid potholes. You cannot drive where you are supposed to drive and that is the cause of accidents. The Government seems not to understand that. For the long-suffering motorists from west Cork on the N71, there is no passing bay on the road to Innishannon, Bandon, Clonakilty into Skibbereen and down to Ballydehob. On the R586, there is no passing bay on the Bandon, Enniskean to Dunmanway road. We need to invest in public transport. We need to invest in the promises of bypasses for Innishannon and Bandon, in the northern southern relief road and the Bantry bypass. These are all promised each year and every time before an election but they are not delivered. It is just simply not good enough. This non-delivery is costing people their lives and the Government needs to sit up, take action and see where the money has been spent and where it needs to be spent.

I was in Galway canvassing over the weekend. People are pleading for the ring road in Galway. The traffic is blocked solid there. It is unacceptable. I think another promise will come up again before the by-election. It is not good enough.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: Regarding a National Safety Camera Strategy, I have no objections to any of that but what I would like to see is some joined-up thinking. In a lot of areas in County Limerick at the moment, an awful lot of robberies are taking place, and the gardaí under pressure with the numbers they have. What I would like to see rolled out in the camera strategy is number plate recognition, which would help An Garda Síochána catch the

vehicles of those involved in robbing people at night, during the day or whenever. It could track them going through all the different towns, villages and byroads they are using and give that data directly to the Garda services. We have a limited number of gardaí in this country, so we need to use technology to help them. We also need it to protect people's lives and people's homes. I would like to see number plate recognition come in. An investigation has been going on for six weeks in my area, trying to locate people who have been in people's backyards and at the back of their houses looking for opportunities to rob them. Yet, we cannot track down these vehicles. We have descriptions of them but An Garda Síochána cannot seem to track them down. If we had number plate recognition cameras on the roads, we would be able to find out the location of these vehicles, where they are coming from, where they are going to, and we would be able to assist the gardaí. We can also use them for the speeding offences - 100%. If we are going to have national safety cameras, we should also have them for the protection of people's properties and lives. That means we have the full data for our Garda services.

I was at the budgetary oversight committee yesterday, and I had done a small bit of research myself. The witnesses at the committee - professors and doctors - outlined research and asked about rural Ireland. They listed all the things in rural Ireland that should be improved - speed limits and all the rest of it. I asked them where they from. All three of them were from Dublin. They made comments about the whole country but all their data and research was based in Dublin. There are 32 counties in Ireland. There is more than Dublin in Ireland. When they are doing research, they need to research the whole country.

Deputy Keira Keogh: I welcome the publication and the roll-out of the National Safety Camera Strategy. It is a significant and overdue step in modernising road safety enforcement, and reducing deaths and serious injuries on our roads. Mayo, along with Donegal, has the highest road deaths *per capita* on 2025 data, so this is important for me and for my constituents. The strategy provides a clear national framework, backed by evidence, for using cameras to tackle speeding, red-light running and dangerous driving behaviours but I also want to ensure it covers rural Ireland, especially blackspots where there are no traffic lights or bus lanes but where there are clearly wide roads where car enthusiasts are engaging in speeding or stunts like doughnuts and things like that.

The programme for Government contains a clear commitment to introduce new road safety cameras to automatically detect mobile phone use while driving and drivers not wearing seat belts. These behaviours are among the most dangerous on Irish roads and they contribute daily to collisions, injuries and fatalities. The strategy is strong on speeding and red-light enforcement but it is less committal on expanding cameras to detect phone use and seat-belt offences. We really need clear roadmaps and clear timelines for when these camera enforcements will be extended to those high-risk behaviours.

I have also raised before serious local issues in Mayo, specifically around Derrinnumera site but also in other sites where large gatherings of car enthusiasts coming from Sligo, Galway and also Mayo are causing disturbances in the same areas over and over again. They are causing safety concerns but are also keeping babies awake at night and residents are having trouble getting to sleep. I have engaged locally with An Garda Síochána and I welcome that engagement. I also engaged with the local authority to discuss the best approach to tackling

this issue. Residents are enduring noise disturbance. There is dangerous driving and antisocial behaviour as well as polluting and this deserves action.

I commissioned the Oireachtas Library and Research Service to examine international approaches around the world to managing car enthusiast gatherings and different evidence came back from that. One thing that was interesting was that there was no strong evidence that providing a safe place for car meets actually reduces antisocial behaviour, something we float regularly. What it did show, and what most evidence backed, was that vehicle impoundment was the most effective deterrent for dangerous driving and antisocial gatherings. It also highlighted emerging technologies that are being used in the UK that could support enforcement. These are noise detection cameras, which can detect behaviour visually but can also pick up on noise detections such as illegal exhaust modifications or excessive engine revving. These systems could be highly relevant in areas like Derrinnumera where noise and modified vehicles are a major part of the problem and I hope Ireland can actively explore the feasibility of a pilot system here similar to the UK.

The National Safety Camera Strategy is a strong foundation but we must ensure it evolves to meet the full range of dangerous driving behaviours on our roads. When I look at that area of Derrinnumera, these car enthusiasts are very clever. They have spotter cars on either side of the road about 1 km away from where the stunts are happening, so as soon as the gardaí are on their way they notify the main group of people so they can disperse by the time the gardaí get there or they can be lined up neatly in a row, which is not illegal. Cameras in these rural blackspots would really help An Garda Síochána to pick up on that dangerous driving and be able to act on it.

I also think we have to get that portal up and running where people can upload their own dash cameras to report dangerous driving. The bus pilot is ongoing but this has to be the next step. My focus here is on safer roads, safer communities and evidence-based enforcement. I welcome the strategy.

Deputy Emer Currie: I welcome the publication of the National Safety Camera Strategy.

I fully support fixed speed cameras, average-speed cameras and bus lane enforcement because, without the infrastructure upgrades we desperately need, our public transport system is stuck. The core bus corridor for Dublin West remains tied up in legal challenges. Until that changes, our buses will continue to crawl through congestion at 12 km/h or 15 km/h, which is roughly the speed of a race walker. That is not a modern transport system. Bus lane enforcement matters. It is an essential short-term deterrent while we wait for long-term infrastructure delivery.

If I am honest, my contribution today will probably be defined by welcoming progress while being frustrated at the pace of change. This strategy outlines structures for the management of speeding enforcement, red light cameras, bus lane cameras and the future enforcement of offences such as mobile phone use and seatbelt violations. My question is simple. Why does progress take as long as it does? Road deaths are at their highest level in a decade. Many of the same agencies that will sit on this camera enforcement oversight group already sit on the road safety leadership group. This raises questions as to why co-ordination takes so long. I am not just referring to the camera strategy but changes in respect of road safety in general. How effectively are the stakeholders working together?

Ambition matters too. The strategy itself states that average-speed cameras reduce collisions resulting in fatalities or serious injuries by 56% while fixed cameras reduce such collisions by 15%. If we know they work, why move cautiously? We currently have just nine fixed speed cameras and three average-speed cameras nationwide. That is obviously not enough.

It is concerning that the strategy seems to talk itself out of expansion because of what it calls "downstream impacts". It suggests that too many offences might overwhelm the courts system. After identifying the benefits of cameras, it states that they should not operate 24 hours a day, that signage is an effective deterrent and that drivers will not know which buses carry the technology. Surely the answer is not to limit enforcement. The answer is to fix the system. Let us be honest about what is happening. A major reason people challenge fixed-charge notices in court is to avoid penalty points. Too often, they succeed because there are weaknesses in how offences are matched to driver numbers on the national driver and vehicle file. According to a Department of Transport review, approximately 1,500 people a year are getting away without any points being recorded. That is the problem we should be urgently solving. If we capture the driver number earlier in the process, ensure penalty points follow convictions properly and make it absolutely clear that offenders will not evade consequences, compliance rates will rise quickly.

Prioritising downstream constraints instead of fixing the root problems is not the right approach. Investing in court capacity, judges, clerks, registrars and digital integration is the right approach. I absolutely agree with the strategy that we must digitise documents, share information in real time and free gardaí from unnecessary court attendance. That work does not need a camera strategy to begin. We know this work requires as much urgency as we can possibly bring to it. I know genuinely great work is happening but our road traffic incident numbers are higher than they should be. We must tackle that issue with every tool at our disposal. We are not just here to manage problems; we are here to solve them.

Deputy Thomas Gould: I wish I was here to welcome this with a sense of hope but this is not a strategy. It is a shortlist of options. People are dying on our roads. We are one of the only states in Europe that is going backwards in relation to road safety. In 2025, 21 people tragically died on the roads of Cork. In 2024, 18 died and seven died in 2021. These are horrific figures. Each of these people left behind a distraught family heartbroken with grief. Some families never come back from the heartache of a death like this. At the same time, the Minister of State has come in here today to provide five options. That is not a strategy. It is nothing short of an insult to those families and those who have died. We want to see real action and so do they. They want to see a real strategy that goes further and will help to prevent deaths. They do not want options. They want action.

This so-called strategy is 34 pages long and sets out five options. This could have been written at a rate of a page a week over the last two years. That is how long it took to put together and publish this strategy and to come up with five options and no clear actions. While this report was being worked on, 336 people died on our roads. It is heartbreaking.

There is another point I want to make. The first people on the scene of these tragedies are our front-line paramedics and ambulance drivers. They are the same people I was proud to stand with on the picket lines yesterday. They are not being valued by this Government. They

are going to the scenes of these accidents and seeing the darkest days of people's lives. They are trying everything they can to save people or to show compassion. This Government is not showing compassion for anyone, however. Those workers deserve fair play and fair pay and conditions. I express my solidarity with them. I hope this Government will now step up and sort this out before there are any more strikes next week. From the bottom of my heart and on behalf of all of the people who are affected, I thank all of those people in the emergency services who go out to these accidents. They do unbelievable work. The Government needs to do more.

Deputy Carol Nolan: I welcome the publication of Ireland's first national camera safety strategy. Any measure that reduces speeding and saves lives on our roads is certainly worth considering in a constructive manner. Across the country, thousands of schools and communities will breathe a sigh of relief when they hear this news because far too many parents have their hearts in their mouths sending their children to school every morning.

Just yesterday, parents at Cloneyhurke National School contacted me with the shocking results of the school's green schools walkability audit. Some 97% of vehicles were breaking the 50 km/h schooltime limit during drop-off. Some 83% were travelling at over 60 km/h and some were recorded at over 100 km/h. There is still no footpath between the school and the community hall. Children and parents are forced to walk on the road while cars block the hard shoulder. The road surface floods and the times on the signage are wrong. The situation is simply unacceptable. It certainly poses difficulties and risks in terms of children's safety.

Cameras will be welcomed by schools like Cloneyhurke National School but let us be honest. Cameras catch offenders but they do not build footpaths, resurface roads or install proper traffic calming measures. That is the glaring contradiction at the heart of this Government's approach. While the Department rolls out a national camera strategy, communities in Offaly have been left waiting years for basic road infrastructure. The Tullamore-Kilbeggan link road on the N52 is a case in point. For over a decade, we were told funding was in the pipeline. TII kept its grip on the money. Only recently, after ongoing pressure and the issue being raised by me in the Chamber many times, it has finally received approval and has been placed on the national development plan.

4 o'clock

Road safety cannot be delivered by means of enforcement alone. We need cameras, but we also need concrete and proper infrastructure, particularly in the vicinity of schools where, in many cases, there are no footpaths.

Deputy Barry Heneghan: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this matter. I want to bring it down to what matters for north Dublin. The strategy is listed in the programme for Government. It sits at the centre of the road safety plan. It is fundamental and will protect lives. It is about the drivers, cyclists, pedestrians and families who have lost loved ones in the constituency I represent and nationally.

In recent months, Dublin Bay North has seen arson attack after arson attack. I would love for some of the CCTV footage to be used by Dublin City Council and gardaí to protect the amenities that have been attacked. We fought for them. I would also welcome CCTV cameras outside schools. They help to protect children, but it is also about protecting the amenities for

children. Two nights ago, a playground was attacked. Why are people attacking the communities? It makes no sense. In Coolock, we fought for a camera to be installed. In the Howth area, we got one installed. This is all in the past 12 months. In St. Anne's Park, public toilets were put in for young girls. Within two days, they were burnt down. That is inexcusable. CCTV, in conjunction with the national strategy, will be of benefit. When I have written about having cameras installed around clothes banks or areas where there is heavy traffic and risk to pedestrians, the GDPR is used as an excuse. I emailed about this in relation to CCTV and the Garda and received a reply to say that the GDPR does not prohibit the use of CCTV.

I welcome the work that is being done. My father was a traffic policeman for 35 years. I spoke to him about how it will help. He does respect that. Gardaí need to be given the proper resources to correctly implement it. That is why it matters and gives us the framework for enforcement by gardaí in the context of people who run red lights, the misuse of bus lanes and, crucially, public safety. Nobody wants a surveillance state. We do not want a Big Brother Ireland, but we do want to stop children's playgrounds in north Dublin being burnt down. We want to stop vans driving to Dollymount beach - a nature reserve - at 2 a.m. and dumping refuse. We also want to protect drivers and stop people recklessly driving on the roads while they are on their phones. I do welcome that.

We deserve better safety and better deterrence. I welcome the moves in that regard. I will continue to push constructively and to work with the Minister of State.

Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Niall Collins): I thank the Deputies for their contributions and for their very useful comments during this debate on the National Safety Camera Strategy and the important topic of road safety more generally. Road safety is a matter which affects all of us, and every member of the public is entitled to feel safe on our roads. Far too many families and communities across the country continue to be affected by the devastating impact of road traffic collisions. I am sure we can all agree that road safety is an area where we all want to see improvements and most importantly a significant reduction in the number of deaths and serious injuries on our roads. In that regard, it is important that we see a return to the progress of previous years and that there is a reduction in the number of fatalities and serious injuries on our roads.

I would like to assure the Dáil that this Government remains committed to delivering the Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030, with the ultimate goal of halving the number of fatalities and serious injuries on our roads by 2030. Meeting this ambitious goal will take us towards achieving Vision Zero by 2050. My colleague the Minister of State, Deputy Canney, provided an update on the phase 2 action plan under the road safety strategy for the period 2025 to 2017, which was published by the Department of Transport in July of last year. This action plan comprises 12 primary transformative actions and 77 support actions. I welcome the progress that has been made too date, in particular the publication of the National Safety Camera Strategy.

Road safety cameras are intended to be, first and foremost, a tool to support safety, prevention and behavioural change across the road network. The enhanced use of cameras across Ireland will encourage safer driving practices, reduce the number of collisions and protect road users by promoting compliance with road traffic laws. Enforcement measures only become necessary in circumstances where individuals fail to exercise due care and

responsibility while driving. In this context, camera enforcement acts as an important safeguard to deter dangerous behaviours and reinforce a culture of road safety for all.

This is an ambitious action plan, but we need to be ambitious in order to reverse the upward trend in fatalities and serious injuries. Delivering the action plan is a collaborative effort involving my Department, together with An Garda Síochána, the Department of Transport, the Road Safety Authority, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, National Transport Authority, the Courts Service, Medical Bureau of Road Safety, the Health and Safety Authority and the local authorities. Deputies will note that there are many experts across a range of partners collaborating to take action and deliver positive road safety outcomes.

Road safety is a priority for the Garda Commissioner. An Garda Síochána is committed to working with all road safety stakeholders to ensure that the number of fatalities and serious injuries on our roads is reduced. The Minister of State, Deputy Canney, reminded us of the four main causes of fatalities on our roads that have been consistent over time, namely speeding, distraction, not wearing a seat belt and intoxicated driving. Tackling these dangerous behaviours can be addressed through road safety education, public awareness campaigns and the enforcement of road traffic laws.

Over the recent May bank holiday weekend, An Garda Síochána carried out an extensive roads policing operation, the results of which were quite emphatic. Almost 4,000 drivers were detected for speeding during the operation. A total of 165 were arrested for driving under the influence of an intoxicant and 300 were detected for holding a mobile phone or not wearing a seat belt. These trends cannot and must not continue. Everyone who gets behind the wheel of a car or who is a passenger in a car has a role to play in ensuring that they or those who are driving behave in a safe manner. Such a change in current behavioural trends would have a far greater long-term positive impact in affecting road safety if adopted by all of those who use the roads. Behaviours are key to creating safer roads across Ireland. We all have a role to play where road safety is concerned.

Ongoing enforcement is a very important aspect of the road safety strategy. In the modern world, it is important that we adopt a multifaceted approach to road safety enforcement. At the end of March, there were 695 gardaí assigned to the roads policing unit. Of course, all gardaí engage in the enforcement of roads policing as part of their duties. In fact, the majority of drug driving and drink driving checks are carried out by regular garda members.

Additional speed cameras and enhanced data sharing are key components of this multifaceted approach to road traffic law enforcement. As highlighted by the Minister of State, Deputy Canney, camera enforcement across the road network has been increasing since 2024. An Garda Síochána, with the assistance of TII and local authorities, has deployed nine new static safety cameras across the road network as well as three new average speed cameras. Effective detection and enforcement of road traffic offences through the use of safety cameras will promote better and safer driver behaviour, which will help to reduce the number of fatalities and serious injuries on our roads. In addition, An Garda Síochána, through the mobile safety camera programme, delivered under contract by GoSafe, provides 9,000 hours of monitoring on our roads each month. This has increased from 7,500 hours in 2024. On 1 January last, An Garda Síochána introduced 390 new safety camera zones, including 55 community request safety camera zones, bringing the total to 1,901 safety camera zones nationwide.

Increased data sharing is also having a positive impact on road safety. Every front-line Garda member now has a mobility device, which is essentially a mobile phone that allows them to access a number of specialised Garda apps at the roadside. These include the ability to issue a fixed charge notice, to check a vehicle's insurance status, if a vehicle is taxed and whether a driver is disqualified. These tasks can now be done within moments, without the need to return to the station making much better use of their time.

The statistics show that it is being widely and extensively used by gardaí across the country as part of roads policing. An Garda Síochána figures show that members of the force checked approximately 3.7 million vehicles via their mobile devices over the last full year. That is more than 10,000 vehicles per day. This year, members of An Garda Síochána had, on average, made inquiries in respect of approximately 360,000 vehicles per month to the end of March.

This information helps to enhance road safety. It also provides An Garda Síochána with more comprehensive insight into any offences a driver may have committed, thereby making it more difficult for drivers who act illegally on Irish roads to evade detection.

The National Safety Camera Strategy sets out a new approach to the operation of safety cameras in Ireland. Up to now, the deployment of safety cameras across the road network has been the primary responsibility of An Garda Síochána. Under the strategy, exclusive responsibility for the installation and maintenance of speed cameras will transition away from An Garda Síochána. A key strength of the new approach, as outlined in the strategy, is that it will ensure greater collaboration between road safety stakeholders, including An Garda Síochána, TII and the NTA, and build on well-established road safety expertise and relationships. By partnering with TII and the NTA, An Garda Síochána will be able to focus its efforts on core policing, including enforcement activities, reducing time spent on the management of the road camera systems. These tasks are non-core policing work. Critically, the strategy has been developed to be scaleable, thereby allowing the introduction of camera-based enforcement of additional road traffic offences in future, such as mobile phone usage and people not wearing seat belts. This will further enhance An Garda Síochána's enforcement capability in relation to deadly behaviours on our roads.

As outlined by the Minister of State, Deputy Canney, the camera enforcement oversight group, which will be delivery focused, will be responsible for implementing the national safety camera strategy. Senior leaders from An Garda Síochána will work alongside leaders of the NTA, TII, the Road Safety Authority, the Courts Service and our local authorities. I am confident that this collaborative approach is the best approach to implementing the safety strategy, including a clear focus on the importance of enforcement of road traffic law. However, lasting progress cannot be made through enforcement alone. Success will require a strong and collaborative collective commitment from all road users to act responsibly, comply with road traffic laws and prioritise safety in every journey. Only through a shared responsibility approach can we create safe roads for everyone. I thank all the Deputies who made contributions to the debate.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 4.12 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 4.30 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 4.12 p.m. and resumed at 4.30 p.m.

Garda Síochána (Recording Devices) (Amendment) Bill 2025: Report and Final Stages

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 1 and 4 are grouped together.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I move amendment No. 1:

In page 4, between lines 7 and 8, to insert the following:

“ ‘crime against humanity’ means any of the acts specified in Article 7 of the Statute of the International Criminal Court;

‘genocide’ means any of the acts specified in Article 6 of the Statute of the International Criminal Court;

‘war crime’ means any of the acts specified in Article 8.2 of the Statute of the International Criminal Court.”.

Amendment No. 1 inserts these definitions. Amendment No. 4, which is a substantive amendment, reads:

Prohibition on procurement or use of certain technologies

43DA.(1) An Garda Síochána, the Minister, or any public body acting on their behalf shall not procure, license, contract for, deploy, or otherwise make operational use of any biometric analysis technology, surveillance technology, software, hardware, dataset, or related service supplied by—

(a) a company incorporated, headquartered, or substantially operating in a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide,

(b) a subsidiary, affiliate, or parent undertaking of such a company, or

(c) any entity that develops, trains, sources, or operates biometric or surveillance systems using data, infrastructure, or technology originating a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide.

(2) For the purposes of this section, ‘surveillance technology’ includes any system capable of biometric analysis, facial recognition, behavioural categorisation, pattern of life analysis, or the processing of biometric data within the meaning of the Data Protection Act 2018.

(3) Any existing contract, memorandum of understanding, or procurement arrangement that contravenes subsection (1) shall not be renewed, extended, or varied, and shall be terminated at the earliest date ...

(4) Nothing in this section shall prevent the Minister from authorising the temporary retention of data or equipment solely for the purpose of evidential preservation ...

(5) No biometric data collected, processed, or retained under this Act shall be transferred to, processed by, or stored on any server, cloud service, or technological infrastructure—

(a) located in a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide.

(b) controlled by an entity referred to in subsection (1), or

(c) operated using software, firmware, or backend systems originating in a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide.”

The reason for these amendments is that banning the use of technology from states engaged in war crimes and genocide should not even be up for debate. It should be an absolute given. We know that An Garda Síochána has used and is probably still using surveillance technology originating from the State of Israel. The record of Israel is highly problematic from both a national security perspective and because it is supporting a genocidal regime that uses this very technology to target Palestinians.

In 2023, for example, An Garda Síochána paid €278,000 to Cognyte, an Israeli surveillance technology company. Its main product is an investigative analytics platform that uses AI, facial recognition and data aggregation to analyse communications, CCTV, social media and much more. The company has a really controversial history. Its tools have been used in Indonesia to monitor LGBT and religious minorities. They have been used in Myanmar and South Sudan for mass interception. A Brazilian investigation alleges that the Cognyte system was used under the Bolsonaro regime to track political opponents. The Minister, Deputy O’Callaghan, cannot guarantee at present that this company’s tools would not be used for the provisions under the recording devices Bill that we are discussing.

We also know that the Garda has paid hundreds of thousands of euro to an Israeli cyberdefence company that has worked with Israeli authorities to target Palestinians during the current genocide in Palestine. That company, Cellebrite, has deep links to the Israeli military and intelligence and has previously been criticised by many international groups for selling its technology to repressive governments. This company has been used by Israel to target Palestinians throughout the current genocide in Gaza. In 2021 alone, the Garda spent over €200,000 on that company’s services.

While it is important that gardaí have access to technology, including the deception technology required to detect and prosecute serious crimes, alternatives have to be found to using companies from states that are engaged in war crimes, genocide or crimes against humanity. Without enshrining this in law, I do not believe that will happen. The experience to date says it will not happen.

In 2024, the Government banned future purchases of military equipment from Israel due to the actions of the Israeli Government in Gaza, but this ban did not apply to An Garda Síochána. The acceptance of these amendments would mirror and be wholly consistent with the position that the Government has taken with respect to the purchase of military equipment by the Defence Forces. It would also be important - I want to stress this - that from a national security perspective, it would make absolutely no sense to procure this type of technology from a state that has been quite blatantly hostile to Ireland simply because this State has stood up against the crime of genocide that is occurring in Gaza.

I encourage and implore the Minister to accept amendments Nos. 1 and 4 so that we can enshrine their provisions in this legislation and ensure that we provide new powers to the Garda to procure equipment that will have very extensive capabilities while at the same time not assisting what is now by definition a rogue state.

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan): I thank Deputy Carthy for these two amendments. We had an opportunity on Committee Stage to have a discussion on these amendments as well, but the Deputy is perfectly entitled to submit them again.

As the Leas-Ceann Comhairle will be aware, the purpose of this legislation is to provide a facility for An Garda Síochána to engage in retrospective biometric analysis in terms of the work that it does and in terms of trying to speed up investigations for the purpose of identifying missing persons or locating individuals in a crowd when there is a large amount of CCTV footage. That is the primary purpose of this legislation.

What the Deputy is seeking to do is to put into primary legislation rules on procurement. In particular, he wants to rule out An Garda Síochána entering into contracts with certain companies that are based in countries that have been adjudicated to have been involved in crimes against humanity or genocide. As I have said previously, however, procurement is governed by EU rules and national regulations and my view today is the same as it was when this matter came before us on Committee Stage, in that it would be inappropriate to duplicate these restrictions in primary legislation.

There are mandatory exclusion grounds where a tenderer has been convicted of one or more of the following offences: participation in a criminal organisation; corruption; fraud; terrorist offences or offences linked to terrorist activities; money laundering or terrorist financing; child labour; human trafficking-related offences; and the breach of tax or social security obligations.

Public procurement rules and regulations provide for a transparent, non-discriminatory process and there are sufficient rules and regulations in place in respect of existing guidelines. Procurement matters generally would not be a matter to be addressed in this Bill. In the case of any procurement of biometric technologies, there are requirements for providers and deployers of AI systems under the AI Act and An Garda Síochána will look to its European counterparts when engaging in the procurement process for best practice in the area. I am satisfied that the Garda will seek to advance ethical considerations when it comes to procurement processes as well.

Deputy Carthy is seeking to target Israel because of the war crimes committed by it in Gaza and elsewhere.

I agree with him when he says that this State, through its Government, has stood up to the criminal genocide in Gaza. That is correct. Obviously, it has resulted in Israel having a negative view of Ireland on the basis that we are standing up for what we believe is a rules-based international system and ensuring we have an orderly resolution of disputes. Nonetheless, having said that, it would be inappropriate to include rules in respect of procurement in primary legislation. For that reason, I am adopting the same position as I did on Committee Stage, which is that I cannot accept these amendments.

Deputy Matt Carthy: The difficulty is that we know An Garda Síochána has purchased this type of equipment from companies that have close relationships with the Israeli regime. The current legal position is that this can continue. The Minister mentioned that we did not need to put this in primary legislation, but since Committee Stage up to now, I do not understand why the Minister did not cut this off at the pass by introducing these types of provision by

regulation, as has been the case in respect of the Defence Forces. The Minister should answer to the House as to why he has not done that.

In the absence of such a move, the only inference that can be taken is that there must be at least the interest in keeping the option of the Garda using companies that are engaged and collaborating in a genocide for the purpose of purchasing material that will ultimately be used to carry out biometric recognition in respect of Irish citizens. That is deeply concerning. For that reason, this House should put on the record where it stands on this issue. This will come back to bite the Government if it does not accept this amendment or bring forward the regulations that would provide the comfort. This is not just in respect of Israel. It is in respect of Russia and any other state that is engaged in activities that are declared by the International Criminal Court, ICC, to be either genocide or war crimes.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: As Deputy Carthy will be aware, under section 3 of the 2023 Act, there is a provision that enables me to make regulations in respect of provisions contained within the legislation. Obviously, I cannot make regulations now in respect of an amendment that is not yet part of the legislation. Nonetheless, I am aware of the powers that I have under section 3. It is a matter that I will give consideration to, but we need to recognise that there are rules in place to deal with procurement. It is not appropriate to put this into primary legislation, such as the legislation we are dealing with here about the ability of An Garda Síochána to use biometric retrospective analysis. It would be inappropriate in that legislation to put in a provision that talks about with whom An Garda Síochána may enter into contracts. I am aware of the point being made by Deputy Carthy and I am aware of the powers I have under section 3.

Deputy Matt Carthy: We are dealing with a Bill that would, for the first time, allow what we all hope would be the appropriate use of biometric recognition technology in order to assist our police force in tackling serious crime, security matters and missing persons cases. Most people in the House recognise that, for those serious issues, there is a need for the use of that type of technology. However, there is also a consensus that we have to ensure appropriate safeguards because we have seen how this type of technology has been abused internationally. A number of states have used this type of technology for aggressive reasons. They have used it to either spy on their own citizenry on an ongoing basis or pursue war crimes and breaches of international law.

To be clear, with this amendment, we are just putting in one of the necessary safeguards to ensure that we do not allow technology to be supplied by companies that collaborate with states engaged in war crimes or genocide. As I said at the outset, that should not even be up for debate. I thought the Minister would have welcomed and adopted that. My real concern is that while the Minister has said, as he did on Committee Stage, that this is something he will give consideration to by way of regulation, he has not assured this House that he will be pursuing that route. It is for those reasons that I will be pressing the amendment.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 60; Níl, 74; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Aird, William.	

Bennett, Cathy.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Brady, John.	Boland, Grace.	
Buckley, Pat.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Byrne, Joanna.	Brennan, Brian.	
Carthy, Matt.	Brennan, Shay.	
Collins, Michael.	Brophy, Colm.	
Coppinger, Ruth.	Browne, James.	
Cronin, Réada.	Burke, Colm.	
Crowe, Seán.	Butler, Mary.	
Cullinane, David.	Butterly, Paula.	
Cummins, Jen.	Buttimer, Jerry.	
Daly, Pa.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Devine, Máire.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Doherty, Pearse.	Calleary, Dara.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Canney, Seán.	
Farrelly, Aidan.	Carrigy, Mícheál.	
Farrell, Mairéad.	Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Chambers, Jack.	
Gannon, Gary.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Clendennen, John.	
Gould, Thomas.	Collins, Niall.	
Graves, Ann.	Connolly, John.	
Gurke, Johnny.	Cooney, Joe.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	Cummins, John.	
Hearne, Rory.	Currie, Emer.	
Kelly, Alan.	Daly, Martin.	
Kenny, Eoghan.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Lawless, Paul.	Dillon, Alan.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Dolan, Albert.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Fleming, Sean.	
McGrath, Mattie.	Foley, Norma.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
Mitchell, Denise.	Geoghegan, James.	
Murphy, Paul.	Grealish, Noel.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Harkin, Marian.	
Nash, Ged.	Healy-Rae, Michael.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Heneghan, Barry.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Heydon, Martin.	
Nolan, Carol.	Higgins, Emer.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	Keogh, Keira.	
O'Donoghue, Richard.	Lawless, James.	
O'Gorman, Roderic.	Maxwell, David.	
O'Hara, Louis.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	McCormack, Tony.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	McGrath, Séamus.	
Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	McGreehan, Erin.	

Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Moynihan, Michael.	
Quaide, Liam.	Moynihan, Shane.	
Quinlivan, Maurice.	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
Rice, Pádraig.	Murphy, Michael.	
Sherlock, Marie.	Naughton, Hildegard.	
Smith, Duncan.	Neville, Joe.	
Tóibín, Peadar.	O'Brien, Darragh.	
Wall, Mark.	O'Callaghan, Jim.	
Ward, Mark.	O'Connell, Maeve.	
Whitmore, Jennifer.	O'Connor, James.	
	O'Dea, Willie.	
	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
	O'Meara, Ryan.	
	O'Shea, John Paul.	
	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Smyth, Niamh.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Troy, Robert.	

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

Amendment declared lost.

5 o'clock

Deputy Matt Carthy: I move amendment No. 2:

In page 6, after line 40, to insert the following:

“(3A) A member of An Garda Síochána shall not deploy biometric analysis unless authorised in advance by a member of An Garda Síochána not below the rank of Chief Superintendent, who shall record in writing the grounds of necessity and proportionality for such deployment.”.

This amendment was discussed on Committee Stage. It seeks to ensure that there are safeguards in terms of how this technology can be used and, crucially, to ensure that there is no overreach, by ensuring that the deployment of biometric analysis or facial recognition must be authorised in advance by a garda not below the rank of chief superintendent. As I said during the previous discussions on this Bill, we know that gardaí have faced disciplinary processes for misuse of the PULSE system in the past, for example. There was one particularly horrendous case in which a former garda was ultimately jailed for inciting strangers to rape a

colleague. That type of situation is in the minority. It is something that does not happen and we would not expect to happen. The individual pleaded guilty to the unauthorised disclosure of Garda PULSE personal data on 14 different individuals. While it is important to say, as I mentioned, that such misuses would only ever relate to a very tiny minority, it does point to a misuse of the PULSE system and, in my view, reinforces the need to ensure we have proper protections in place to ensure that when we are adopting new technologies that they are only used when appropriate, that they are properly authorised and that they are absolutely necessary for the investigation of serious crimes or missing persons or matters of that nature. It is appropriate that we would set an appropriate level of Garda rank who could authorise that and in my view the authorisation should come from a chief superintendent or above.

Deputy Gary Gannon: I will be supporting this amendment and a similar one tabled by Deputy Kelly. We all appreciate that An Garda needs tools to investigate serious crime, find missing people of people and protect the public. Nobody on this side of the House will ever dispute that. However, our job is to make sure that when we hand these tools over we do so in a way that is legally sound. The Bill introduces a new concept of biometric analysis which is defined across three limbs in section 43A. The first allows gardaí to automatically recognise and categorise physical features of individuals generally from footage gathered in an investigation. The second allows them to track particular unidentified persons across that footage. The third allows them to locate particular identified persons using the same process.

The Bill carefully avoids using the language of the EU AI Act, but the EU AI Act does not care what we call things; it cares what we do. What these powers do - in particular the first limb - is categorise people on the basis of their biometric data, namely, skin colour, hair colour, eye colour and body shape. By any plain reading, that is a biometric categorisation within the meaning of the AI Act. The AI Act is not aspirational. Rather, it is binding and it is explicit that biometric categorisation systems used by law enforcement are classified as high-risk AI systems. This classification carries with it a suite of mandatory obligations under Articles 26 and 27. These are obligations on the deployer, which in this case is An Garda Síochána. Those obligations include: ensuring human oversight by personnel with the necessary skills, training and authority; monitoring the system for risks to fundamental rights; suspending use of the system if such a risk arises; maintaining logs for a minimum of six months and carrying out a data protection impact assessment and, under Article 27, conducting a detailed fundamental rights impact assessment before deploying the system and sharing results with the market surveillance authority.

I did raise this on Committee Stage and I was told that the code of practice would deal with it. I want to gently but firmly push back on that. A code of practice prepared by the Garda Commissioner and reviewed every five years is not an adequate substitute for statutory obligations enshrined in primary legislation.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I thank Deputy Carthy for his amendment and Deputy Gannon for his contribution. As I said at the outset, the purpose of this legislation is to provide an additional tool to An Garda Síochána in order to expedite its investigations. This is not a tool that will be used for the purpose of putting evidence before a court to convict a person of a criminal offence. It is an instrument that will be of benefit to gardaí when they are going through very significant amounts of CCTV footage. As I said previously on Committee Stage,

this amendment would, in my opinion, make the system incapable of effective operation. As I said, the gardaí will be assisted by this provision in sorting and filtering data in order that a human reviewer can narrow down avenues of investigation.

Let us take an example of where biometric analysis will be of considerable assistance to An Garda Síochána. This is in investigations of child sexual abuse material. As an aside, I should say that earlier today I was at the launch of the annual report of the Irish Internet Hotline. It is an excellent report, but it does reveal the extent to which child sexual abuse material is being derived, accessed and used by people in Ireland. It is something we need to be constantly vigilant about and ensure that we have a very strong ability within An Garda Síochána to investigate it and prosecute it. If we take the example of a child sexual abuse material investigation, there could be thousands of images over which biometric analysis could be performed. If the approach in the amendment were to be adopted, it would require the biometric analysis of each image to be approved by a chief superintendent. We would clearly lose valuable time seeking authorisations. We would lose time identifying vulnerable victims and waste valuable Garda time. I regret to say it would make no operational sense to proceed in the manner proposed by the amendment.

Identifiable persons will be responsible for not only reviewing the footage or images, but responsible for any decisions made in the course of an investigation. Biometric analysis could aid investigators by finding all instances of a distinctive facial feature or scar in what can be hundreds of thousands of images or videos on a single seized device. All searching proposed in this Bill is for investigative leads only. It has the potential to group relevant images together, so a person can either review the footage or have a starting point for that review. Inserting an authorisation process for the carrying out of biometric analysis, as is suggested by this amendment, would, in my opinion, be unnecessary. This, as I said, is a decision-support tool with clear safeguards set out in the Bill, including approval by both Houses for a code of practice. Biometric analysis could be used to search for general biometric characteristics for an unidentified victim, a suspect, a person who is a threat to the security of the State or indeed a missing person. However, there are also conditions that must be met in order for those searches to be permitted and these include that it has to be necessary and proportionate in the context of a specific criminal investigation into serious offences, offences which have penalties of five years or more, a matter relating to national security, or in a missing person investigation. It can also only be used on documents gathered in the context of that investigation. An authorisation does need to be reserved for the most intrusive use in cases. The Bill is about using technology to aid investigative work, not to replace it.

For those reasons, I cannot accept Deputy Carthy's amendment.

I note what Deputy Gannon said in respect of the EU AI Act. I want to emphasise again that the Bill will be in line with EU law. The Commission guidelines for high-risk AI systems are still in drafting and have been reviewed by member states with feedback provided. These will include a list of practical examples of use cases of AI systems that are high risk or not high risk. While the guidelines will act as an interpretive tool in understanding how to implement the AI Act, the European Court of Justice will be the ultimate arbiter of the AI Act and its provisions.

Deputy Gary Gannon: I should say that we are not raising these issues to obstruct. We are raising the issues because there is the potential for quite clear legal vulnerabilities here. The Bill, as it is presented to us and as we can see before us, has brought suggestions from some organisations that there are some violations of the AI Act and EU regulations. We can only scrutinise what is in front of us as it is presented to us. With regard to the use of this technology, particularly in some of the cases the Minister outlined of the most serious nature where we want prosecution if a person is found to be guilty, we do not want to leave legal loopholes that people can use to remove themselves from prosecution because the tools that have been used by the State to establish guilt are being seen as a breach of an EU law. That is the vulnerability I am highlighting. I am not sure from the Minister's answer if that will be addressed in the legislation that actually gives confidence to what we are doing here today.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I am not entirely reassured by the Minister's assurances. He talks about a code of practice which this House will have no hand, act or part in developing. His own Department and his office, in particular, since he has taken office have been incredibly reluctant to provide information to the Members of this House on how decisions are made or how matters relating to the outworkings of legislation actually work in practice. I would have thought this would be a fairly standard safeguard to ensure the public could be assured that, before this type of technology is utilised, it is actually approved by a senior garda. The question then is at which rank that should be. We have indicated in this amendment that it should be chief superintendent. I think that is eminently reasonable. To talk about a code of practice that may or may not have adequate or even stronger safeguards ultimately does not provide the assurances this House should have before we pass legislation that will, ultimately, convey substantial new powers to An Garda Síochána.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I just want to clarify. I am certainly not suggesting that any of the Deputies here are highlighting issues for the purpose of obstructing the legislation or, indeed, trying to obstruct the work of An Garda Síochána. Deputies are highlighting issues that are of concern to them. Similarly, however, in responding to them I have to be able to say be able to say how I think in practice the amendment, if enacted, would impact An Garda Síochána. My view is that if this amendment was enacted, it would have a very negative operational impact on the force because of the fact that we are dealing with images that can come in bundles of hundreds or thousands. If we are going to have a chief superintendent who has to authorise each one of them before biometric analysis can take place, that is going to have a very limiting impact on the work of the Garda. In fact, the likelihood is that it will just become a paper-signing exercise or a box-ticking exercise and it would undermine the whole purpose of the real measures that are going to be put in place to ensure there is proper oversight.

Deputy Carthy said he did not gain much confidence from the code of practice. He should reserve his comments in respect of that because a code of practice setting out procedures surrounding the use of retrospective biometric analysis will be laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas. It will be subject to debate and resolutions being passed. It will be published as a statutory instrument, making it a publicly available document. Human rights and data protection impact assessments will be required as part of the procedure for drafting a code of practice. In respect of the code, the Garda Commissioner, as is the case with the current codes of practice under the principal Act, will have to consult with several bodies listed in section 47A, which is to be inserted by section 10 in this Bill, and publish the code for views prior to

adoption. There is, therefore, a whole statutory mechanism to ensure there is oversight and engagement in respect of the finalisation of those codes of practice.

Where gardaí are deploying a high-risk AI system, there will be criteria to be fulfilled more generally under the AI Act for deployers, as I mentioned earlier, and the providers of systems will also have to fulfil certain criteria. Notwithstanding this, the Data Protection Acts will continue to apply, as set out in section 4 of the principal Act. There is also oversight whereby a High Court judge will be required to report to the Taoiseach annually on the code. There is a huge amount of oversight there. I believe it is sufficient to ensure there is public confidence in the work that is being done by An Garda Síochána should this provision be enacted. I have to say, however, that I remain opposed to the amendment we are discussing now because I think it would have a very negative impact operationally on the work of An Garda Síochána.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I will make a couple of comments in conclusion. The Minister knows full well that nobody is suggesting that there would be individual authorisation for every single image, for every still and video. The amendment does not suggest that at all. It states that it would be authorised in advance by a chief superintendent or higher and that there would be a written record of the grounds for necessity and proportionality. That would negate the suggestion that this would become just a rubber-stamping exercise. The amendment is eminently sensible in my view.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I move amendment No. 3:

In page 8, between lines 12 and 13, to insert the following:

“Processing and storage of data

43DA.Biometric data processed under this Act shall—

- (a) be retained only for the minimum period strictly necessary,
- (b) be stored and processed exclusively on servers located within the European Union,
- (c) not be accessible to private contractors, and
- (d) be deleted immediately once no longer required for the purpose for which it was collected.”.

This amendment is about ensuring that there can be full public confidence. I think there is broad recognition that this type of technology will become an important and useful mechanism to An Garda in its work of tackling serious crime, dealing with security matters and particularly, hopefully, in respect of missing person cases. I will state again, however, that the public will want to be assured that there are safeguards in terms of how and when this technology will be used. This amendment seeks to ensure that we have full protection in terms of where the data is processed and stored and to ensure that such data is only stored for the necessary period. As we permit the use of this kind of technology in assisting gardaí to do their job of detecting crime and catching criminals, we also need to ensure there are safeguards in terms of what is being processed and for how long it is being held. That is what this amendment simply does. I believe it is important because without this type of amendment there is going to be some

public concern about the deployment of this type of technology. This amendment is a way of negating that in a way that does not disrupt the intention of the Bill.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I thank Deputy Carthy for this amendment. As the subheading to it indicates, it is a processing amendment. I want to point out, however, that a processing provision is already provided for and the wording proposed for this section will be governed by the code of practice. The provisions of the recording devices Act are without prejudice to the requirements of the Data Protection Acts. The general principles of data protection are set out in those Acts and the processing of data, including access, retention, storage, deletion or destruction of data, will be supplemented by the code of practice. I ask Deputy Carthy to look at section 47A, which is on page ten of the Bill and, in particular, subsections (2) and (3) of that section. Subsection (2) states:

[the] draft code of practice shall include provisions relating to-

[...]

- (b) parameters for use of biometric analysis, including geographical and, subject to section 43C(7), temporal limits of such use,
- (c) the confidentiality, security, storage, access, retention, erasure and destruction of data obtained as a result of the operation of Part 6A,

It specifically includes, in subsection (2), reference to data, and also subsection (3)(b) refers to "different types of biometric data and biometric analysis", and "different categories of persons or data (including biometric data)".

The issue is referred to and covered already in the Bill. There is, as I say, a provision there regarding the destruction or deletion of data where it does not result in the recognition or categorisation of a person. I also emphasise that the power provided for in this Bill is for An Garda Síochána only.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I move amendment No. 4:

In page 8, between lines 12 and 13, to insert the following:

"Prohibition on procurement or use of certain technologies

43DA.(1) An Garda Síochána, the Minister, or any public body acting on their behalf shall not procure, license, contract for, deploy, or otherwise make operational use of any biometric analysis technology, surveillance technology, software, hardware, dataset, or related service supplied by—

- (a) a company incorporated, headquartered, or substantially operating in a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide,
- (b) a subsidiary, affiliate, or parent undertaking of such a company, or

(c) any entity that develops, trains, sources, or operates biometric or surveillance systems using data, infrastructure, or technology originating a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide.

(2) For the purposes of this section, 'surveillance technology' includes any system capable of biometric analysis, facial recognition, behavioural categorisation, pattern of life analysis, or the processing of biometric data within the meaning of the Data Protection Act 2018.

(3) Any existing contract, memorandum of understanding, or procurement arrangement that contravenes subsection (1) shall not be renewed, extended, or varied, and shall be terminated at the earliest date permissible under contract law.

(4) Nothing in this section shall prevent the Minister from authorising the temporary retention of data or equipment solely for the purpose of evidential preservation, forensic examination, or legal compliance, provided that no further operational use is made of such technology.

(5) No biometric data collected, processed, or retained under this Act shall be transferred to, processed by, or stored on any server, cloud service, or technological infrastructure—

(a) located in a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide.

(b) controlled by an entity referred to in subsection (1), or

(c) operated using software, firmware, or backend systems originating in a state engaged in war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide.".

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 63; Níl, 76; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Aird, William.	
Bacik, Ivana.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Bennett, Cathy.	Boland, Grace.	
Brady, John.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Buckley, Pat.	Brennan, Brian.	
Byrne, Joanna.	Brennan, Shay.	
Carthy, Matt.	Brophy, Colm.	
Collins, Michael.	Browne, James.	
Cronin, Réada.	Burke, Colm.	
Crowe, Seán.	Butler, Mary.	
Cullinane, David.	Butterly, Paula.	
Cummins, Jen.	Buttimer, Jerry.	
Daly, Pa.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Devine, Máire.	Cahill, Michael.	
Doherty, Pearse.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Calleary, Dara.	
Farrelly, Aidan.	Canney, Seán.	
Farrell, Mairéad.	Carrigy, Micheál.	

Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	
Gannon, Gary.	Chambers, Jack.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Gould, Thomas.	Clendennen, John.	
Graves, Ann.	Connolly, John.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Cooney, Joe.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	Cummins, John.	
Healy, Seamus.	Currie, Emer.	
Hearne, Rory.	Daly, Martin.	
Kelly, Alan.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Kenny, Eoghan.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Kenny, Martin.	Dillon, Alan.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Dolan, Albert.	
Lawless, Paul.	Fleming, Sean.	
Lawlor, George.	Foley, Norma.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Geoghegan, James.	
McGrath, Mattie.	Grealish, Noel.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Harkin, Marian.	
Mitchell, Denise.	Healy-Rae, Michael.	
Murphy, Paul.	Heydon, Martin.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Higgins, Emer.	
Nash, Ged.	Keogh, Keira.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Lawless, James.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Lowry, Michael.	
Nolan, Carol.	Maxwell, David.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
O'Donoghue, Richard.	McConalogue, Charlie.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	McGrath, Séamus.	
O'Gorman, Roderic.	McGreehan, Erin.	
O'Hara, Louis.	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	Moynihan, Michael.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	Moynihan, Shane.	
Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Murphy, Michael.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Naughton, Hildegard.	
Quaide, Liam.	Neville, Joe.	
Quinlivan, Maurice.	O'Brien, Darragh.	
Rice, Pádraig.	O'Callaghan, Jim.	
Sherlock, Marie.	O'Connell, Maeve.	
Smith, Duncan.	O'Connor, James.	
Wall, Mark.	O'Dea, Willie.	
Ward, Mark.	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
Whitmore, Jennifer.	O'Meara, Ryan.	
	O'Shea, John Paul.	
	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	

	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Smyth, Niamh.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Troy, Robert.	
	Ward, Barry.	

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

Amendment declared lost.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I move amendment No. 5:

In page 8, between lines 15 and 16, to insert the following:

“(ab) contravenes section 43C(1);”.

The Bill is drafted on the basis that what is not permitted remains prohibited. Checking a person's image against a database of images seems to remain prohibited. It seems the only way to emphasise this is to make it an offence. The Bill already criminalises falsifying, concealing or destroying information obtained by biometric analysis. It does not, however, state that a contravention of the Bill itself is an offence. The purpose of this amendment to make it an offence without lawful authority or reasonable excuse knowingly to contravene section 43C(1), which states: "A member of Garda personnel shall not carry out biometric analysis other than in accordance with this Part and any applicable code of practice."

The last time we spoke on this, the Minister said he would look at it and consider it. I await his response.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I did look at it and I am opposed to the amendment for the following reason. I am conscious that the Deputy wants to make it a criminal offence if a garda should access or use biometric analysis other than in accordance with the legislation. That would mean that a garda could be prosecuted in circumstances where the mistake was inadvertent or where something was done which did not reach the culpable level that would merit a criminal prosecution. Like the Deputy, I do not want to see gardaí unnecessarily or unfairly prosecuted. If this provision was included in the Act, there would be a requirement on the DPP or whoever is investigating it to say there is a breach of the Act because even if it was an inadvertent breach of the rules in respect of biometric analysis, there was nonetheless a breach of the rules.

The offence provision follows on from what is set out in principal Act and focuses on the falsification, concealment, destruction or unauthorised disposal of information. These are offences that could have significant consequences for people if information were destroyed or concealed. That is what is criminalised in the proposed legislation at present. The Deputy's

amendment would ensure that any inadvertent use would be subject to criminal penalties when it would be far more appropriate that such activity be considered in a disciplinary context and by the various authorities that oversee An Garda Síochána.

I understand the intention of the amendment, but I do not see that making Garda personnel subject to an offence for inadvertent use is good policy here. As a result, I cannot accept the amendment.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I will not press the amendment. I accept the Minister's response. This is something that may need to be narrowed down and looked at. Something that is inadvertent would, by and large, be acceptable, but something that is deliberate would not. This may be a matter that we can return to at a later stage. On the basis of the Minister's reply, I will not press the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I move amendment No. 6:

In page 9, between lines 36 and 37, to insert the following:

“**10.**The Minister shall ensure that no national deployment of biometric categorisation technologies shall occur until a pilot programme has been completed and independently evaluated, including assessments of—

- (a) accuracy and error rates,
- (b) discriminatory impacts,
- (c) compliance with data protection law, and
- (d) impacts on privacy and fundamental rights,

and the evaluation shall be laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas.”.

The amendment follows on from the roll-out of other technology used by gardaí, including body cameras. It would be eminently sensible that, prior to the full deployment of new technology, we would have a pilot programme. Such a programme would ensure that we end up with technology that is accurate and effective and that any issues which need to be identified are identified at an early stage and can be addressed prior to the wider roll-out.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I thank Deputy Carthy for his amendment. As he indicated, he wants to put into legislation that a pilot programme should be carried out before biometric analysis is commenced by An Garda Síochána. As I mentioned on Committee Stage, the putting in place of a pilot scheme for the roll-out of any new technology is an operational matter for the Garda Commissioner and is not appropriate to this Bill. For instance, regarding the use of body cameras, which Deputy Carthy mentioned, or the use of Tasers, the Commissioner has introduced them through the use of a pilot project. That type of technology is used operationally on the ground by An Garda Síochána in communities.

Gardaí have not yet procured this type of technology. Accuracy will be a decisive factor in any decision made. As I mentioned previously, gardaí will look to their European counterparts

during the procurement process because these types of tools are in use in other EU states. The code of practice procedure already requires the Commissioner to conduct data protection and human rights impact assessments before the deployment of any technology. Therefore, I do not think a pilot programme, whether it is necessary or not, should be put into primary legislation. For that reason, I cannot support the amendment.

Amendment put and declared lost.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 7 to 9, inclusive, are related and may be discussed together, by agreement. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I move amendment No. 7:

In page 10, between lines 16 and 17, to insert the following:

“(ba) clear and specific limits on the circumstances in which biometric analysis or biometric categorisation may be used, including prohibitions on use for general surveillance, population level monitoring, or speculative searches,

(bb) objective thresholds and evidential standards that must be met before any biometric analysis may be initiated,

(bc) safeguards to prevent disproportionate or discriminatory impacts, including mandatory risk assessment procedures,

(bd) technical and operational parameters governing accuracy, reliability, and error rate thresholds, and

(be) mandatory documentation, authorisation procedures and audit trails to ensure accountability and prevent misuse.”.

Amendment No. 8 proposes to insert the following into the Bill:

In page 11, between lines 22 and 23, to insert the following:

“(5A) When making an order under subsection (5), the Minister shall lay the code of practice, together with an explanatory memorandum outlining the safeguards, limitations and parameters governing the use of biometric analysis and biometric categorisation, before each House of the Oireachtas.”.

With respect to amendment No. 7, in response to a previous amendment, we heard the Minister cite the code of practice. Much is left to the code of practice regarding the potential concerns that people have, but there is no real clarification as to what the parameters of the code of practice will be. Therefore, it is important that we have some detail on the safeguards, data limits, oversight and practical uses within the overarching legislation. The section on the code of practice gives far too much discretion to the Garda Commissioner, who drafts, amends and controls the consultation process relating to the codes that regulate Garda powers. Safeguards are not fixed in the legislation, which leaves crucial questions unanswered. The additions in amendment No. 7 would strengthen the requirements in relation to the code of practice by requiring strict limits, objective evidential thresholds, anti-discrimination safeguards, technical accuracy safeguards and full authorisation, thereby ensuring that

biometric powers would remain properly controlled and that there would be transparency and accountability.

Amendment No. 8 is complementary to Committee Stage amendment No. 16. It proposes a requirement that the code of practice be laid before the Dáil and deals with the safeguards to which I referred earlier.

With regard to the first review of the code of practice, amendment No. 9 suggests a change from five years to two. After the initial review, five years is fine. However, five years is too long to wait for the first review of the code of practice. The amendment is clear and sensible. It does not upset the apple cart. There will be five-year reviews, but the first review should take place after two years. When talking about a new technology, there are, as already discussed, many potential issues that may arise. Unless amendment No. 7 is adopted, the answer to the question as to where the code will end up is very cloudy. It is critical that this House stipulates in legislation that after the first two years, there will be a comprehensive review. The reviews will take place on a five-year basis thereafter, as the legislation currently stipulates.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I thank Deputy Carthy for tabling these three amendments. One of the things that is noticeable when looking at this type of legislation, which involves data, is that there is a huge amount of legislation in place at present outside of the recording devices Act of 2023. I am referring in particular to the Data Protection Acts. Those Acts contain prohibitions on mass surveillance, indiscriminate searches and utilising biometrics. I do not believe amendment No. 7 is necessary because a lot of what it deals with is already prohibited under the Data Protection Acts. It is not good legislative practice to duplicate existing statutory powers.

Section 4 of the principal Act notes that the provisions of the recording devices Act are without prejudice to the provisions of the Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2018. This will also apply to Part 6A, which is being inserted by section 10. There is an express provision that states that the recording devices Act is without prejudice to what is in the Data Protection Acts. There are also clear limitations on searching already set out in section 43C. That information must be in the context of, among other things, a specific investigation.

As stated, the code of practice provisions already set out what needs to be included in a code. These include provisions relating to procedures, confidentiality, security, storage, access, retention and parameters for use. The code can also set out different provisions in relation to types of biometric data or the circumstances in which biometric analysis can be carried out. As a result, I cannot accept amendment No. 7. Amendment No. 8 is also not considered necessary because section 47A sets out what is to be included in the code of practice. This includes the parameters for the carrying out of biometric analysis. The code of practice for the carrying out of such analysis will be laid before the Houses. This means that the Houses will have the opportunity to scrutinise the code alongside what is required under the provisions in section 47A.

In the context of amendment No. 9, Deputy Carthy is proposing to change the initial review period from five years to two years. As I said on Committee Stage, setting this at five years aligns with the principal Act. We can already see how involved the process of drafting a code of practice is. The requirements for assessments and consultation make it a lengthy and detailed

process and would further delay the roll-out of what I believe is an essential, necessary digital tool for An Garda. A code may need to be reviewed earlier than the five years and there is nothing preventing this from happening in the Bill. For that reason, I cannot accept the amendment.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I will make a quick point in respect of amendment No. 9. The review will take place after the roll-out. Any delays in the initial roll-out will not affect the review - and that is not suggested or implied in any way - from the enactment of this legislation to the roll-out. The Bill currently states that following the initial roll-out, the review will take place after five years. There is nothing in the Bill to prevent a review taking place earlier. What is critically important for public confidence, however, is that people know that once this legislation is in place, there will be a swift opportunity to analyse its effectiveness. I strongly believe that this would be more appropriately done after two years rather than five.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I move amendment No. 8:

In page 11, between lines 22 and 23, to insert the following:

“(5A) When making an order under subsection (5), the Minister shall lay the code of practice, together with an explanatory memorandum outlining the safeguards, limitations and parameters governing the use of biometric analysis and biometric categorisation, before each House of the Oireachtas.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I move amendment No. 9:

In page 11, line 31, to delete “5 years” and substitute “2 years”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 10 and 11 are related and may be discussed together. Amendment No. 11 is a physical alternative to amendment No. 10.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I move amendment No. 10:

“11. Section 49 of the Principal Act is amended—

(a) by the substitution of the following subsection for subsection (3):

“(3) The functions of the designated judge are to—

(a) keep under review the operation of Parts 3, 6 and 6A in so far as each of them has come into operation, and

(b) report to the Taoiseach from time to time and at least once every 12 months concerning any matters relating to that operation, including the impact of such operation on human rights, that the designated judge considers should be reported.”,

and

(b) in subsection (6), by the insertion of “or disclose the personal data relating to an individual” after “security of the State”.”.

This amendment arises on foot of an amendment tabled by Deputy Kelly on Committee Stage, which, in effect, I am accepting. However, I have rejigged the wording in order to give what the Deputy proposed what we would regard as a more effective meaning in terms of its presentation. I tabled amendment No. 10 having considered the amendment put forward by Deputy Kelly on Committee Stage and again now. His amendment asks that the designated judge consider whether Part 3, which deals with ANPR, or Part 6, which deals with third-party CCTV, or Part 6A, which deals with biometric analysis, operate in a manner calculated to secure "confidence in the impartial performance of policing functions, without disproportionate impact on persons of particular national or ethnic origins". Using the words "national or ethnic origins" would have left it unclear as to how this could be measure for those Parts. That is why the proposal I have come with involves a slight change to Deputy Kelly's wording.

We should assess the impact on the human rights of the person. That will allow judges to focus on the operational effect of the Parts relating to human rights, something that will also be assessed by An Garda through the human rights impact assessment during the development of codes of practice for those Parts. I thank Deputy Kelly for bringing forward his amendment. His intention in amendment No. 11 is that the human rights of individuals should be assessed by judges. That is being done, although the only real change is that I have not limited it to the national or ethnic origins. I have adopted a broader approach, but human rights will contemplate someone's national or ethnic origins.

Deputy Alan Kelly: This is a rarity, but I thank the Minister. It is not very often that, in effect, a Minister accepts an amendment from the Opposition, particularly on a Bill that is quite technical. I acknowledge that. Even though this is technically not my amendment, it reflects the spirit of the amendment I tabled. I acknowledge the fact that it is the Labour Party's amendment and my amendment. I do accept what the Minister is saying in relation to how he has constructed a revision of what I put forward and broadened it out to go past the issue of national or ethnic origins and focus on the broader human rights issue. I thank him sincerely for accepting the spirit of the original amendment. It was put forward for the right reason, namely to ensure that people will be protected no matter where they come from or their background. On that basis, I will not move amendment No. 11.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment No. 11 not moved.

Bill, as amended, received for final consideration and passed.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 5.57 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 6.02 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 5.57 p.m. and resumed at 6.02 p.m.

6 o'clock

Criminal Law and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026: Instruction to Committee

Minister for Defence (Deputy Helen McEntee): I move:

That Standing Order 194 is modified in accordance with Standing Order 241(2) to provide that it be an instruction to the Select Committee on Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, in relation to the Criminal Law and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026, that the Committee has power to make amendments to the Bill which are outside the scope of the existing subject matter of the Bill in order to make amendments to the Defence Act 1954, in order to provide for certain powers of the Defence Forces in relation to:

- a) safeguarding, protecting and defending the security of the State by the Defence Forces in certain circumstances arising in the territorial sea or internal waters of the State or where there is a risk to the sovereign rights and jurisdiction of the State in the exclusive economic zone;
- b) the deployment of members of the Defence Forces in aid of the civil power; and
- c) the protection of military installations by the Defence Forces;

and to change the title of the Bill and make other consequential amendments required to take account of the changes above.

I thank the House for the opportunity to discuss this motion to include relatively short but important amendments to the Defence Act 1954 on Committee Stage of the Criminal Law and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, which is scheduled for 19 May. I am progressing these amendments as a matter of urgency as it is a priority for me and all of us to ensure that the Defence Forces have the powers they need to respond to emerging threats in our waters, especially from vessels linked to the Russian shadow fleet. We are all concerned about the threats they present to our critical underwater infrastructure which provide vital support for our energy and communications sectors. I am also conscious, with our upcoming Presidency of the European Union, that I want to ensure we have the necessary provisions in place to respond to these threats, including clarity on the use of force by members of the Defence Forces.

The purpose of these amendments to the Defence Act 1954 is to help to protect and defend our territorial seas and internal waters and protect the sovereign rights of the State in our exclusive economic zone; to make provision for the long-standing role of the Defence Forces in aid of the civil power; and enhance the protection of military installations. The maritime security-related amendments are particularly relevant in today's increasingly volatile geopolitical situation, which is resulting in new and evolving threats in the maritime domain. We need to make sure we are able to respond to these threats as they emerge. This includes providing the Defence Forces with the specific necessary legislative tools they need to protect our critical undersea infrastructure.

As an island nation we are reliant on this critical infrastructure. Many major undersea cables land on our shores, come across the Atlantic and transit through our exclusive economic zone. They carry significant amounts of global Internet traffic and financial data. From an energy perspective, they are absolutely critical for us. Our energy sector is heavily supported by subsea gas pipelines and electricity interconnectors. This infrastructure is vulnerable to hybrid

threats, as it is in any other ocean. In broad terms, this legislation will provide the Defence Forces with stand-alone statutory powers that will include the power to use force that is reasonable, proportionate and necessary in order to safeguard, protect and defend the security of the State in the maritime domain. This is to ensure they have stand-alone statutory powers. At the moment, they are working to other legislation from other Departments.

In practical terms, this proposed legislation will allow, for example, the captain of one of our State's naval ships to have the power to hail, board, search, re-direct or otherwise frustrate and delay those ships suspected of engaging in non-innocent passage in the seas around our island. The proposed legislation also provides for the Chief of Staff to provide guidance on the exercise of these new powers. This guidance will, of course, be developed with the consent of the Minister, where appropriate, in consultation with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade insofar as the guidance relates to the application of international law at sea.

Let me also make it clear that these legislative proposals do not provide for any prosecutions, arrests or detention of vessels. I have asked my Department to undertake a comprehensive review of all maritime security-related legislation that is envisaged as part of the new national maritime security strategy that I launched at the end of February, and I will bring forward further legislation in this space if it is required. I am bringing this forward now because I believe it is important we have specific legislation for the Defence Forces enacted as soon as possible. I am satisfied that this legislation is proportionate and that it will address the urgent needs of the Defence Forces when they are carrying out operations at sea. I also think it is important we have these legislative amendments in order that we can respond to other potential challenges with our naval fleet, particularly with the shadow fleet when it comes to an environmental challenge.

Let me now turn to the other defence-related amendments. The proposed new section 40B of the Defence Act 1954 will make express provision in primary legislation for the long-standing role of the Defence Forces when they assist An Garda Síochána, which is referred to in the Defence Acts as the aid to civil power. This new section sets out the legislative framework under which members of the Defence Forces may be deployed in aid to civil power. It also clarifies that a member of the Defence Forces deployed in the aid to civil power is authorised to use such force as is proportionate, necessary and reasonable when deployed on such duties. This is a necessary provision to clarify the powers of a member of the Defence Forces in such circumstances.

It is important to note that there is ongoing and continuous close liaison between An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces regarding security matters, including aid of civil power deployments. In any given year there can be in excess of 3,000 aid of civil power operations. These range from explosive ordnance calls to cash-in-transit escorts. The new section 40B of the Defence Act 1954 will replace existing provisions concerning aid of the civil power as set out in Defence Force Regulations. Finally, the proposed new section 40C of the Defence Act 1954 sets out the powers that may be exercised by a member of the Defence Forces for the protection of military installations.

There will be an opportunity for detailed engagement on the text of the amendments on Committee Stage. I would appreciate Deputies' support on progressing these important amendments to the Defence Acts as expeditiously as possible. I commend this motion to the House.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I am used to dealing with the Minister for justice and I am used to dealing with convoluted ways of dealing with matters. There is clearly a habit of limiting democratic oversight and scrutiny of this House in announcing and bringing forward proposals at short notice; minimising the period of time for debate; guillotining important legislation; and moving things from committees to this Chamber rather than allowing the detailed scrutiny of legislation. However, this is probably the most bizarre stroke pulled yet, where we have a Criminal Law and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill that is dealing with a myriad of issues. There was already quite an amount of criticism from many stakeholders that a number of very distinct issues were in a single piece of legislation, and then we find out on a Monday that Government is actually bringing forward an additional change in the law that has nothing to do with criminal law, nothing to do with civil law and nothing to do with Jim O'Callaghan's Department at all, but is actually a defence amendment.

I hear what the Minister is saying.

We are blaming the need to move this in at short notice on Russia apparently. There would be openness from all sides of this House to ensure our Defence Forces had the powers necessary for the safeguarding, protection and defence of the State, particularly in respect of maritime security, if it was done in the right way, but I suspect the reason this Bill is being brought forward in this manner at this time is not just for that. To get to the crux of this, people might be interested in part of the motion that is being brought before the House. It states that the Minister may, subject to conditions, give general approval for the deployment of a member of the Defence Forces in aid of the civil power for such classes or class of assistance as may be agreed with the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration. Does that sound familiar to anyone? It sounds familiar to me. I think people will automatically remember that, during the fuel protest, rather than de-escalate tensions, the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, inflamed what was a volatile situation with his comments threatening to deploy the Defence Forces. It was the first time in the history of the State that the Army had been used as a threat against the Irish people by a Government. The Government have refused point blank to acknowledge just how insulting and angering that was and how those comments inflamed a situation and brought people to protests. When I attended protests to do what Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael refused to do and actually listen to people, I heard time and again that it was those comments more than anything else that had spurred people to action. When I was at the Galway protest, for example, with Mark Lohan and Mairéad Farrell, several people told me they were spurred to action because people who were protesting against the costs they were enduring and the pressures they were under were being threatened in that way. It now appears clear to me that, having learned nothing from the mess that the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, made of this situation, the Government is now changing the law to retrospectively make legal what he said during the protests. It is crazy stuff.

Why bring this in now in this manner and in this type of legislation? Any reasonable person will look at what is being proposed here and will say that the Government is trying to get measures to expand the deployment of the Defence Forces through the Dáil, again without proper scrutiny, by putting them into a piece of criminal law and civil law, a miscellaneous Bill that already deals with a range of unrelated matters. What the Minister, Deputy McEntee, is trying to do is rushed, unfair, undemocratic and underhanded. Jim O'Callaghan made a mess. The Minister was dragged into the original mess. It seems she is going all in now. This is a

product of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael putting up in bright lights that they still have not listened. Sinn Féin will not be supporting this motion because the Government is treating this House with utter contempt.

Deputy Duncan Smith: I find this totally improper. A couple of months ago, the Minister launched the maritime strategy, a very substantial document. It is the way we should be going. There are a number of issues with it but we should be debating this in the context of a defence amendment Bill. With these amendments, we are amending the Defence Act 1954 in three substantial ways: helping to protect and defend our territorial seas and internal waters and protect the sovereign rights of the State and our exclusive economic zone; making provision for the long-standing role of the Defence Forces in aid of the civil power; and enhancing the protection of military installations. These are substantial things to amend and should be done with proper scrutiny, notwithstanding the EU Presidency. The EU Presidency has not falling upon us by surprise. We have known for years that we were going to have this Presidency.

The Russian shadow fleet is also being used as a reason to bring this in. Again, the threat and the activity of the Russian shadow fleet is not something that has fallen on us. The Minister's messaging is mixed. She is saying this is both a pre-EU Presidency measure and is also meant to tackle the Russian shadow fleet. We need scrutiny and debate on both of those things, particularly in relation to how we tackle the Russian shadow fleet and other threats in our seas. I believe that the Minister is serious about tackling those threats. I do not believe that she thinks it is proper to be in the Dáil debating a criminal and civil law Bill with amendments that impact her remit as Minister for Defence. I do not think that this is how she wants to do business.

I think that the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, has made and is making an absolute mess of his portfolio. An example of that is the element of these amendments relating to the aid to civil powers. On 9 April, the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, confirmed it was well established in law that the Defence Forces may assist An Garda Síochána in aid to the civil power. That was on 9 April when he was deploying Defence Forces in relation to the fuel protests. Here we are on 13 May and we are bringing in new law to enable him to request the deployment of the Defence Forces "in aid of the civil power". He said six weeks ago that it was already in law, so why are we bringing in these amendments now? It is because the Minister for justice made an absolute hames of it and acted outside his remit in early April.

This deserves huge attention. At a time when the Minister for Defence is transforming our Defence Forces with the amount of funding that is going in and when national security is a huge conversation that is taking place, not just in committee rooms here, but in homes and on doorsteps all over the country, we should be having grown-up and sophisticated debates about national security through our defence committee and in the Dáil properly, not with late, ham-fisted amendments put through in a criminal and civil law amendment Bill. It is totally improper. It is not how we should be doing business on matters of such huge national significance.

The people are being asked to come on a journey with us in national security. We have issues in relation to the deployment of troops and the triple lock, which is under threat. The Minister, Deputy McEntee, is trying to get the trust of the people and bring them along. I want to see us transformed in terms of our national security. I want to see us in a state where we can

defend ourselves and have proper intelligence, proper surveillance and a proper ability to monitor our waters. However, the Minister loses the trust of the people on that journey when she brings in amendments such as this. It looks like it is mission creep and that she is trying to do it under the table and under the radar. That is not how it should be. There is no way a Minister for Defence should be happy that such substantial amendments to our Defence Forces would be brought in in this manner.

The Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, has a lot to answer for. He should be here. These amendments should not be on the clár. They should be in a Bill separate from the one in the Minister, Deputy McEntee's name. We find this improper and we cannot support it.

Deputy Michael Collins: Let us cut to the chase with the language of these amendments and get to the reality of what people are asking at home. The foreign fishing vessels in our waters are, by and large, not there illegally. We all know that. They are there under EU rules. If they were acting illegally, though, would this legislation actually stop them? Would we see real enforcement or more talking while Irish waters were left exposed? Fishers along our coast have heard it all before - promises of protection and action - but when push comes to shove, they are often left wondering who is minding the waters. We saw that starkly with the Russian vessel off our coast. The Government hesitated, delayed and dithered, and it was Irish fishers who stepped up, organised and forced the issue. Ordinary working people did what the State should have been prepared to do. I ask the Minister plainly. Will paragraph (a) of the motion mean that never happens again? Will the State act decisively the next time or will we again be relying on fishers to defend Irish sovereignty?

Let us turn to the other side of this, which is where the real concern lies. We are giving powers here for the deployment of the Defence Forces in aid of the Garda and explicitly allowing the use of force described as reasonable, proportionate and necessary. Fine words, but people have heard that language before. Look at the fuel protests across the country. People came out because they could not afford to run their cars, heat their homes or keep their businesses going. Yes, there were blockades and disruption but those protests came from desperation among ordinary Irish people backed into a corner. What people fear is that measures like this could be used in future, not against external threats, but against our own citizens when they stand up and speak out.

That is a line the public does not want crossed. I am asking the Minister for real clarity. Are these powers about stopping genuine threats in our waters, protecting sovereignty and ensuring we are not caught flat-footed again or are we quietly expanding the scope for force to be used domestically where Irish citizens could end up being on the receiving end? Once those powers are in place, they will be used. The public needs to know exactly where they stand.

Minister for Defence (Deputy Helen McEntee): I thank the Deputies. I will touch on a number of points. It has been suggested that this is an attempt to sneak something in and to avoid debate and proper consideration but that is not reflected in the facts. Since coming into this Department and first engaging with our Defence Forces, particularly our Naval Service, and since publishing the maritime security strategy, I have been very clear that I want to introduce new legislation to consolidate the various pieces of legislation our Naval Service currently works to into a specific defence Act. The Defence Forces have been asking for that. I have also been very clear that I want this in place before we begin our Presidency. There is a

reason for that. I brought a memorandum to the Cabinet back in March. I did not hide the fact that I was bringing it to the Cabinet. I said very clearly what the intention of the memorandum was.

It is important that we have a vehicle to move this on. While it could have been other legislation, the quickest approach was to use this miscellaneous provisions Bill because it was already moving. I thank the Minister for working with me to give me a vehicle and mechanism to introduce this. Irrespective of the contents of the miscellaneous provisions Bill, this is specifically about our Defence Forces and making sure they have powers in legislation.

When at sea, the Defence Forces rely on the powers assigned to them under the Customs Act, the Sea Pollution Act, the Criminal Justice Act, the Dumping at Sea Act, the Maritime Security Act, the Maritime Safety Act and the Sea-Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act. Under these Acts, members of the Defence Forces operate as authorised officers or exercise certain powers on behalf of other State bodies, including An Garda Síochána and Revenue. While these arrangements have been sufficient up until now, it has been made very clear to me that we need specific legislation through the Defence Act to grant powers specifically to the Defence Forces. This is something the Defence Forces have been asking for.

Deputy Duncan Smith is right. Just because these issues have been ongoing for some time does not mean we should not act on them now. That is what I am doing. I am responding to a very clear ask from the Defence Forces. We will have an opportunity to debate and discuss this next week, on 19 May. I am very open to engaging with colleagues on amendments or adjustments. This is a focused amendment to specify in legislation certain powers of the Defence Forces, which they can currently only use as authorised officers. It is appropriate to have this in place for the beginning of our Presidency on 1 July. That is the reason for the urgency in moving this forward. I have worked on other legislation in which other Ministers have asked me to include certain elements. That has happened without debate in this House. It is important that we are having these discussions here this evening. We will discuss these amendments further on Committee Stage before the legislation progresses through the various other Stages.

On the question of providing aid to the civil power, this has been worked on within my Department for over a year. It is not something that has just come about in the last few weeks or months. Again, this is about putting in place-----

Deputy Matt Carthy: When did the Minister bring that memo to the Cabinet?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister should just continue.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Will we get our questions answered?

Deputy Helen McEntee: This is about taking something that is currently in regulations made under the Defence Act and putting it into primary legislation. It does not change the provisions made under the regulations. This has been worked on for some time. We are simply putting it on a new statutory footing. I repeat that the Defence Forces provide aid to the civil power, for example, An Garda Síochána, at least 3,000 times a year. That support is provided every day in extreme weather conditions, in incidents such as those we have seen recently or in the

scenarios I outlined in my opening remarks. This is really about putting what is already in regulations on a different statutory footing. My Department has been developing this for over a year now. As we now have this legislative mechanism to move it forward-----

Deputy Matt Carthy: When was it brought to the Cabinet?

Deputy Helen McEntee: -----I thought it would be appropriate to do so.

Question put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 81; Níl, 64; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Boland, Grace.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Brady, John.	
Brennan, Brian.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brennan, Shay.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Brophy, Colm.	Cairns, Holly.	
Browne, James.	Carthy, Matt.	
Burke, Colm.	Collins, Michael.	
Butler, Mary.	Cronin, Réada.	
Butterly, Paula.	Crowe, Seán.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Cullinane, David.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cummins, Jen.	
Cahill, Michael.	Daly, Pa.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Calleary, Dara.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Canney, Seán.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Chambers, Jack.	Gannon, Gary.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Clendennen, John.	Gould, Thomas.	
Connolly, John.	Graves, Ann.	
Cooney, Joe.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Cummins, John.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Currie, Emer.	Healy, Seamus.	
Daly, Martin.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Kelly, Alan.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kenny, Martin.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Fleming, Sean.	Lawless, Paul.	
Foley, Norma.	Lawlor, George.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Geoghegan, James.	McGettigan, Donna.	

Grealish, Noel.	McGrath, Mattie.	
Harkin, Marian.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Harris, Simon.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	Murphy, Paul.	
Heneghan, Barry.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Heydon, Martin.	Nash, Ged.	
Higgins, Emer.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Keogh, Keira.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Lawless, James.	Nolan, Carol.	
Lowry, Michael.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
Maxwell, David.	O'Donoghue, Richard.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McGrath, Séamus.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
McGuinness, John.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Quaide, Liam.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Murphy, Michael.	Sherlock, Marie.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Smith, Duncan.	
Neville, Joe.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Connor, James.		
O'Dea, Willie.		
O'Donnell, Kieran.		
O'Meara, Ryan.		
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Matt Carthy and Duncan Smith.

Question declared carried.

Critical Infrastructure Bill 2026: Report and Final Stages

An Ceann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 1 and 2 are related and may be discussed together.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: I move amendment No. 1:

In page 5, to delete lines 22 to 26 and substitute the following:

“(4) A draft of the designation order shall be laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas, and the order shall be made only after a resolution approving the draft has been passed by each House of the Oireachtas.”.

I want to talk about the concentration in the hands of the Minister of huge power under this Bill. I am generally supportive of the intention of this Bill and what the Minister is trying to achieve. However, there is not sufficient oversight of this or transparency about it. As I have said before, any legislation has to be drafted keeping in mind any Minister and indeed any Government being in that role. What is being proposed in my amendment and in a similar amendment from the Labour Party is very reasonable. It is simply that the designation order shall be laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas, and the order shall be made only after a resolution approving the draft has been passed by each House of the Oireachtas. That allows for proper scrutiny, debate, questions around the process, how this designation was arrived at, and whether one project is being prioritised as critical infrastructure when another is not. The current provisions in the Bill put the onus on Members of the Opposition to use limited Private Member's time to put down a resolution. Smaller parties and groups may not have time to do that. Just to ask questions about the designation should not require having to put down a motion in Private Member's time when we have limited opportunities to do that.

This is a sensible proposal. I do not see the issues with it. It would give greater transparency and oversight to the process, and put more confidence into it. The Oireachtas, Members of this House and the general public have a right to know why these decisions have been made, why certain projects have been prioritised, and why certain projects are not being prioritised. This will prove to be controversial because there will be geographic areas, for example, that do not get their infrastructure project prioritised and they will wonder why that is the case when other areas did. In the past, there have been instances of certain parts of infrastructure getting a much higher priority than others. We are talking about not just prioritisation under this Bill but also the money behind that, which is public money. The more oversight we have of that, the better.

Deputy Ciarán Ahern: I echo Deputy O'Callaghan's concerns about this. We obviously want to see infrastructure delivered quickly in this country. Our biggest concern with the Bill in general is the disapplication of the climate action Acts. Given that is a power that will be given to the Minister, it is important that the Dáil and Seanad have a say in any project that is designated. Our amendment would essentially flip the burden. Rather than something being annulled requiring a resolution from the Dáil, we would say it will not take effect until a positive resolution is passed by both Houses.

Deputy Paul Murphy: These are modest amendments reinstituting some form of democratic oversight. I presume the Government is going to oppose them, because the whole purpose of the Bill from the Government's perspective is to gut democratic oversight and democratic input into the planning system. The public should know where this is coming from. The Collison brothers, two filthy-rich Irish billionaires, have developed seriously undue influence over the Irish Government via the neoliberal think-tank, Progress Ireland. First, it was changing the law to allow landlords to rent out beds in sheds by getting rid of planning permission for cabins in back gardens. Now, they are driving this Bill to gut democratic input into the planning system so that what tech billionaires see as critical infrastructure can bypass normal democratic checks and balances. Presumably the Minister will oppose a modicum of democratic oversight as proposed by these amendments.

It does not take a genius to know what this will mean. It will mean data centres driving household electricity costs even higher, hoovering up all the renewables that are added to the grid, just like they have been doing for the past ten years. The next item on their agenda is normalising nuclear power. The mindless parrots over on the Government benches are singing along to that tune now too. The last we heard of the Collisons was them jogging through Tel Aviv, tweeting that it is great to be back, during a genocide. These Zionists are disciples of the notorious Koch brothers. For decades, they have bankrolled and astroturfed for far right, neoliberal and libertarian causes around the world, including Javier Milei in Argentina, climate denialism, and, of course, Donald Trump. Ninety-year-old Charles Koch, the closest thing to a real-life Mr. Burns off "The Simpsons", is an idol for these people. Last summer, Patrick Collison gave a keynote address at a gathering of libertarians in Washington, DC, where he eulogised Charles Koch as inspirational. The Ayn Rand Institute, the Cato Institute, the Adam Smith Institute, and the Mercatus Center, all shadowy, Koch-funded, right-wing think tanks, are co-thinkers and fellow travellers of Progress Ireland, with 1,000 ties that bind them together. It is genuinely scary stuff.

The Government will oppose this amendment which is about a modicum of democratic oversight. Progress Ireland's innovation policy lead, Sam Enright, recently hosted a conference to discuss whether Milton Friedman was the greatest economist of all time. The fact that he was the architect of Pinochet's neoliberal reforms in Chile, which would only be enforced by a military coup and brutal dictatorship during which an estimated 40,000 people were tortured, is no problem for these guys. If anything, as the Collisons' attitude to Israel shows, it is probably a plus.

When Progress Ireland launched an appeal for funding, it bragged that, "Ireland is highly conformist and is more prone to deference to elite or expert consensus than our British counterparts." That was said to be a positive in its pitch for funding. I am making this speech to warn everyone who is watching that what we are experiencing right now is a key moment of corporate takeover. Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the right-wing Independents are lapping it up like the corporate lapdogs that they are. We have to wake up and stop the Collisons before it is too late. This amendment is a very small step towards doing that.

An Ceann Comhairle: Before we move on, I caution Members with regard to mentioning the names of people who are not present or are outside the House. While it can be Deputies' opinion, it is not fair to use derogatory terms when there is no one here to defend themselves. That is a caution, please.

Deputy Thomas Gould: I support the amendment. It is a commonsense amendment that requires transparency, openness and discussion. There is really important work to be done regarding infrastructure. We really need to get it right now. The Government is bringing forward a plan, which we support, but it is not going far enough. I will give a couple of examples. The point was made by a number of speakers about transparency and what projects go ahead in what areas.

I represent Cork North-Central. For over 25 years, there has been talk about a northern ring road. The southside of the city has a massive ring road, all the way from Ballincollig, into the tunnel, and out to Dunkettle. We have nothing on the northside. The question that people ask me about transparency and honesty is who made the decision to pull the northern ring road. Why was it made? Transparency is so important because this was part of a plan 20 years ago, and now it is not, and the Government has allocated a couple of hundred thousand euro to a project. People might say, "You are being parochial about the northern ring road, Tommy," but the northern ring road is key for the city, because if there is a crash in the tunnel or on the south ring road, there is chaos in Cork. It is vital infrastructure. How do I find out where that vital infrastructure is?

How do I get answers? How do we debate it? Who picks the projects? Are they picked on merit or are they picked because of who is in power or who the Minister or Taoiseach is? These are vital questions. That is why if we come in here and we have a debate, people can get answers and we can go back to our constituencies.

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, Deputy. Put your hand up if you want to speak.

Deputy Thomas Gould: We have the same issue with northern distributor road. We have an elective hospital that was promised 20 years ago. It is vital that these pieces of infrastructure are delivered not alone for northside of Cork city but for Munster.

Someone made a point about delivering infrastructure quickly. That is impossible. It will never happen on this island, especially in the Twenty-six Counties, but we could aim to deliver it in a reasonable amount of time. I represent people and we cannot get more jobs into the northside of Cork city. We cannot get more investment in. Why? It is because we do not have the infrastructure to support the business.

I want to make one last point. We want to see a college campus on the northside of the city. Education is the key to success for individuals and the country. Why has the northside never got funding? Why has there never been a college campus on the northside of Cork city? I cannot get answers.

This amendment will allow people to come into this House to discuss issues openly and transparently. This is not to kick the Government. This is to work with the Government and to say that we need fairness and transparency.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The background to this Bill is this country is grinding to a halt in so many ways. Right across the country, critical infrastructure that is necessary for all our lives

is grinding to a halt and it is having disastrous effects on people's lives. It is water infrastructure currently. Uisce Éireann came into the infrastructure committee and stated that it will take until 2050 before the gaps in the water infrastructure that are currently blocking the building of homes will be filled. In a housing crisis, that is a startling admission. The Navan to Dublin rail line was promised in 1994. The earliest possible chance currently is 2036. People who started work in 1994 will have retired by the time the rail line is built. The Midleton flood defences were promised in 2015 after Storm Frank and no planning application has been put in yet. We have a massive crisis in terms of infrastructure builds in this country.

Regulation is important. There is no doubt that we need regulation to make sure that we have environmental, safety and working standards, but regulation can often be like a pendulum. We can have times when there is too much regulation, and we have times when there is not enough regulation. At this moment in time, we have times when we have too much regulation happening, especially in terms of the climate action Act. The climate action Act is preventing lifesaving projects from going ahead in this country because the balance in terms of people's needs is simply not there any more.

We see projects like the Galway ring road being stopped, in large part because of the climate action Act. This has led to tens of thousands of people being stuck in traffic for long periods of time, with all the damage that it does. In the North of Ireland, we have a similar Act that has actually put a stop to the development of the Derry to Dublin road, which, in itself, is leading to significant deaths among people. We need a rebalancing in terms of this.

There needs to be a realisation that this Bill only goes some direction in terms of what is needed. It prioritises some of these infrastructural projects and it does so on the basis of what the Government thinks should be prioritised. This means that there is a natural deprioritisation of other projects. We need the whole system to be made far more functional, far more efficient and far faster.

I have a question for the Minister, Deputy Chambers, and he may have answered it before. I know it came up in the committee. Will the Bill cover private projects such as data centres, etc.? Will the Minister go on record and answer that query? I would appreciate it.

This amendment does look for some level of oversight and engagement with this Chamber and it is a good amendment.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Having been denied the opportunity to tease out some of the provisions of this legislation by the decision to waive pre-legislative scrutiny, giving a mere 60 minutes to the debate on Report Stage is entirely inappropriate.

I have deep concerns about what the Government is doing tonight. It is seeking to undermine the climate action Act by the back door. More significantly, by the provision of section 7 of this legislation which disapplies section 15 of the climate action Act, it is actually going to make it more likely that challenges against big infrastructure projects will be successful. I will repeat that. By disapplying section 15, it is more likely that challenges to big infrastructure projects, particularly infrastructure projects that are going to help us reach our climate targets in the area of public transport, will be successfully judicially reviewed in the courts.

I want to take the House back to the decision of the Supreme Court earlier this year relating to Coolglass and section 15 of the climate action Act. Coolglass Wind Farm Limited had applied to a wind farm in County Laois. The then named An Bord Pleanála rejected that application on the basis that the Laois county development plan said that there should be no wind farms in particular areas. The Supreme Court held that An Bord Pleanála had not applied its section 15 obligation to consider the climate obligations of this particular wind farm development and did not consider its pro-climate benefits. Section 15 was the critical factor in the Supreme Court overturning a rejection of planning permission. The Bill that the Minister is putting forward provides that section 15, which we have demonstrated protected a major infrastructure project three months ago, will no longer apply to those projects. This entire piece of legislation is being conveyed on the basis of changing the law to get stuff over the line and to get these big projects delivered. The one time that section 15 was actually used in our courts, it was the decisive factor in a rejection of a wind farm swinging to an approval. This notion being put forward that what we are doing is going to help us deliver big infrastructure projects is entirely wrong, and this is demonstrated by a recent decision of the Supreme Court.

Earlier in this process, I referred to three real-life judicial reviews against public transport projects: the judicial review of the Luas in Finglas, the judicial review of DART+ West and the judicial review in my constituency of BusConnects between Blanchardstown and the city centre. In each one of those cases, an individual was protecting their private property rights through a judicial review. I did not agree with those judicial reviews. I wish that they had not gone on. I am glad that two of them have been resolved, but someone exercised their rights. These were not environmentalists. These were not people with climate objections. These were people with a personal property right objection to these particular projects. Time and again, they are the source of the majority of judicial reviews that come before the courts, not environmental matters. This Bill does nothing to restrict the ability of somebody to take a judicial review on the basis of protecting their property rights, the much bigger driver of judicial reviews within our courts. In each of those cases, and one of them has been litigated before the courts, the National Transport Authority, the body taking the projects forward, strengthens its case for getting acceptance of those particular projects by saying that it is implementing its climate objectives by bringing them forward under section 15.

We have to very clear: we are taking away the extra protection that section 15 gives to these particular projects, and public transport projects are explicitly listed as one of the areas that this Critical Infrastructure Bill is to apply to. It has been described as something that will help deliver these projects. It is exactly the opposite. We can be sure that as this Government and future governments advance major infrastructure projects, and particularly in the area of public transport, they will be judicially reviewed. They always are. People do it because they do not like the compulsory purchase order and they do not like losing a piece of their land. They have a right to do that. However, by passing this Bill tonight, we are making it more likely that those judicial reviews will be successful.

7 o'clock

We are making it more likely that public transport projects will be successfully judicially review by courts and plans with planning permission will be overturned. We are doing that wilfully. I have raised this throughout. The Minister has at no point come back and explained why he is ignoring the powerful decision of the Supreme Court in the Coolglass case. That

judgment shows that section 15 of the Act protects projects that are seen to have a positive climate impact. We are wilfully doing that today. I want to put it on the record of the House that this Bill will not advance big public transport projects. It undermines and lessens the chance that they will get planning permission. It particularly strengthens the case of those who want to judicially review for personal reasons.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am glad to get the opportunity to say a few words on this Bill. I will give the Government the benefit of the doubt because, for too long, this country has been starved of infrastructure. We are strangled and tied down and I cannot see the benefit of this amendment by insisting that we are to go through this Chamber. I realise all the different political views that different Members have from different counties. We would finish up without agreement on anything important that we need for our counties. Each of us would be fighting our corner, which we would be well entitled to do.

For my part, Kerry has been starved of an awful lot of infrastructure. For instance, in Kenmare, we have no public water supply at the present time. Many towns and villages have inadequate treatment plants. There are villages without any treatment plant like Scartaglen and Curragh where the sewage is being drawn into Killarney. It is the same story in Beaufort where the sewage is being drawn into Killarney. We have all these places without any treatment plants. We must find the best way to hurry these things along. Uisce Éireann has a lot of work to do but we cannot be seen to be holding it up inside this Chamber with debates as to whether it should be Beaufort or Brosna or some place in Limerick or Cork.

We are behind in so many ways now. For a country that is first to bring in every type of new regulation, we are behind with many of the critical infrastructure projects that are needed. Even when it comes to the basic local improvement scheme, LIS, we are way behind in Kerry, with some 560 to 570 roads on the LIS. People appreciate the last half or quarter mile to their door. We can do all the motorways and national primary and secondary roads but the road to the door should also be good. The people of Kerry and rural Ireland are entitled to a road to their door every bit as much as the people in Dublin 4.

I cannot and will not support this amendment tonight. We have been waiting for so long. There are judicial reviews, analysing and scrutinising and we are paying environmental objectors money each year to object to projects. That is the actual truth of it. You could not build a hen house now anywhere without some fella putting in an objection, and he could be 100 miles away.

I am glad to get this opportunity. I will support the Government on this. If it does not work, then I hope I will be back here telling the Government that it is not working. I am giving it the chance to put this Bill forward to see whether it will help us because we are in a desperate way. People who need planning are waiting far too long. It is time to do something about it. This has been promised for a long time and I hope it works. I hope, for the Government's sake, that it works.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: In the context of this amendment, some accountability has to be brought to the Dáil. I support the Bill because it is needed. It is basically putting critical infrastructure projects to the top of the pile, to put it in simple terms. I note that the Minister said earlier, which he said previously, that private infrastructure projects are not part of this.

The one thing I will say is that there are projects waiting for years. Galway hospital is one such example. It is critical infrastructure that is needed because it covers the west, north west and all that area. We all know about the Galway outer ring road that has been on the go for 30 years.

As I said to the Minister earlier, there are two issues we have to address as public representatives. If they are not addressed, we can put the Bill to the ceiling of the Dáil Chamber. First, the habitats directive is blocking progress on any building job around the country, whether it is a road, sewerage or water project or works at an airport, port or wherever. We must do something with that when Ireland holds the Presidency. There are a lot of sceptics who will go against the Government if it opens its mouth about this, but let us call a spade a spade and call out the rigmarole one has to go through. A snail that did not exist in Sligo held up a water project for ten years. Let us think about that. The lunatics are running the asylum to be quite frank about it. That is what is happening. We must address that.

Second, sooner or later, politicians will have to face back to the climate Bill. I am watching what the courts have decided on and some of what they have said. I am fearful for road projects and other types of projects with some of the definitions I see coming out of the courts on the climate Bill. If they go down that road, legislation will have to be brought in to try to resolve that so that we will be compatible with the courts. I am not criticising the courts but we must be compatible with them so that this works. Those are the two issues I address to the Government. We support the Bill but unless those two issues are addressed, we are in trouble.

An Ceann Comhairle: Look at Deputy Healy-Rae.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: It was not my phone.

An Ceann Comhairle: It was not his phone that rang and he thinks he is a hero.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Why do Members always look at me?

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: I wonder why.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Michael Collins.

Deputy Michael Collins: In principle, we will be supporting the Bill because of the importance it holds for the much-needed projects out there. I was in Galway recently and I met a lot of people in relation to Galway University Hospital. Staff are working in shocking conditions, with scaffolding in place for the past two years slattering around the place like frisbees. It is a bit of a joke in this modern era in which we live. Some 4,000 brilliant staff are trying to work under those conditions.

Who has the final say as to where all these projects will go? I have been a Member of the Dáil for the past ten years and I have been bringing up passing bays on the N71 in west Cork and on the R586, but nothing has happened. A fortune of money was never needed. These projects are desperately needed. A bypass is needed in Innishannon, while in Bandon there is the need for northern and southern relief roads. These all remain undone 20, 30 and 40 years

later. However, every year before an election, an announcement will be made that there is money to look at some project. Some fella will make a couple of hundred thousand euro but there will be no shovel in the ground. One of my councillors, John Collins, asked that question at a meeting recently. He asked when our shovel will be in the ground, and he could not get answer. That is all we want to know. We do not want to hear about more reports because reports end up finding snails and worms, and we know what that means - the can is kicked down the road. It is the same with the bypass in Bantry. It is very difficult to come up here and to be kind of giving out while not seeing the progress that is needed for areas to progress.

If this Bill is going to be supported by us, I want to know who has the final say about the projects that are being picked. Is it going to be where the most Ministers are? Is it going to be in the bigger cities while the smaller towns and villages throughout Ireland, where critical infrastructure is equally as important, will be forgotten about? Work is desperately needed in areas like Roscarberry, Ballydehob and Goleen where raw sewage is pouring into the tide. There is a desperate need for Uisce Éireann to build new sewerage services. In fairness to Uisce Éireann, it met us recently across the road. We cannot get it to sit down with us even if we have a developer. In one of those towns, I have a developer who is willing to invest and build a plant with Uisce Éireann, but it will not sit down with us. We have been asking it to do so for five or six weeks.

That makes me very doubtful about where all this money is going to end up and who will have the final say. It is fine to say that we need critical infrastructure as it means the projects that are desperately needed will get to the top. However, councillors in County Cork will soon vote on a county development plan that has no vision and cannot have a vision because most wastewater treatment plants in the county's towns are full and bursting at the seams. It is a vicious circle. Money is critically needed for a lot of these projects, but is it going to be provided or am I going to be back again in five years' time telling this House that nothing has happened with these projects and we are still in crisis, even though we supported the Bill for critical infrastructure projects that were supposed to get to the top for delivery?

I do not want to harp on too much but these are hugely important issues. I would like to know where the funding we are voting for will go and who will have the final say. Will politicians and the political body have any say or are we going to be squeezed out, with the final say going to the most senior politicians? In fairness, if we are supporting this, the least we deserve is an answer here and that everybody will have a say in this and will feed into the whole process. We could then go back to people and say that while we did not get the bypasses, we might have got passing bays. That would be a great start. I know of a lot of accidents in west Cork caused by people becoming frustrated behind lorries and tractors. The Minister, Deputy Chambers, and the Minister of State, Deputy Fleming, have been down there themselves. Imagine travelling from Bandon all the way west to Skibbereen before being able to pass a vehicle during the silage season. Lord God, there is something wrong somewhere. A few simple passing bays could be put in. That is where money like this should be going. It is what I keep asking for. I never ask for a fancy flyover. I just ask for common sense solutions so that people travelling on those roads at least have some safety, people who have a genuine reason to travel slowly can be easily passed and there are no serious accidents on the roads.

As I mentioned, hospitals and other critical infrastructure projects need to be put at the top of the list. I know from talking to people about the Galway ring road that it is a serious issue.

There is a chronic traffic issue in Galway city. I met the groups down there and they told me about it. I did not need to be told, though, because I travel around there myself. It is chronic to get through Galway at the present time. I would hate to see projects being announced now just before the election, but we need a concentration on major projects so they are done for the people and people see where their money is going. They are taxpayers. They are honest to God, hard-working taxpayers and they deserve to see their money being spent wisely and to get something back for what they continue to give. Some €500 million left over in the National Oil Reserves Agency, NORA, fund has not been spent. At the same time, I am trying to get rural transport projects across the line for rural communities. These are simple, good projects in villages and towns that transport does not reach, yet there is €500 million there. I do not know why funding is so scarce or why that money cannot be spent or given back to the people in some way.

I recently met a person in Dublin who has been 20 years living in this country. He said it is a great country but it is badly run. I had to agree with him. He is from Nigeria. It was a simple statement but he is 100% right. This is why we need to make sure the money that will be available, and there could be a lot of it, is spent right and on the projects that are needed. Whether that is University Hospital Galway or passing bays in west Cork, the focus needs to be on those projects. People should be able to go into a hospital in Galway without having to look at scaffolding or see slates flying around like frisbees for the next two years. Money needs to be spent and there needs to be delivery for the people of Galway.

Do not be smiling. I am being honest.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: I am glad to have the opportunity to speak on this very important Bill. I do not support the amendments. It is important that we get this legislation passed and allow critical infrastructure to be built in the quickest possible time. I hope the Minister will have an opportunity to visit Ardnacrusha power station some day. To give some background to that, in 1896 a young engineer who had qualified through UCD was over working in the province of Pomerania in Germany. His name was Thomas McLaughlin and he came back home to Ireland at Christmas in 1923 aged 27. After being with his family, he spent the Christmas period trying to convince various Government Ministers - I will not try to name them - that a hydroelectric scheme similar to the one opening in Pomerania that year could be done in Ireland on the lower River Shannon. Given the differential in flow from the Galway area down to Killaloe and further down to Parteen, he said this could work in Ireland. In December 1923, the Government accepted what a 27-year-old bucko, who was home on holidays from Germany, had to say. Construction started 18 months later and Ardnacrusha took just four years to build, with 5,000 workers. During those years, we saw an influx of workers into our area, including a huge number of German contractors via the Siemens-Schuckert company, and a large cohort of 1,000 people from the Connemara area. During that period, our local club won its only county title in those years. The match report stated there were four languages heard on the pitch that day, English, Irish from the Connemara men, German and bad language.

On a serious note, this proves that in the early years of this State, coming out of the Civil War with all the strife those years brought, and the economic uncertainty we were facing into, and with a population not knowing what their future held, we were able to build the biggest public project in our country, the likes of which has never been surpassed in the past century.

That is a template for what we should be doing. The meeting Thomas McLaughlin had with the Government that Christmas is commemorated on a plaque at the entrance of Ardnacrusha power station.

It is wrong that key projects are being held up year after year. I was elected to my local council at the age of 21 in 2004. There was joy in the area that summer because land had been acquired to build a sewerage scheme. I am sad to say that 22 years later, it has not been built. The Government has been actively working on it but it needs to benefit from this legislation. There are so many projects, not just in Clare but in every constituency, that could benefit from this legislation. I could rattle off a list of them.

I read recently one of the Minister's statements, which I hope to convey correctly. He said that when this legislation passes two of the test projects he would like to see were the redevelopment of the GPO site and the redevelopment of the National Concert Hall.

Deputy Jack Chambers: They are for delivery under the National Development Finance Agency, the NDFA.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: Those are to be administered by a different organisation. It is important that other projects also move at pace. University Hospital Limerick dominates so many debates in the House, whether at question time or during questions to the Taoiseach. I would like to see that project, above all others, progressed and advanced.

A balance needs to be struck between advancing critical infrastructure and public projects and listening to the voices of objectors. It concerns me hugely that just this week, a large wind farm company objected to, and had overruled, planning permission that had been granted to a private family for a private dwelling just outside Thurles, County Tipperary. The reasons it opposed planning and put the family through the wringer of An Coimisiún Pleanála had nothing to do with the principles of renewable energy or wind turbines and their rotational impact. The objection dealt with the county development plan and the entitlement the family would have, as local rural people, to live in the local rural area they originate from. This is fundamentally wrong. The company in question, Orsted, would want to take a good look at itself. If it intends to become a feature of the rural Irish landscape providing renewable energy, it needs to understand that it has to coexist with families in the area. We cannot have one without the other. Families will continue to exist. This did not occur in my constituency of Clare but it is something we are seriously concerned about as the company tees up other projects in the west.

Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation (Deputy Jack Chambers): I will deal with amendments Nos. 1 and 2 in the first instance. Members have raised the climate Act, so it might be useful to address that specifically.

I will not accept these two amendments. There is a clear process for the designation of individual projects and programmes set out in the Bill, as currently drafted. The process already includes a provision that allows Dáil Éireann to reverse any Government decision to designate a specific project or programme. Specifically, an order may be annulled if a resolution annulling the order is passed by Dáil Éireann within the next 21 days on which Dáil Éireann has sat after an order is laid before it. In practical terms, this gives Dáil Éireann ample

time to consider any order the Government makes. This reflects wider accountability but broader questions can also be asked of me or my Department, as would occur through the normal process, as set out on Committee Stage.

While I intend to recommend the designation of only a small number of projects or programmes, I believe it would be disproportionate to require each designation order to receive an individual assent from both Houses of the Oireachtas. The focus of the Bill is on accelerating the pace of critical infrastructure delivery.

This is within the broader framework of the accelerating infrastructure plan published late last year. Part of this wider work includes taking a cold, hard look at the legislation and the regulatory process to determine which ones are fit for purpose and which ones may trap infrastructure investment in process without purpose. I do not believe that adding a requirement for both Houses of the Oireachtas to positively approve each and every designation order would be an efficient use of time. It could add an additional and unnecessary layer of uncertainty to the infrastructure development process. In that context, I will not be accepting the amendment.

I was asked a question specifically relating to private projects. Section 1 of the Bill states that a project is something "funded by capital investment, by or on behalf of the State or by or on behalf of a public body". Some of the statements about private data centres are just inaccurate in relation to this Bill. It does nothing to enable them in the context of critical infrastructure and that is set out in the detail of the Bill.

There has also been reference to section 7 disapplying section 15 of the climate Act. This is an important and substantive change which we discussed at length on Second Stage and on Committee Stage. I remain strongly of the view that the disapplication of section 15 of the climate Act is necessary to accelerate the provision of critical infrastructure in the country. There has been a lot of what I would describe as misinformation about the motives for this provision and its practical impact. Section 15 of the climate Act and the Supreme Court's recent interpretation of this section effectively establishes a potential extra barrier to infrastructure by creating a new avenue for judicial review. This avenue is where a public body has had adequate regard to a range of climate policies and strategies in its consideration of any development proposal. This is not idle speculation on my part. Published analysis of the recent Supreme Court judgment on Coolglass by legal professional and others has noted the higher evidential bar that would be imposed on public bodies as a result of that judgment. The issue is that in many cases, whether a public body has had adequate regard to climate considerations would be an inherently subjective assessment. Indeed, one piece of published legal analysis noted that how decision-makers square away conflicting objectives and obligations is likely to be decided in another decision of the court on another day. This is a tangible demonstration of the uncertainty that the application of section 15 is adding and could add to infrastructure development.

The Government has signed up to ambitious climate targets. We are accountable to our citizens and legally to the EU on the achievement of these targets. There is no change whatsoever to our ambition, our targets or our climate policies as a result of this legislation. Similarly, the role played by public bodies in the achievement of the climate targets is set out at multiple levels and is reflected in strategies, policies and investment plans. It includes assessment of the climate and environmental impacts of any proposal that may be developed.

However, the climate Act is clear that the national climate targets will be achieved through the accumulation of mitigation measures that are put in place on a sectoral basis, with each Minister responsible for achieving these targets in the sector of the economy for which they are responsible. Having a parallel system that attempts to determine whether every public body in the approval process has sufficient regard to the climate characteristics of each individual infrastructure development is a real departure, in my view, from the intended structure of the climate Act. It is also an abdication of responsibility. How An Coimisiún Pleanála should weigh, for example, the public safety benefits of a road improvement versus the potential impact on emissions is not something that should be determined by the courts on a case-by-case basis. It would be irresponsible for us in our role as legislators to leave the risks associated with this system in place.

Removing the application of section 15 from designated projects or programmes simply removes one avenue for potential judicial review. It does so on the basis that the provision could delay the development of infrastructure and introduce uncertainty in the development system. As the accelerating infrastructure report demonstrated, there is a clear link between the increasing number of judicial reviews over time and the hesitation and consequent delays this risk introduces into decision-making processes, and we have to be responsive to this. This is in line with action 6 of our plan, where the Government undertook to respond more rapidly to precedent, where warranted.

I want to be clear that I see judicial review as an important tool that ensures decisions made by bodies carrying out public functions are transparent, fair and accountable and adhere to the principles of legality, procedural propriety and rationality. However, as the administrative complexity of the State has evolved, the application of this test to a significant number of decisions made by public bodies has the practical effect of potentially delaying the development of critical infrastructure. This imposes real costs on taxpayers and on society in general. People have referenced the Galway ring road. Multiple critical projects over the last 20 years are going through process after process. People want us to get things done and not be outsourcing responsibility or risking delivery of projects to the courts.

Disapplying section 15 to critical infrastructure projects does not mean that projects will not be subject to climate and environmental assessments. These will still take place as part of the development process for these initiatives. Every Exchequer-funded project is already required to measure and price its greenhouse gas emissions under the infrastructure guidelines. That provides an important incentive to minimise emissions, where it is cost effective to do so. Similarly, every individual-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Minister. He will have an opportunity to come back in. The first person indicating is Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The need for these designations to come before the Houses of the Oireachtas is absolutely critical because I do not trust this Government not to bully its way through on things it wants, over the legitimate concerns of stakeholders, in these decisions. I want to highlight again an instance of this, which is very relevant and happened in the last few weeks. Fishers in Dublin Bay, who have been fishing for a very long time and earning their living, have been bullied in the most disgraceful way by EirGrid. EirGrid wanted to do a survey and, without any consultation with the fishers, sent them a notice a week or two before

the survey instructing them to get their fishing pots out of the water because it was going to do a survey. The consequences were that the fishers were taken to court. They were terrified. These are hard-working people who had never been in a courtroom in their lives. They were terrified and were landed with costs. I was talking to one of them just now. He was one of the named people against whom Eirgrid took the case and they were talking about €80,000 in costs being made against these fishers. This is outrageous. I raised it a couple of weeks ago in the Dáil. The whole issue is that there is supposed to be consultation, but to me this shows the high-handed attitude that State bodies can have, rather than actually having a process where everybody is heard.

One imperative to develop offshore renewable energy is that it is not supposed to displace other industries. That is my understanding of EU directives in this regard. Other people's livelihoods are not supposed to be displaced in the process of critical infrastructure being developed. In this case, what is doubly infuriating about it all is who will be the beneficiaries of these developments for which the State is going to run the infrastructure, the cables and so on. Is it the State or the taxpayer? No, it is private companies like the French state and other European companies that have got the licences for a lot of these sites, which the developers selected. They were not done on the basis of benefit to the State. Do not get me wrong, we need offshore renewable wind and we need it on the east coast, but it should be done on the basis of the most appropriate and suitable sites. It should not happen at the expense of other people's livelihoods, biodiversity and sensitive environments like the sandbanks. These are very rich environments and the spawning grounds for fish, shellfish and so on. They are also the main area where phytoplankton, which produces oxygen, is found. One of the main sources of oxygen and one of the main carbon sinks are sandbanks.

If the Government is concerned about protecting marine biodiversity and having the marine protected areas, it should want to designate such areas. Instead, it wants to give it all away to private developers to make profit out of our natural resources at the expense of biodiversity and, in this case, at the expense of the rights of fishers to continue their traditional livelihood. The Government just says, "no, they can select the sites, we will put in the infrastructure for them, and they will run away with the profits". That is what is actually going on. By the way, there is no obligation that the supply will come back to us or that we will benefit in terms of price or anything else from these private concerns that selected their own sites, which the Government gave them the right to do. We are going to pay for the infrastructure.

Where have we heard all this before? This is happening on sea, but I have a vague memory that this happened on land as well. In fact, it is the basis of all the rotten corruption that existed in this country in terms of developer-led stuff. The Government will do anything for the developers. What do we get out of it in the end? We get housing that nobody can afford. We get speculation. I suspect the same is going to happen with giving away these sites. It is wide open for the same kind of speculation. We put in the infrastructure for them. We drive the fishers out of the way. We short-circuit any proper planning process. They are the beneficiaries, but they do not actually have to do anything. The Government is leaving it up to them as to whether we will get the offshore renewable energy at all, and they can just sit on it. They can flip it. They do not have to do anything, but the Government has left it in their hands. We are bending over backwards. We are displacing fishers and bullying and threatening them in the courts to the extent that they are fearful that they may lose their houses. That is outrageous.

The whole thing is a flipping scandal. We need to develop offshore renewable wind and renewable energy, but it should be us who are doing it. The beneficiaries should be us, the owners of the sites. The site selection should be based on what is best for our Irish society, the environment and biodiversity. The benefits should accrue to the people of Ireland - and, for that matter, the environment - but not to private companies that decide which sites they get and get to run away with profits. We are paying for the infrastructure while short-circuiting the right of stakeholders to actually have any meaningful say in all of this. If they get in the way, they will be bullied and threatened. That is what has happened to the fishers.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: After listening to Deputy Boyd Barrett, I might misquote St. Augustine: "Lord, make me an ecosocialist, but not if the turbines are in my constituency". I think it is a good quote for that. I have a question for the Minister. I do not think this is in the Bill, but he might be able to clear it up. Can this particular Bill affect any project that has already gone through planning in terms of any conditions that have been assigned to the planning application of an existing project? The Minister might be able to think about that and answer it, if he can, on the record. That is important because if there are existing projects that have gone through existing planning and have conditions attached to them, they should not be reopened. The conditions should be applied properly, etc., on that.

In terms of what Deputy Cathal Crowe was saying about Ardnacrusha, the Navan to Dublin rail line was built in the 1860s in three years with picks and shovels. As I said, it has already been waiting 40 years from announcement to completion on it. I was in Deputy Crowe's constituency of Clare on Monday meeting people in Broadford, Ennis and Kilrush. The N68 is the main road between Ennis and Kilrush. It is a dangerous road. It is a very narrow road that is a 45-minute drive. It is the main access route to the west of County Clare. It is wide open for accidents and difficulties and, again, it is one of those projects that have been crying out for investment for a long period of time.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: The intention of my amendment is that it could go through the Houses of the Oireachtas in a matter of hours. That is the amount of time that would be needed. It should not be causing any delays. It could happen within a matter of days. Indeed, if the Minister has made a designation, it is not as if the project just stalls in its entirety until the designation order is ratified by the Houses of the Oireachtas. There is still work that can go on in the project. I wish to press the amendment.

Deputy Ciarán Ahern: We are all agreed that there are delays and problems in delivering infrastructure in this country. The problem is that the Government and the Minister have come to the wrong conclusion about why this is a problem and why this is happening. He is determined to blame judicial reviews and environmental laws and to dump on environmentalists. These are people who are just trying to ensure that the law is upheld as it is and that decisions of our public bodies are made in the appropriate manner. The reason we want transparency and accountability and why we are pushing this amendment is that the Government is giving Ministers, essentially, the powers of monarchs. It is a power to essentially suspend or disapply a law for their favourites. The monarchs' power to suspend or dispense with the operation of law in a way that favoured their favourites was actually outlawed by a bill of rights in 1689. Deputy O'Gorman talked about judicial reviews increasing as a

result of this legislation. I think this legislation is potentially open to a constitutional challenge on the basis that we had Supreme Court cases before where Ministers have given themselves power to disapply laws for whoever they want and that has been struck down. I refer the Minister to the case of *East Donegal Co-operative Livestock Mart Ltd. v. Attorney General* from 1970.

The issue at the heart of this is not in relation to the planning process; the issue is the allocation of resources to our public bodies. The national children's hospital has been delayed 17 or 18 times. That is not to do with environmental law; that is to do with a lack of strategic planning and a lack of controls in our procurement processes. We know we are still four or five years away from any offshore wind infrastructure being built. That should be through planning in the next couple of years but the reason it is not going to be built is because our ports are not ready to construct the offshore wind platforms. This is not to do with planning or objections; it is to do with the resourcing and the expertise needed in our public bodies.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: I will come back to the central issue of whether this Bill will make it more or less likely that judicial reviews will be taken, and also the question of whether it will mean judicial reviews are more or less likely to be successful after they are taken. The Minister noted that there have been academic articles discussing the impact of the climate Act. He said this is tangible evidence of the risk of section 15 of the climate Act. I am sure those particular academics are absolutely delighted now to have the Minister reference their work. The impact scores for their research are going to go off the charts now that they have been cited in the Dáil. With respect, however, this is not tangible evidence. The tangible evidence we have about the impact of section 15 of the climate Act is the Supreme Court decision in the *Coolglass* case four months ago, which made it very clear that section 15 applied to a planning decision and was used to overturn the denial of planning permission. Section 15 protected the infrastructure development in that case. The Government's Bill is disapplying section 15 to the biggest types of infrastructure development that the Government and future Governments are seeking to bring forward. This Bill removes legal provisions that have been held to weigh in favour of the granting of planning permission. Throughout all of this debate, the Minister has failed to address the issue of how section 15 has been found by our Supreme Court to benefit these big projects, particularly where they are seen to have a positive climate impact. When judicial reviews are taken against big public transport proposals, as they always are, that provision is going to be denied to them. In future, the granting of a designation of critical infrastructure to big projects may actually be the death knell of those projects because they will be harder to defend in the courts, not easier.

Deputy John McGuinness: My concern around the issue we are debating now is the rights and supports that are necessary for local communities when they make their objections and when they are pitched against big companies that can steamroll their way through the planning process and onwards. The reason they take judicial reviews is because they feel that they are failed by the process itself and that they are being ignored by the political process.

We have been promised, for example, onshore wind regulations in this House since 2006. We have had numerous debates about the regulations. Politicians have done somersaults in relation to it.

An Ceann Comhairle: As the time for this debate has expired-----

Deputy John McGuinness: Can I mention before I sit down that the construction of a ring road around Kilkenny is another issue which was held up.

An Ceann Comhairle: The time permitted for this debate having expired, I am required to put the following question in accordance with the order of the Dáil of 12 May 2026: "That Fourth Stage is hereby completed and that the Bill is hereby passed." Is that agreed?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It is not agreed.

Question put: "That Fourth Stage is hereby completed and that the Bill is hereby passed."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 132; Níl, 15; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Bennett, Cathy.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Boland, Grace.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Healy, Seamus.	
Brady, John.	Kelly, Alan.	
Brennan, Brian.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Brennan, Shay.	Lawlor, George.	
Brophy, Colm.	Murphy, Paul.	
Browne, James.	Nash, Ged.	
Buckley, Pat.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
Burke, Colm.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
Butler, Mary.	Sherlock, Marie.	
Butterly, Paula.	Smith, Duncan.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Wall, Mark.	
Byrne, Joanna.		
Byrne, Malcolm.		
Cahill, Michael.		
Cairns, Holly.		
Callaghan, Catherine.		
Calleary, Dara.		
Canney, Seán.		
Carrigy, Micheál.		
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.		
Carthy, Matt.		
Chambers, Jack.		
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.		
Clendennen, John.		
Collins, Michael.		
Collins, Niall.		
Connolly, John.		
Cooney, Joe.		
Cronin, Réada.		

Crowe, Cathal.		
Crowe, Seán.		
Cullinane, David.		
Cummins, Jen.		
Cummins, John.		
Currie, Emer.		
Daly, Martin.		
Daly, Pa.		
Dempsey, Aisling.		
Devine, Máire.		
Devlin, Cormac.		
Dillon, Alan.		
Doherty, Pearse.		
Dolan, Albert.		
Donnelly, Paul.		
Ellis, Dessie.		
Farrelly, Aidan.		
Fitzmaurice, Michael.		
Fleming, Sean.		
Foley, Norma.		
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.		
Gannon, Gary.		
Geoghegan, James.		
Gibney, Sinéad.		
Gould, Thomas.		
Graves, Ann.		
Grealish, Noel.		
Guirke, Johnny.		
Harkin, Marian.		
Hayes, Eoin.		
Healy-Rae, Danny.		
Healy-Rae, Michael.		
Hearne, Rory.		
Heneghan, Barry.		
Heydon, Martin.		
Higgins, Emer.		
Kenny, Martin.		
Keogh, Keira.		
Kerrane, Claire.		
Lawless, James.		
Lawless, Paul.		
Lowry, Michael.		
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.		
Maxwell, David.		
McAuliffe, Paul.		
McConalogue, Charlie.		
McCormack, Tony.		
McEntee, Helen.		

McGettigan, Donna.		
McGrath, Mattie.		
McGrath, Séamus.		
McGreehan, Erin.		
McGuinness, Conor D.		
McGuinness, John.		
Mitchell, Denise.		
Moynihan, Aindrias.		
Moynihan, Michael.		
Moynihan, Shane.		
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.		
Murphy, Michael.		
Mythen, Johnny.		
Naughton, Hildegard.		
Neville, Joe.		
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.		
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.		
Nolan, Carol.		
O'Brien, Darragh.		
O'Callaghan, Cian.		
O'Callaghan, Jim.		
O'Connell, Maeve.		
O'Connor, James.		
O'Dea, Willie.		
O'Donnell, Kieran.		
O'Flynn, Ken.		
O'Hara, Louis.		
O'Meara, Ryan.		
O'Rourke, Darren.		
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Ó Murchú, Ruairí.		
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.		
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.		
Quaide, Liam.		
Quinlivan, Maurice.		
Rice, Pádraig.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Tóibín, Peadar.		
Troy, Robert.		

Ward, Barry.		
Ward, Mark.		
Whitmore, Jennifer.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Richard Boyd Barrett and Roderic O'Gorman.

Question declared carried.

Presentation of Estimates: Motion

Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation (Deputy Jack Chambers): I move:

That, notwithstanding Standing Order 222 of the Standing Orders of Dáil Éireann relative to Public Business or the Resolutions of the Dáil of 17th December, 2025, 28th January, 2026 and 25th March, 2026 the following Further Revised Estimate for Public Services for the year ending 31st December, 2026, be presented to the Dáil and circulated to members on 13th May, 2026 being a date later than that prescribed for the presentation of Estimates:

Vote 26 — Education and Youth.

Question put and agreed to.

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

The following motion was moved by Deputy Mary Lou McDonald on Wednesday, 6 May 2026:

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.

Debate resumed on amendment No 1:

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."

- (Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Deputy John Cummins)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the motion regarding flat regeneration. On Wednesday, 6 May 2026, on the question, "That the amendment to the motion be agreed to", a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 81; Níl, 67; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Boland, Grace.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Brennan, Brian.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Shay.	Brady, John.	
Brophy, Colm.	Buckley, Pat.	
Browne, James.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Burke, Colm.	Cairns, Holly.	
Butler, Mary.	Carthy, Matt.	
Butterly, Paula.	Collins, Michael.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	
Cahill, Michael.	Crowe, Seán.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Cullinane, David.	
Calleary, Dara.	Cummins, Jen.	
Canney, Seán.	Daly, Pa.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Devine, Máire.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Chambers, Jack.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Clendennen, John.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Collins, Niall.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Connolly, John.	Gannon, Gary.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gould, Thomas.	
Cummins, John.	Graves, Ann.	
Currie, Emer.	Guirke, Johnny.	

Daly, Martin.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Healy, Seamus.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kelly, Alan.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Fleming, Sean.	Kenny, Martin.	
Foley, Norma.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Lawless, Paul.	
Geoghegan, James.	Lawlor, George.	
Grealish, Noel.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Harkin, Marian.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	McGrath, Mattie.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Heneghan, Barry.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Heydon, Martin.	Murphy, Paul.	
Higgins, Emer.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Keogh, Keira.	Nash, Ged.	
Lawless, James.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Lowry, Michael.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Maxwell, David.	Nolan, Carol.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Donoghue, Richard.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McGreehan, Erin.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McGuinness, John.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Murphy, Michael.	Quaide, Liam.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Neville, Joe.	Rice, Pádraig.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Smith, Duncan.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Connor, James.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Dea, Willie.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Meara, Ryan.		
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		

Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

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

Amendment declared carried.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 80; Níl, 67; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Boland, Grace.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Brennan, Brian.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Shay.	Brady, John.	
Brophy, Colm.	Buckley, Pat.	
Browne, James.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Burke, Colm.	Cairns, Holly.	
Butler, Mary.	Carthy, Matt.	
Butterly, Paula.	Collins, Michael.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	
Cahill, Michael.	Crowe, Seán.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Cullinane, David.	
Calleary, Dara.	Cummins, Jen.	
Canney, Seán.	Daly, Pa.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Devine, Máire.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Chambers, Jack.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Clendennen, John.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Collins, Niall.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Connolly, John.	Gannon, Gary.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gould, Thomas.	
Cummins, John.	Graves, Ann.	
Currie, Emer.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Daly, Martin.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Healy, Seamus.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kelly, Alan.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Fleming, Sean.	Kenny, Martin.	

Foley, Norma.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Lawless, Paul.	
Geoghegan, James.	Lawlor, George.	
Grealish, Noel.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Harkin, Marian.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	McGrath, Mattie.	
Heneghan, Barry.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Heydon, Martin.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Higgins, Emer.	Murphy, Paul.	
Keogh, Keira.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Lawless, James.	Nash, Ged.	
Lowry, Michael.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Maxwell, David.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Nolan, Carol.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Donoghue, Richard.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McGreehan, Erin.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McGuinness, John.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Murphy, Michael.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Quaide, Liam.	
Neville, Joe.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Rice, Pádraig.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Smith, Duncan.	
O'Connor, James.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Dea, Willie.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

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

Question declared carried.

8 o'clock

Cost of Living Mini-Budget: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Ged Nash on Thursday, 7 May 2026:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

- Budget 2026 failed to provide for indexation of income tax credits and bands, providing instead untargeted Value-Added Tax (VAT) cuts for the hospitality and construction sector;
- despite clear evidence of an ongoing cost-of-living crisis, the Government withdrew energy credits and cut pre-election once-off payments, that in recent years had cloaked the inadequacy of existing social welfare payment rates;
- the analysis by the Economic and Social Research Institute of Budget 2026 measures, shows that it resulted in household income losses averaging 2 per cent of disposable income, with low-income households hit hardest;
- the illegal war launched by the United States of America and Israel against Iran, has created an energy crisis that has already led to increased inflation, with further price rises still to come on energy, food and other commodities;
- the energy sector is reaping windfall gains, with British Petroleum reporting more than a doubling of profits in the first three months of 2026;
- last year, in advance of Budget 2026, Department of Finance officials warned that the hospitality VAT cut was a blunt measure, would be poorly targeted, and comes with a significant amount of deadweight, while Bord Bia consumer spending in food services data shows that 60 per cent of the benefit goes to fast food outlets and hotels;
- sectoral fuel supports and cuts to Excise Duty have been introduced by the Government, which includes changes to the Diesel Rebate Scheme that were backdated to January 2026;
- struggling households will have to wait over five months, until October, to find out what supports may be introduced to ease the increase in the cost of living; and
- the State has yet to deploy the Apple windfall funds, and carries significant cash balances;

recognises that:

— Pay As You Earn (PAYE) and self-employed workers have received no targeted support in the cost-of-living crisis, and are now subject to effective cuts in their disposable incomes due to Government budget decisions;

— rising grocery prices continue to impact on household budgets, as 14 per cent of households can't afford to warm their home, and nearly half a million households are in arrears on their energy bills;

— those most at risk of energy poverty, and reliant on fossil fuels, will continue to be hit hardest by further increases in energy prices;

— Ireland has the highest energy prices in Europe, due to an overreliance on natural gas for electricity generation leaving us exposed to geopolitical shocks and international market prices; and

— only by rapidly transitioning away from fossil fuels through faster rollout of renewables, and electrification of transport and heating, can prices be permanently reduced;

calls on the Government to immediately introduce a Cost of Living mini-Budget that will:

— reverse the VAT reductions and use the savings to provide for indexation of income tax bands and credits, backdated to January 2026;

— introduce a windfall tax on energy profits to fund targeted energy credits and social welfare supports, including a summer bonus double payment;

— provide a one-off €100 grocery supplement to Child Benefit, restore the €100 previously cut from the Back-to-School Clothing and Footwear Allowance, and remove State exam fees;

— increase the bank levy to €500 million, and provide targeted energy grants for small businesses, and tailored supports to increase uptake of Electric Vehicles for households and businesses;

— introduce pilot trials of free public transport, to reduce fuel use and cut school transport fees; and

— deploy the windfall Apple funds to turbocharge retrofitting, the installation of solar photovoltaic and offshore wind, and the electrification of heating and transport, to bring down the cost of bills; and

further calls on the Government to introduce a Budget in October that puts the interests of middle- and low-income households first.

The following amendment No. 1 was moved by the Minister of State at the Department of Finance, Deputy Robert Troy, on Thursday, 7 May 2026:

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

"notes that:

— the conflict in the Middle East has, once again, exposed the vulnerability of the Irish economy, and Irish society more generally, to imported fossil fuels;

- these strategic dependencies have major macroeconomic implications, and the risks to macroeconomic and fiscal stability cannot be ignored;
- at a minimum, the large upward shift in energy prices is likely to impart a stagflationary impulse to the global economy, with a combination of lower levels of economic activity alongside higher inflation;
- by reducing Excise Duty payable on both petrol and diesel, the Government has dampened the pass-through from higher wholesale price to retail prices;
- this burden-sharing has been complemented by other support mechanisms, including an extension of the fuel allowance season and targeted measures for the most exposed sectors;
- the total budgetary cost of these measures is of the order of €750 million this year, one of the largest interventions of any country in the European Union (EU), and these measures reduce the annual rate of inflation in April, May, June and July by about 0.6 percentage points;
- the Government has also extended the 9 per cent Value-Added Tax (VAT) on gas and electricity bills until 31st December, 2030, one of the lowest rates in the EU, which will have cost over €1 billion from the time it was introduced in May 2022, until the end of this year;
- Budget 2026 focused on building more homes and protecting jobs;
- the 9 per cent VAT rate for hospitality and hairdressing will take effect from 1st July, 2026, to support businesses in services sectors, supporting over 150,000 jobs across the country;
- Budget 2026 delivered weekly welfare rate increases, benefitting approximately 1.5 million people, including pensioners, people with disabilities, carers and lone parents;
- for low-income families, Budget 2026 increased the weekly rate of the Child Support Payment; and
- the Government has increased the rates for the Fuel Allowance, extended it to the recipients of the Working Family Payment, and recently extended the season by four weeks, to protect those at risk of fuel poverty;

recognises that:

- a package worth €750 million of supports has been introduced by the Government;
- rates of Excise Duty (Mineral Oil Tax) applying to petrol, auto diesel and marked gas oil (MGO) have been temporarily reduced;
- the National Oil Reserve Agency levy has been reduced by 2 cent per litre of fuel, to 31st July, 2026;
- the total reductions, will reduce the cost of:
 - petrol, by 27 cent per litre;

- diesel, by 32 cent per litre; and
- MGO/green diesel, by 7.4 cent per litre;
- the Government deferred the planned increase in carbon tax, scheduled for 1st May, until October, to provide additional support for consumers of green diesel and other affected fuels;
- to protect those at risk of fuel poverty, the Government extended the fuel allowance season by four weeks, which will result in additional payments of over a quarter of households;
- in Budget 2026, Government announced that VAT on electricity and gas will remain at the lowest possible level of 9 per cent to the end of 2030, to mitigate costs and address energy poverty;
- the Government increased the maximum repayment allowable under the Diesel Rebate Scheme from 7.5 cent up to 12 cent per litre of diesel, which will apply until 30th June, 2026;
- these interventions have been designed to provide timely and proportionate relief, indeed, the Government's approach is underpinned by the need to balance short-term supports with longer-term objectives, including:
 - maintaining fiscal discipline and building fiscal buffers;
 - supporting continued employment growth and economic stability;
 - strategic capital investment and infrastructure delivery;
 - advancing Ireland's climate commitments and energy transition; and
 - strengthening energy security and resilience;
- the Fuel Support Scheme for farmers is now open for applications, and a scheme for hauliers will open in the coming weeks;
- Budget 2026 was the first of five budgets to be delivered by the Government;
- this Government has committed to, and will stand by, its Programme for Government commitment to make progressive changes to personal income tax, if the economy remains strong;
- preparation for Budget 2027 is already underway, and decisions regarding policy measures should be taken in the context of the annual Budget and Finance Bill processes;
- the bank levy has raised €1.8 billion since 2014, with a further €200 million due in 2026;
- the National Development Plan, includes the once-off receipts arising from the Court of Justice of the European Union ruling of 2024, to advance key capital projects;
- the Irish economy is facing its second fossil fuel shock in less than half a decade;

- fossil fuel dependence, especially imported fossil fuels, is a major economic vulnerability;

- analytical work will be undertaken by the Department of Finance, to set out the key macroeconomic principles that should guide the medium-term transition towards energy independence; and

- the Government has also established the National Energy Affordability Taskforce, to identify, assess and implement measures that will enhance energy affordability for households and businesses, while delivering key renewable commitments and protecting security of supply and economic stability; and

acknowledges that:

- the geopolitical and economic outlook continues to be highly uncertain;

- in the Department of Finance's reference scenario, inflation is projected to average 3.3 per cent this year, 1.5 percentage points higher than assumed at budget time, but still significantly lower than the 8.1 per cent rate recorded in 2022, after the last energy price shock;

- the economy is still expected to grow this year, albeit at a slower pace than previously forecast, and Government has committed to a range of temporary measures to mitigate the impact of increases in energy prices on households and businesses;

- the overall approach to budgetary policy must remain balanced and sustainable over the medium-term; and

- the Government will consider the continued impact of the energy shock on households, and make proportionate decisions in the forthcoming Budget."

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1 to amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after "notes that" and substitute the following:

":

- the conflict in the Middle East has, once again, exposed the vulnerability of the Irish economy, and Irish society more generally, to imported fossil fuels;

- these strategic dependencies have major macroeconomic implications, and the risks to macroeconomic and fiscal stability cannot be ignored;

- at a minimum, the large upward shift in energy prices is likely to impart stagflationary impulses to the global economy, with a combination of lower levels of economic activity alongside higher inflation;

- by reducing Excise Duty payable on both petrol and diesel, the Government has dampened the pass-through from higher wholesale price to retail prices, but they have not gone far enough;

- this burden-sharing has been complemented by other support mechanisms, including an extension of the fuel allowance season and targeted measures for the most exposed sectors;

— the total budgetary cost of these measures is of the order of €750 million this year, one of the largest interventions of any country in the European Union (EU), and these measures reduce the annual rate of inflation in April, May, June and July by about 0.6 percentage points;

— the Government has also extended the 9 per cent Value-Added Tax (VAT) on gas and electricity bills until 31st December, 2030, one of the lowest rates in the EU, which will have cost over €1 billion from the time it was introduced in May 2022, until the end of this year;

— Budget 2026 left workers worse off, and handed tax breaks to those at the top;

— the 9 per cent VAT rate for hospitality and hairdressing will take effect from 1st July, 2026, to support businesses in services sectors, supporting over 150,000 jobs across the country;

— Budget 2026 delivered weekly welfare rate increases, benefitting approximately 1.5 million people, including pensioners, people with disabilities, carers and lone parents;

— for low-income families, Budget 2026 increased the weekly rate of the Child Support Payment; and

— the Government has increased the rates for the Fuel Allowance, extended it to the recipients of the Working Family Payment, and recently extended the season by four weeks, to protect those at risk of fuel poverty;

recognises that:

— a package worth €750 million of supports has been introduced by the Government, that has left many people still struggling to make ends meet;

— rates of Excise Duty (Mineral Oil Tax) applying to petrol, auto diesel and marked gas oil (MGO) have been temporarily reduced;

— the National Oil Reserve Agency levy has been reduced by 2 cent per litre of fuel, to 31st July, 2026;

— the total reductions, will reduce the cost of:

— petrol, by 27 cent per litre;

— diesel, by 32 cent per litre; and

— MGO/green diesel, by 7.4 cent per litre;

— the Government deferred the planned increase in carbon tax, scheduled for 1st May, until October, to provide additional support for consumers of green diesel and other affected fuels;

— to protect those at risk of fuel poverty, the Government extended the fuel allowance season by four weeks, which will result in additional payments to over a quarter of households;

— in Budget 2026, Government announced that VAT on electricity and gas will remain at the lowest possible level of 9 per cent to the end of 2030, to mitigate costs and address energy poverty;

— the Government increased the maximum repayment allowable under the Diesel Rebate Scheme from 7.5 cent up to 12 cent per litre of diesel, which will apply until 30th June, 2026;

— these interventions have been designed to provide timely and proportionate relief, indeed, the Government's approach is underpinned by the need to balance short-term supports with longer-term objectives, including:

— maintaining fiscal discipline and building fiscal buffers;

— supporting continued employment growth and economic stability;

— strategic capital investment and infrastructure delivery;

— advancing Ireland's climate commitments and energy transition; and

— strengthening energy security and resilience;

— the Fuel Support Scheme for farmers is now open for applications, and a scheme for hauliers will open in the coming weeks;

— the bank levy has raised €1.8 billion since 2014, with a further €200 million due in 2026;

— the National Development Plan, includes the once-off receipts arising from the Court of Justice of the European Union ruling of 2024, to advance key capital projects;

— the Irish economy is facing its second fossil fuel shock in less than half a decade;

— fossil fuel dependence, especially imported fossil fuels, is a major economic vulnerability;

— analytical work will be undertaken by the Department of Finance, to set out the key macroeconomic principles that should guide the medium-term transition towards energy independence; and

— the Government has also established the National Energy Affordability Taskforce, to identify, assess and implement measures that will enhance energy affordability for households and businesses, while delivering key renewable commitments and protecting security of supply and economic stability;

further recognises that:

— Budget 2026 left workers worse off and handed tax breaks to those at the top;

— according to analysis by the Economic and Social Research Institute of Budget 2026 measures, households lost disposable income, with low-income households hit hardest;

— despite clear evidence of an ongoing cost-of-living crisis, the Government withdrew cost of living supports, including energy credits;

— people with disabilities have been hard hit by the Government's callous decision to withdraw cost of living support, with many people with disabilities left up to €1,400 worse off;

— since energy credits were withdrawn, we have seen record numbers of household unable to pay their electricity bills, and many more people struggling to keep up;

— the Government measures on Excise Duty on fuel do not go far enough, with petrol, diesel, and green diesel all remaining too expensive at the pumps;

— the Government has refused to cut Excise Duty on home heating oil, despite over 700,000 homes relying on this fuel source for heating;

— struggling households cannot wait until next years' Budget for Government intervention; and

— the State is forecast to run a surplus of €9.2 billion, €4.1 billion higher than previously projected; and

calls on the Government to immediately introduce a Cost of Living Emergency Budget that will:

— cut the Universal Social Charge, to put €500 back in the pockets of workers;

— cut Excise Duty on fuels, such as petrol, diesel, green diesel and home heating oil;

— introduce energy credits of €400 per household; and

— make targeted cost of living support payments of €500 for people with disabilities, €400 for social welfare recipients, such as pensioners and people on the Working Family Payment, and a double child benefit payment."

(Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to amendment No. 1 to Government amendment No. 1 to the motion on a cost-of-living mini-budget. On Thursday, 7 May 2026, on the question, "That the amendment to the amendment be made", a division was claimed. That division will be taken now.

Amendment to amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 68; Níl, 81; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Aird, William.	
Bacik, Ivana.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Bennett, Cathy.	Boland, Grace.	
Boyd Barrett, Richard.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Brady, John.	Brennan, Brian.	
Buckley, Pat.	Brennan, Shay.	
Byrne, Joanna.	Brophy, Colm.	
Cairns, Holly.	Browne, James.	
Carthy, Matt.	Burke, Colm.	
Collins, Michael.	Butler, Mary.	

Coppinger, Ruth.	Butterly, Paula.	
Cronin, Réada.	Buttimer, Jerry.	
Crowe, Seán.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Cullinane, David.	Cahill, Michael.	
Cummins, Jen.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Daly, Pa.	Calleary, Dara.	
Devine, Máire.	Canney, Seán.	
Doherty, Pearse.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	
Ellis, Dessie.	Chambers, Jack.	
Farrelly, Aidan.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Clendennen, John.	
Gannon, Gary.	Collins, Niall.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Connolly, John.	
Gould, Thomas.	Cooney, Joe.	
Graves, Ann.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Cummins, John.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Currie, Emer.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	Daly, Martin.	
Healy, Seamus.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Hearne, Rory.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Kelly, Alan.	Dillon, Alan.	
Kenny, Eoghan.	Dolan, Albert.	
Kenny, Martin.	Fleming, Sean.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Foley, Norma.	
Lawless, Paul.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
Lawlor, George.	Geoghegan, James.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Grealish, Noel.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Harkin, Marian.	
McGrath, Mattie.	Healy-Rae, Michael.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Heneghan, Barry.	
Mitchell, Denise.	Heydon, Martin.	
Murphy, Paul.	Higgins, Emer.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Keogh, Keira.	
Nash, Ged.	Lawless, James.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Lowry, Michael.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Maxwell, David.	
Nolan, Carol.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	McConalogue, Charlie.	
O'Donoghue, Richard.	McCormack, Tony.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	McEntee, Helen.	
O'Flynn, Ken.	McGrath, Séamus.	
O'Gorman, Roderic.	McGreehan, Erin.	
O'Hara, Louis.	McGuinness, John.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	Moynihan, Michael.	
Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	Moynihan, Shane.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	

Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Murphy, Michael.	
Quaide, Liam.	Naughton, Hildegard.	
Quinlivan, Maurice.	Neville, Joe.	
Rice, Pádraig.	O'Brien, Darragh.	
Sherlock, Marie.	O'Callaghan, Jim.	
Smith, Duncan.	O'Connell, Maeve.	
Tóibín, Peadar.	O'Connor, James.	
Wall, Mark.	O'Dea, Willie.	
Ward, Mark.	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
Whitmore, Jennifer.	O'Meara, Ryan.	
	O'Shea, John Paul.	
	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Smyth, Niamh.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Troy, Robert.	
	Ward, Barry.	

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

Amendment to amendment declared lost.

Deputy Holly Cairns: I move amendment No. 2 to amendment No. 1:

To insert the following after "decisions in the forthcoming Budget":

"; and

commits to adopt the Social Democrats' five point 'Solar for All' plan, to help families cut electricity costs by an average of €450 a year, through the following measures:

- double grants for solar installation to €3,600;
- include solar panels in the 'Warmer Homes Scheme';
- reinstate the €1,000 battery grant scheme;
- develop streamlined regulations for 'Plug-in Solar' products for renters and apartment dwellers, whilst ensuring safety standards; and
- increase the grant value for solar panels for businesses."

Amendment to amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 68; Níl, 81; Staon, 0.

Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Aird, William.	
Bacik, Ivana.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Bennett, Cathy.	Boland, Grace.	
Boyd Barrett, Richard.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Brady, John.	Brennan, Brian.	
Buckley, Pat.	Brennan, Shay.	
Byrne, Joanna.	Brophy, Colm.	
Cairns, Holly.	Browne, James.	
Carthy, Matt.	Burke, Colm.	
Collins, Michael.	Butler, Mary.	
Coppinger, Ruth.	Butterly, Paula.	
Cronin, Réada.	Buttimer, Jerry.	
Crowe, Seán.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Cullinane, David.	Cahill, Michael.	
Cummins, Jen.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Daly, Pa.	Calleary, Dara.	
Devine, Máire.	Canney, Seán.	
Doherty, Pearse.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	
Ellis, Dessie.	Chambers, Jack.	
Farrelly, Aidan.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Clendennen, John.	
Gannon, Gary.	Collins, Niall.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Connolly, John.	
Gould, Thomas.	Cooney, Joe.	
Graves, Ann.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Cummins, John.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Currie, Emer.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	Daly, Martin.	
Healy, Seamus.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Hearne, Rory.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Kelly, Alan.	Dillon, Alan.	
Kenny, Eoghan.	Dolan, Albert.	
Kenny, Martin.	Fleming, Sean.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Foley, Norma.	
Lawless, Paul.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
Lawlor, George.	Geoghegan, James.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Grealish, Noel.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Harkin, Marian.	
McGrath, Mattie.	Healy-Rae, Michael.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Heneghan, Barry.	
Mitchell, Denise.	Heydon, Martin.	
Murphy, Paul.	Higgins, Emer.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Keogh, Keira.	
Nash, Ged.	Lawless, James.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Lowry, Michael.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Maxwell, David.	

Nolan, Carol.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	McConalogue, Charlie.	
O'Donoghue, Richard.	McCormack, Tony.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	McEntee, Helen.	
O'Flynn, Ken.	McGrath, Séamus.	
O'Gorman, Roderic.	McGreehan, Erin.	
O'Hara, Louis.	McGuinness, John.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	Moynihan, Michael.	
Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	Moynihan, Shane.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Murphy, Michael.	
Quaide, Liam.	Naughton, Hildegard.	
Quinlivan, Maurice.	Neville, Joe.	
Rice, Pádraig.	O'Brien, Darragh.	
Sherlock, Marie.	O'Callaghan, Jim.	
Smith, Duncan.	O'Connell, Maeve.	
Tóibín, Peadar.	O'Connor, James.	
Wall, Mark.	O'Dea, Willie.	
Ward, Mark.	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
Whitmore, Jennifer.	O'Meara, Ryan.	
	O'Shea, John Paul.	
	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Smyth, Niamh.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Troy, Robert.	
	Ward, Barry.	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Cian O'Callaghan and Jennifer Whitmore; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Amendment to amendment declared lost.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 81; Níl, 68; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Boland, Grace.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Brian.	Brady, John.	

Brennan, Shay.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brophy, Colm.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Browne, James.	Cairns, Holly.	
Burke, Colm.	Carthy, Matt.	
Butler, Mary.	Collins, Michael.	
Butterly, Paula.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Crowe, Seán.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cullinane, David.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Cummins, Jen.	
Calleary, Dara.	Daly, Pa.	
Canney, Seán.	Devine, Máire.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Chambers, Jack.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Clendennen, John.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Collins, Niall.	Gannon, Gary.	
Connolly, John.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gould, Thomas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Graves, Ann.	
Cummins, John.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Currie, Emer.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Daly, Martin.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Healy, Seamus.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kelly, Alan.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Fleming, Sean.	Kenny, Martin.	
Foley, Norma.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Lawless, Paul.	
Geoghegan, James.	Lawlor, George.	
Grealish, Noel.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Harkin, Marian.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	McGrath, Mattie.	
Heneghan, Barry.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Heydon, Martin.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Higgins, Emer.	Murphy, Paul.	
Keogh, Keira.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Lawless, James.	Nash, Ged.	
Lowry, Michael.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Maxwell, David.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Nolan, Carol.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Donoghue, Richard.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McGreehan, Erin.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	

McGuinness, John.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Murphy, Michael.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Quaide, Liam.	
Neville, Joe.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Rice, Pádraig.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Smith, Duncan.	
O'Connor, James.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Dea, Willie.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Duncan Smith and Ged Nash.

Amendment declared carried.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 81; Níl, 68; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Boland, Grace.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Brian.	Brady, John.	
Brennan, Shay.	Buckley, Pat.	
Brophy, Colm.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Browne, James.	Cairns, Holly.	
Burke, Colm.	Carthy, Matt.	
Butler, Mary.	Collins, Michael.	
Butterly, Paula.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Cronin, Réada.	

Byrne, Malcolm.	Crowe, Seán.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cullinane, David.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Cummins, Jen.	
Calleary, Dara.	Daly, Pa.	
Canney, Seán.	Devine, Máire.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Chambers, Jack.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Clendennen, John.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Collins, Niall.	Gannon, Gary.	
Connolly, John.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gould, Thomas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Graves, Ann.	
Cummins, John.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Currie, Emer.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Daly, Martin.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Healy, Seamus.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kelly, Alan.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Fleming, Sean.	Kenny, Martin.	
Foley, Norma.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Lawless, Paul.	
Geoghegan, James.	Lawlor, George.	
Grealish, Noel.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Harkin, Marian.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	McGrath, Mattie.	
Heneghan, Barry.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Heydon, Martin.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Higgins, Emer.	Murphy, Paul.	
Keogh, Keira.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Lawless, James.	Nash, Ged.	
Lowry, Michael.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Maxwell, David.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Nolan, Carol.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Donoghue, Richard.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
McGreehan, Erin.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McGuinness, John.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Murphy, Michael.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Quaide, Liam.	

Neville, Joe.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Rice, Pádraig.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Smith, Duncan.	
O'Connor, James.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Dea, Willie.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Duncan Smith and Ged Nash.

Question declared carried.

Electricity Regulation (Amendment) Bill 2026: Second Stage (Resumed) [Private Members]

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to Second Stage of the Electricity Regulation (Amendment) Bill 2026, taken on Tuesday, 12 May 2026. On the question, "That the Bill be now read a Second Time", a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Question put: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 66; Níl, 83; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Aird, William.	
Bacik, Ivana.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Bennett, Cathy.	Boland, Grace.	
Boyd Barrett, Richard.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Brady, John.	Brennan, Brian.	
Buckley, Pat.	Brennan, Shay.	
Byrne, Joanna.	Brophy, Colm.	
Cairns, Holly.	Browne, James.	
Carthy, Matt.	Burke, Colm.	
Collins, Michael.	Butler, Mary.	

Coppinger, Ruth.	Butterly, Paula.	
Cronin, Réada.	Buttimer, Jerry.	
Crowe, Seán.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Cullinane, David.	Cahill, Michael.	
Cummins, Jen.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Daly, Pa.	Calleary, Dara.	
Devine, Máire.	Canney, Seán.	
Doherty, Pearse.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	
Ellis, Dessie.	Chambers, Jack.	
Farrelly, Aidan.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Clendennen, John.	
Gannon, Gary.	Collins, Niall.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Connolly, John.	
Gould, Thomas.	Cooney, Joe.	
Graves, Ann.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Cummins, John.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Currie, Emer.	
Healy, Seamus.	Daly, Martin.	
Hearne, Rory.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Kelly, Alan.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Kenny, Eoghan.	Dillon, Alan.	
Kenny, Martin.	Dolan, Albert.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Fleming, Sean.	
Lawless, Paul.	Foley, Norma.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Geoghegan, James.	
McGrath, Mattie.	Grealish, Noel.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Harkin, Marian.	
Mitchell, Denise.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Murphy, Paul.	Healy-Rae, Michael.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Heneghan, Barry.	
Nash, Ged.	Heydon, Martin.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Higgins, Emer.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Keogh, Keira.	
Nolan, Carol.	Lawless, James.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	Lowry, Michael.	
O'Donoghue, Richard.	Martin, Micheál.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	Maxwell, David.	
O'Flynn, Ken.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
O'Gorman, Roderic.	McConalogue, Charlie.	
O'Hara, Louis.	McCormack, Tony.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	McEntee, Helen.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	McGrath, Séamus.	
Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	McGreehan, Erin.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	McGuinness, John.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
Quaide, Liam.	Moynihan, Michael.	

Quinlivan, Maurice.	Moynihan, Shane.	
Rice, Pádraig.	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
Sherlock, Marie.	Murphy, Michael.	
Smith, Duncan.	Naughton, Hildegard.	
Tóibín, Peadar.	Neville, Joe.	
Wall, Mark.	O'Brien, Darragh.	
Ward, Mark.	O'Callaghan, Jim.	
Whitmore, Jennifer.	O'Connell, Maeve.	
	O'Connor, James.	
	O'Dea, Willie.	
	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
	O'Meara, Ryan.	
	O'Shea, John Paul.	
	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Smyth, Niamh.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Troy, Robert.	
	Ward, Barry.	

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

Question declared lost.

Reproductive Rights (Amendment) Bill 2026: Second Stage (Resumed) [Private Members]

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to Second Stage of the Reproductive Rights (Amendment) Bill 2026, taken on Wednesday, 13 May 2026. On the question, "That the Bill be now read a Second Time", a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Question put: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 30; Níl, 85; Staon, 36.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Aird, William.	Bennett, Cathy.
Ardagh, Catherine.	Brabazon, Tom.	Brady, John.
Bacik, Ivana.	Brennan, Brian.	Buckley, Pat.
Boland, Grace.	Brennan, Shay.	Byrne, Joanna.
Boyd Barrett, Richard.	Brophy, Colm.	Carthy, Matt.

Cairns, Holly.	Browne, James.	Cronin, Réada.
Coppinger, Ruth.	Burke, Colm.	Crowe, Seán.
Cummins, Jen.	Butler, Mary.	Cullinane, David.
Farrelly, Aidan.	Butterly, Paula.	Daly, Pa.
Gannon, Gary.	Buttimer, Jerry.	Devine, Máire.
Gibney, Sinéad.	Byrne, Malcolm.	Doherty, Pearse.
Hayes, Eoin.	Cahill, Michael.	Donnelly, Paul.
Healy, Seamus.	Callaghan, Catherine.	Ellis, Dessie.
Hearne, Rory.	Calleary, Dara.	Gould, Thomas.
Heneghan, Barry.	Canney, Seán.	Graves, Ann.
Kelly, Alan.	Carrigy, Micheál.	Guirke, Johnny.
Kenny, Eoghan.	Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Kenny, Martin.
Lawlor, George.	Chambers, Jack.	Kerrane, Claire.
Murphy, Paul.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Lawless, James.
Nash, Ged.	Clendennen, John.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.
O'Callaghan, Cian.	Collins, Michael.	McAuliffe, Paul.
O'Donoghue, Robert.	Collins, Niall.	McGettigan, Donna.
O'Gorman, Roderic.	Connolly, John.	McGuinness, Conor D.
Quaide, Liam.	Cooney, Joe.	Mitchell, Denise.
Rice, Pádraig.	Crowe, Cathal.	Mythen, Johnny.
Sherlock, Marie.	Cummins, John.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.
Smith, Duncan.	Currie, Emer.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.
Wall, Mark.	Daly, Martin.	O'Hara, Louis.
Ward, Barry.	Dempsey, Aisling.	O'Rourke, Darren.
Whitmore, Jennifer.	Devlin, Cormac.	O'Sullivan, Christopher.
	Dillon, Alan.	Ó Broin, Eoin.
	Dolan, Albert.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.
	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
	Fleming, Sean.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.
	Foley, Norma.	Quinlivan, Maurice.
	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Ward, Mark.
	Geoghegan, James.	
	Grealish, Noel.	
	Harkin, Marian.	
	Harris, Simon.	
	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
	Healy-Rae, Michael.	
	Heydon, Martin.	
	Higgins, Emer.	
	Keogh, Keira.	
	Lawless, Paul.	
	Lowry, Michael.	
	Martin, Micheál.	
	Maxwell, David.	
	McConalogue, Charlie.	
	McCormack, Tony.	
	McEntee, Helen.	
	McGrath, Mattie.	

	McGrath, Séamus.	
	McGreehan, Erin.	
	McGuinness, John.	
	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
	Moynihan, Michael.	
	Moynihan, Shane.	
	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
	Murphy, Michael.	
	Naughton, Hildegard.	
	Neville, Joe.	
	Nolan, Carol.	
	O'Brien, Darragh.	
	O'Callaghan, Jim.	
	O'Connell, Maeve.	
	O'Connor, James.	
	O'Dea, Willie.	
	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
	O'Donoghue, Richard.	
	O'Flynn, Ken.	
	O'Meara, Ryan.	
	O'Shea, John Paul.	
	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Smyth, Niamh.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Tóibín, Peadar.	
	Troy, Robert.	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Holly Cairns and Pádraig Rice; Níl, Deputies Peadar Tóibín and Paul Lawless.

Question declared lost.

Is féidir teacht ar Cheisteanna Scríofa ar www.oireachtas.ie.

Written Answers are published on the Oireachtas website.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar athló ar 8.41 p.m. go dtí 8.47 a.m., Déardaoin, an 14 Bealtaine 2026.

The Dáil adjourned at 8.41 p.m. until 8.47 a.m. on Thursday, 14 May 2026.