



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—Neamhcheartaithe
(OFFICIAL REPORT—Unrevised)

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 8 Iúil 2026

Wednesday, 8 July 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 John Connolly - To discuss the development of an injury unit clinic in Galway.

Deputy Joe Neville - To discuss the national semiconductor plan.

Deputy Shane Moynihan - To discuss the provision of a new school building at Scoil Chrónáin.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman - To discuss the increasing processing times for residence permit renewals.

Deputy Rory Hearne - To discuss ongoing issues with scramblers in the north west and the enforcement of Grace's Law.

Deputy Gary Gannon - To discuss withdrawal of solicitors from criminal legal aid cases.

Deputy Robert O'Donoghue - To discuss the introduction of a summer childcare support scheme.

Deputy Malcolm Byrne - To discuss the need for the development of Bunclody Community College, County Wexford.

Deputy Marie Sherlock - To discuss the enforcement of e-scooter legislation.

Deputy Thomas Gould - To discuss the usage of scramblers, e-bikes and e-scooters in Cork city.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú - To discuss the issues being created in the court system by the new legal aid model.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire - To discuss progress of the Cork southern distributor link multi-modal route.

Deputies Sorca Clarke, Martin Kenny - To discuss the Peterhead Ten.

Deputies Fionntán Ó Súilleabháin, Conor D. McGuinness and Natasha Newsome Drennan - To discuss CDNT issues in Waterford and the south east.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae - To discuss the current age limits for school bus drivers and school buses used for school transport.

Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan - To discuss the reimbursement of SkyClarys.

The matters raised by Deputies Connolly, O'Sullivan, O'Donoghue, Ó Súilleabháin, McGuinness and Newsome Drennan, and Neville have been selected for discussion.

Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate

Hospital Services

Deputy John Connolly: Mar a dúirt an Cathaoirleach Gníomhach, táim ag iarraidh ábhar a ardú, is é sin, an gá le hionad gortuithe beaga do dhaoine i nGaillimh. Le tamall fada, táim den tuairim gur cheart go mbeadh ionad mar seo againn i nGaillimh. I thank the Minister of State for coming to the House to discuss this issue. It has long been a contention of mine and, indeed, many others that Galway city and the wider region need, and would benefit from, a minor injuries unit. This unit should be located somewhere in the environs of Galway city. In February the HSE capital plan 2026 was published and the page detailing potential expenditure and infrastructural development in Galway noted a figure of €84,000 for the appraisal of a Galway injuries unit. I thought this was very welcome and I was hopeful there would be some progress on the issue. I was somewhat taken aback recently, following a parliamentary question in which I asked for an update on the development of this appraisal of a minor injuries unit in Galway, when the Minister, in her response, advised me that the HSE had advised her there was no plan to establish a new unit in Galway at this time.

The reply stated the national injury unit expansion programme prioritises locations based on population need, geographical gaps and clinical safety considerations. On all of these issues, Galway would tick the box. If we take geographical gaps, there is one minor injuries unit in the entire HSE West and North West health area while there are three in County Cork alone. There is a clear geographical gap there. With regard to population need, Galway city is a significant population centre. To consider equivalent population centres, Limerick has a minor injuries unit, there are three in Cork and there are two in Dublin. On a population base, a unit in Galway is warranted.

The area the appraisal needs to focus on is clinical safety consideration. The emergency department at University Hospital Galway is consistently under considerable pressure. I happened to be there on Monday night with a family member and the only way I can describe it is that there was limited standing room in the waiting area, such was the demand for people to be seen. For the third time this year, which I understand is an increase on previous years, management in the hospital has had to advise the public that, due to exceptionally high

emergency demand, elective procedures have been postponed and urgent and time-sensitive procedures are being prioritised. Management of the hospital advising the public that elective or non-urgent procedures are being cancelled due to demand at Galway emergency department is becoming more frequent. If we were to develop a minor injuries unit in the city, it would relieve some of this demand.

To look at data presented by the HSE this morning, there are 47 patients in the country waiting more than 24 hours in emergency departments throughout the country and nine of them are in Galway. This means 20% of the patients in this country who spent more than 24 hours in an emergency department over the past day or so are in Galway. There are considerable pressures on the emergency department in Galway. I know some of this is about increasing bed capacity in the hospital and there are plans to do that but it would be assisted if we developed a minor injuries unit, for which an allocation of funding for its appraisal was provided earlier this year.

As I said, I visited the UHG on Monday night. I am not a doctor and I do not diagnose but, looking at some of the people waiting for treatment, I could see that a number had sports injuries. Had they the option to attend a minor injuries clinic, it would have freed up greater capacity in the emergency department and people would have had to spend less time there. I ask that the Minister consider this again.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): I thank Deputy Connolly for raising this very important matter and for his continued engagement on urgency and emergency care capacity in Galway and the wider west and north west. I have answered many questions from Deputy Connolly on healthcare and I appreciate the focus he places on it. I will take this Topical Issue on behalf of the Minister for Health, Deputy Carroll MacNeill.

Ensuring that people receive the right care in the right place at the right time remains a core commitment of the Government under the Sláintecare reform programme. Injury units are a key part of this commitment. They provide safe convenient treatment for non-life-threatening injuries such as broken bones, sprains, minor burns and wounds, delivering the same standard of care as an emergency department but with significantly shorter waiting times and closer to home for many patients. This is exactly the point Deputy Connolly has been making with regard to how much he appreciates and supports what a minor injuries unit can provide.

Nationally, injury units continued to perform strongly. Last year, they saw more than 222,000 attendances, a 5% increase on 2024. Up to the end of June this year, attendances reached 115,000, a further 2% increase on the same period in 2025. It is very clear how important minor injury units are in communities. Crucially, the median patient experience time remains exceptionally low, at just 1.2 hours. This demonstrates the value of injury units in providing rapid access to care and reducing pressure on emergency departments, particularly for lower acuity injuries.

The HSE West and North West regional executive officer is working on the development of an investment package, including targeted supports for the Galway and Roscommon area. This includes enhancements to acute community and diagnostic capacity across the region. While this work is at an early stage, consideration is being given to the feasibility of the development of an injury unit in Galway. As Deputy Connolly has said, €84,000 has been provided.

With the new structures, we now have six regional health areas and six regional executive officers. I know that Deputy Connolly knows the regional executive officer in the area, Tony Canavan, very well and it would be well worth having a conversation with him because an awful lot of decisions have been devolved to regional areas.

9 o'clock

The project is at appraisal stage, which involves assessing feasibility, demand, site suitability, clinical alignment, cost estimates and value-for-money considerations. Further updates will be available once the initial feasibility work has concluded.

It is important to situate Galway within the wider national development pipeline. Four units are scheduled for delivery in 2026, at Athlone, Ballina, Carlow and Tallaght. These represent the current national pipeline and reflect the HSE's assessment of geographical gaps, population growth and clinical safety considerations. The HSE continues to review expansion needs and is working to future-proof the system by standardising opening hours to 8 a.m. until 8 p.m., seven days per week across existing sites.

I know the Minister for Health and the Department see the merit in the expansion of minor injury units, and four are targeted for this year. The fact that €84,000 has been allocated for the appraisal of a Galway injury unit is very positive. It is important to get a line in the capital plan, and that is what happened. The Department will continue to engage closely with the HSE and the regional executive officer, REO, to ensure that Galway's urgent and emergency care services evolve in line with population growth, service demand and the needs of local communities. I will raise with the Minister the fact that the Deputy has raised this issue again. Conversations locally are important too.

Deputy John Connolly: I very much welcome the response. I particularly welcome the clarity it brings, in that the Minister of State said consideration is being given to the feasibility of the development of a minor injury unit in Galway. If I had not received a response from the Minister just last week advising me there were no current plans to establish a new unit in Galway at this time, I would not have been here this morning. There is clearly a discrepancy there. I can understand that occurs, but what concerns me also is that this discrepancy might also suggest the minor injury unit is not being afforded the importance and priority it should be as afforded as a health solution to address one of the significant problems we have in Galway, that being the delays in accident and emergency services. If we could develop this unit and drive this project in a quicker timeframe, it would help to alleviate some of the problems in accident and emergency services.

I understand, as I said, that the greater solution to this problem in Galway is increased bed capacity. We are not going to see that for some time, but I welcome the appointment of a design team to develop two new bed blocks at University Hospital Galway. The team has commenced its work and we hope it will bring a proposal to the planning stage soon. We also hope the project will be included as a piece of critical infrastructure, and that the Government will consider that.

In the intervening period, however, there is a need to address the issue of people waiting long periods, many for over 24 hours, in a temporary accident and emergency facility at University Hospital Galway. While it is an improvement on the previous facility, it is

considered temporary. When we have the new additional bed blocks in the new hospital, perhaps we will be able to increase capacity there. In the intervening period, a minor injury unit would help a lot. I welcome the clarity today that it is being considered. I am happy with the Minister of State's advice and I will take this issue up with local health officials. In fairness to them, they give public representatives opportunities to meet them quarterly to discuss capital projects. The next time I meet them, I will certainly stress that this project is particularly important for the city, county and region.

Deputy Mary Butler: I reiterate that the HSE West and North West regional executive officer, Mr. Canavan, is currently working on the development of an investment package, including targeted supports for both the Galway and Roscommon areas. This includes enhancements to acute, community and diagnostic capacity across the region. While this work is at an early stage, consideration is being given to the feasibility of the development of an injury unit in Galway. It is very important that I repeat that. A sum of €84,000 was allocated for the appraisal of a Galway injury unit.

I have been a Minister of State in the Department of Health for the last six years. What we are about in the Department is improving capacity and trying to ensure the throughput in emergency departments and acute hospitals is fluid. It is also important that we deliver community supports on the ground. Some 225,000 people attended minor injury units last year, and the median time taken was one and a half hours. There is no comparison.

I think the Deputy is pushing an open door, and he should continue to push it and engage locally as well. The Minister has a plan for this year to open four new units. Everything depends on funding and more units will be opened next year. The Deputy's intervention is very timely.

Childcare Services

Deputy Robert O'Donoghue: I raise an issue brought to me by my constituents in Dublin Fingal West, primarily in north County Dublin, namely, the rising costs of summer camps and the impact this is having on middle and lower income families. For example, the cost of one four-day summer camp is running at €150 per child. For families with two or three children, this quickly becomes impossible to manage. Many parents are juggling household bills, food costs, the cost-of-living crisis and everyday expenses. For those relying on social welfare or on low incomes, summer camps are just out of reach. No one is suggesting that these camps should be free or that providers are charging unreasonable prices. We recognise that staff must be paid, halls must be hired, insurance must be covered and materials and equipment come with costs. These organisations are providing valuable services and deserve to be supported. This is exactly why we need to look at how the Government can support families rather than expecting community groups or camp providers to absorb these costs themselves.

The reality is that many children are spending the summer watching their friends attending sports camps, arts camps and activity programmes, while they are being left behind simply because their parents cannot afford the fees. This exclusion can be incredibly difficult for a child to understand. They do not see budgets, household incomes or finances. They only see that everybody else gets to go and they do not.

I have been contacted by several parents in the constituency who have described to me these conversations with their children. No parent wants to tell their child that they cannot take part simply because the family does not have the money. For this reason, I ask that the Minister consider introducing or extending a summer support scheme to help families with the cost of summer camps. We already provide support in many areas, including, in particular, childcare through core funding. I believe this is another area where targeted assistance could make a real difference. Could the Department examine the possibility of a means-tested subsidy or a voucher scheme for summer camps to be included in the budget for 2027? Such a measure would support families, help providers maintain services and, most importantly, ensure children are not excluded because of their family's financial circumstances.

Each child deserves the opportunity to enjoy the summer, make friends, learn new skills and participate in activities that contribute to their development. Children's access to these opportunities should not be solely based on their family's financial circumstances. I hope the Minister will give serious consideration to this proposal and work towards a practical solution with family support groups and the summer camp organisers delivering these valuable summer programmes.

Minister of State at the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (Deputy Emer Higgins): I thank Deputy O'Donoghue for raising this issue and offering me the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality, Deputy Norma Foley. The Department is conscious that the cost of early learning and childcare and organised summer activities can present financial challenges for families, particularly those on lower incomes. Through a range of measures, the Government seeks to reduce these costs and improve access to high-quality, affordable childcare.

A key support in this regard is the national childcare scheme, NCS. This scheme provides financial supports in the form of either universal or income-assessed subsidies to reduce the cost of early learning and childcare for eligible families. The scheme operates on a tapered, income-assessed basis, with subsidy rates reducing progressively as household incomes increase. This design ensures that families with the lowest levels of income receive the highest rates of support. The scheme also includes a universal element whereby all eligible families may apply for a minimum of €2.14 per hour for a maximum of 40 weekly hours, regardless of their income levels.

While the NCS does not provide subsidies for stand-alone summer camps or recreational activities outside of Tusla-registered early learning and childcare, many participating NCS services continue to operate during the summer season. This ensures public funding is provided where there is assurance of the quality of provision. Where eligible families register with such a service, they may continue to avail of their NCS subsidy during the summer months. Importantly, families may choose to claim the maximum weekly hours, namely, 45 hours, during school holidays, including the summer.

An evaluation of the NCS has recently commenced. This review will assess the performance of the scheme to date and its operation within the wider early learning and childcare funding and policy environment. It will also identify any improvements that could be made to enhance accessibility and affordability and to ensure that the scheme is working for as many families as possible.

Deputy Robert O'Donoghue: I thank the Minister of State. It is good to see the Department is aware of the issue. The NCS is a good scheme but it is generally for childcare, and I am asking more specifically about summer camps. I am not sure if the NCS is usable in summer camps, though I am open to correction on that. We are looking for targeted supports. Like the NCS, we support school meals, childcare and school transport because we recognise the barriers families face. Why should summer activities be any different? I am not suggesting every family should receive a subsidy. I am asking the Minister of State to examine targeted, means-tested supports for those who need them the most. Summer activities keep children active, connected and engaged. They support their well-being and ease the pressure on families during the school holidays. Will the Minister of State commit to engaging with summer camp providers and family organisations to examine what practical support schemes specifically for summer camps can be introduced ahead of next summer? If we genuinely believe every child deserves an equal start in life, we must also believe every child deserves an equal opportunity to take part in activities that help them learn, socialise and thrive during the summer months.

Deputy Emer Higgins: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. As I said, childcare is a priority for the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality and the Government as a whole. The Deputy is specifically referring to summer camps and recreational activities outside the NCS. Summer camps which provide early years service, that is, summer camps for children under six years of age, are considered an early years service and must therefore be registered, unless exempted as defined under section 58A of the Child Care Act, inserted by section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013. I would like it noted that further enhancements of the income-assessed subsidy are being introduced from 31 October of this year. These include an increase in the lower income threshold to qualify for the maximum subsidy rate from €26,000 to €34,000. This will ensure more families on lower incomes, including those below the relative poverty line, will qualify for the highest level of support. In addition, increases to the multiple-child discount component of the income-assessed subsidy for families for two or more children will further reduce families' reckonable income, thereby supporting access to higher subsidy rates for childcare. As I have said, that childcare is available through NCS services throughout the summer months.

Disability Services

Deputy Fionntán Ó Súilleabháin: I highlight the serious case of a ten-year-old called Poppy, whose experience is a compelling example of a wider service failure for children in my constituency of Wicklow-Wexford, which covers south Wicklow and north Wexford. Poppy has complex feeding difficulties and has been referred between the child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, the children's disability network team, or CDNT, primary care and the complex feeding clinic for over three years. Despite CAMHS advice that Poppy needs specialist dietary input, north Wexford CDNT has not had a dietician for the past five years. This is shocking and it means Poppy does not get the type of support she needs. Her condition has deteriorated to the point where anti-anxiety medication and possible PEG tube placement or force-feeding have been discussed. The family have funded assessments and therapies privately due to the lack public services. Poppy's case highlights the lack of such services for children in south Wicklow and north Wexford. There are many long-term vacancies in the

north Wexford CDNT, there is no current occupational therapy service and only limited physiotherapy is available. Families are experiencing significant delays, there is poor communication and unclear referral pathways and parents are reporting extensive waiting lists. I want to know what is going to be done about it.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: In raising the issues with CDNT services across the south east, in Waterford in particular, I am really concerned about the situation in Dungarvan. The service there is down two whole-time equivalent speech and language therapists, and that is on top of a low base. I am very concerned about waiting lists. There are six children on a waiting list for CDNT services in Dungarvan for over 12 months. The situation is not much better in the Clonmel and Waterford CDNTs which cater to parts of County Waterford. This comes on top of the latest figures I have - though there may have been some movement since I got them - showing an 18% vacancy rate in CDNTs across the State. This means children are being left behind. I am thinking of a young boy in west Waterford who was really coming on with speech and language therapy but who has been left in the lurch. Since I mentioned locally that I would be raising the issue this week, I have been inundated with messages and emails, most of which have already been passed on to the relevant offices as representations. It just shows the issues that exist, despite the best efforts of the people working in the CDNTs, who are really diligent, dedicated and excellent. This is putting huge pressure on families and holding children back in their development and also their wellness.

Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan: I acknowledge Kilkenny city has bucked the trend and is operating a full staff complement, which is great to see. However, it is a completely different story in south Kilkenny. The team serving Ferrybank, south Kilkenny and Waterford north city has a vacancy rate of 52%. Over half its posts remain unfilled. That is a massive failing for children across these communities. To make matters worse, the planned closure of Carlow College, which provided so many social care courses in the area, is another serious blow to the sector and the region. In Carlow the vacancy rate for the CDNT stands at a staggering 42%. While some areas have made real progress, others have been completely neglected. Will the Department introduce targeted measures for teams like those in Waterford north city and Carlow to tackle the high vacancy rates? I know from working with adults with disabilities that if some of the people I supported had received services when they required them, they would be in employment now and leading much different lives. It is too late for them. We need to look after the children now and see more staff in these places.

Deputy Emer Higgins: I thank all three Deputies for raising this really important issue and giving me the opportunity to respond. As the Minister of State with responsibility for disability, I, along with the Minister, Deputy Foley, and the Government, fully recognise the importance of providing timely and appropriate supports for people with disabilities and their families. We are committed to improving access to these services across the country, including for children and families in Waterford and the south east.

The HSE children's disability services team has undergone significant reform and restructuring over the past few years. The core focus of these changes has been to ensure children with complex needs and their families receive an appropriate and accessible family-centred service. HSE preliminary data for March 2026 indicates our CDNTs are providing

services and supports nationally for 45,472 children and strategies and supports for wait-listed children with urgent needs, where staffing resources allow.

These are encouraging in terms of the numbers of children receiving support but there has also been encouraging progress in the numbers on our waiting lists reducing. In that same period, the national CDNT waiting list has reduced by 50% from 16,522 children in 2023 to 8,200 children at the end of March this year. In the national services plan for this year, the HSE is committed to a further 25% reduction in the numbers on our waiting lists. The HSE preliminary data to the end of March this year indicates that for Dublin and the south-east health region, which is the region all three Deputies represent, 6,834 children are on open CDNT caseloads or are receiving services, and a waiting list of 2,078 children remains. The children's disability network team in Waterford and the south east continues to provide services and supports for children from birth to 18 years of age. I would like to pay tribute to all the staff working in our CDNT teams, not just in that region but across Ireland.

Like many areas across the country, they continue to face recruitment and retention challenges across a range of health and social care professions. As Deputy Ó Súilleabháin pointed out, in the north west and in south Wicklow, there is a particular issue with dietitians; as Deputy McGuinness pointed out, in Dungarvan, there is a particular issue in terms of speech and language therapists; and as Deputy Newsome Drennan pointed out, while in south Kilkenny there are high vacancy rates, in Kilkenny, there are not. There are areas where vacancy rates are higher and we will be prioritising the teams with the highest vacancy rates when it comes to allocation of additional resources. Services are operating under significant pressure. That is as a result of those vacancy rates and also the demand. While teams continue to work hard to meet the needs of the children and families, workforce shortages can impact the capacity to provide assessments therapies and interventions. This can slow things down and, ultimately, everybody wants that sped up. Unfortunately, children on the CDNT register, whether they are on waiting lists or on an open caseload, are likely to be waiting some time in terms of intervention. That is a direct result of those issues, which we are determined to overcome. I acknowledge the frustration this can cause for children and their families.

The HSE and CDNT lead agencies are continuing to work actively and collaboratively to recruit into funded posts to strengthen workforce capacity and support staff retention across the sector. We have provided funding for additional posts in recent years to enhance the capacity of teams and reduce waiting lists. Most recently, €8 million was secured in this year's budget to support the recruitment of 150 additional posts for CDNT teams. As I said, priority will be given to the teams with which there are the highest vacancy waiting lists.

Deputy Fionntán Ó Súilleabháin: In north Wexford and south Wicklow, if a child needs specialist care, say, in the area of physiotherapy, occupational therapy, OT, speech and language, psychology or with a dietitian, if they are in desperate need, what procedures are in place if the necessary specialist intervention is not available due to staffing shortages? Does the HSE consider it acceptable that children remain without these services? If they are unavailable, is there an emergency plan B to deal with desperate cases like these? There are many of them. I know of so many people who cannot access any service, so what is plan B?

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: I thank the Minister of State for the response. Like her, I want to pay tribute to those who are working in the services. They have, in many cases with one hand tied behind their backs, managed to clear backlogs arising out of the pandemic and they do their work to a really excellent standard. As we know, however, there are ongoing issues in terms of recruitment and retention, with retention being a key issue. That is not to say there is not capacity elsewhere, however, and for those children whose development and ability to live their lives fully is being held back, Government needs to look, in the interim at the very least, at private provision or provision in areas outside of where they live, so that at least they can access some modicum of service in the short term.

Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan: I thank the Minister of State for her response. While I welcome that there is progress being made, the harsh reality of this is that much of the progress is moving at a snail's pace. Over 2,100 children across the region I live in are on a CDNT waiting list. Almost 1,600 of those children having been on a waiting list for over 12 months. This number just compounds how slow progress is being made. Every day that a child in need is missing out on vital care is causing harm. It is as simple as that, so we need to see faster progress.

Deputy Emer Higgins: I thank the Deputies very much. I fully appreciate not just their frustrations but those of the parents and children they are here representing. I am pleased to be able to say that we are making progress when it comes to recruitment. The HSE reported a 28% increase in staffing levels nationwide from October 2023 to October 2025. That equates to 448 whole-time equivalents now working in HSE disability services. That includes an additional 321 who are specifically health and social care professionals. We are doing a lot of work to increase that pipeline to be able to hire from. One example of this is the student sponsorship programme, which we launched in April of last year. That has already resulted in more than 40 graduates taking up roles in our CDNTs nationally. This includes six student sponsorships across integrated healthcare area, IHA, Carlow, Kilkenny and south Tipperary and IHA Wexford and Waterford. Therefore, the Deputies will see even in their own areas that this is an initiative that is working to help support their constituents. In addition, a dedicated disability workforce strategy is being developed by the HSE this year to meet growing service demands and address recruitment and retention challenges. While challenges do remain, both the Government, the HSE and our funded service providers - our section 38 and section 39 organisations - remain absolutely committed to improving access to disability services, strengthening workforce capacity and ensuring that children with disabilities and their families receive the supports they need.

Information and Communications Technology

Deputy Joe Neville: The issue I want to raise today is the national semiconductor plan. A lot of people wonder what exactly semiconductors are and what exactly that means because it can be a catch-all name in itself. Realistically, they are the chips that power modern electronics and modern computing. Ultimately, they are one of the most important items worldwide. This is obviously something we cannot measure easily but we know how important it is. We have seen the geopolitical impact of semiconductors over the past number of years with the issues in Taiwan, the issues with China and the discussions with America. Semiconductors have been

a key part of that focus world-wide. Some might ask why I am raising this topic, which may be an international topic, and why it is so important. For me, this is a really local issue. One of the largest semiconductor plants world-wide is only a few hundred metres from my house. It is a large employer where a multitude of my friends, neighbours and even family, at times, have been employed. Intel has been hugely important in north Kildare and, indeed, internationally. We know that in the US, the CHIPS Act has been hugely important and that there have been similar plans in Europe. Ultimately, what I want to discuss today is the national semiconductor plan and we, in Ireland, are doing about and its progress.

Obviously, Intel is a key issue I have raised since I came into the Dáil. As I said, I know the impact and footprint it has all across north Kildare, Leixlip specifically and, indeed, Ireland, whether that is through rates paid to Kildare County Council, wages paid or, indeed, corporation tax. Whatever element it is, its support to the State is enormous and that is something of which I think we are all very conscious. Once again, with its importance and the key impacts of the national semiconductor plan in mind, what I am specifically asking about today is the progress and plans we have regarding the clusters, growth and employment opportunities we have for semiconductors. We all know that Ireland and the world are changing from an employment perspective. One hundred years ago, Ireland was an agri-state. It is now very much a mix.

Agriculture is still obviously hugely important, but at the same time, it is almost industrial or post-industrial, in many ways, at true AI computing. However, Intel remains at the forefront of that and is a place where there are thousands of jobs. Indeed, 4,000 or 5,000 are direct employees and there are several thousand more employees working there, not to mention the employment ecosystem that extends well beyond that.

I wanted to raise the real importance of semiconductors and the importance of Intel, because we know the difficulties such entities face in Ireland. We have challenges with energy, employment opportunities and the skill sets required. Ultimately, these are really technological skills.

How is the national semiconductor plan going, what different phases are we at and how can we continue to support companies like Intel and the opportunities that might arise from it in having other clusters and companies in that same area?

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (Deputy Alan Dillon): I thank the Deputy for raising this important matter. He is absolutely right to highlight the importance of this sector, particularly for the communities he represents in north Kildare, such as Leixlip, which has played a central role in Ireland's technological success.

The Government and I completely recognise the importance of this strategic sector. That is why in May 2025, the Minister, Deputy Burke, launched Silicon Island: Ireland's National Semiconductor Strategy, which aims to make Ireland a global leader in semiconductors. Through a successful implementation of its three pillars - building on our strong ecosystem, developing skills and talent, and identifying and seizing opportunities - Silicon Island promises to deliver for multinational and indigenous Irish companies alike. Significant progress has been made in implementing the strategy over the past year. Already, over €70 million in combined national and EU funding has been secured for the Tyndall National Institute's participation in three European pilot lines under the European Chips Act.

The national competence centre for semiconductors, I-C3, is now operational as part of a European-wide network, providing SMEs and researchers with access to world-class expertise, pilot production lines, design platforms, funding supports and training. The expert group on future skills needs has commenced a specific study on the semiconductor sector, which is due to be published in quarter 3 of this year. This is in addition to the next generation sites initiatives, which is being led by IDA Ireland to deliver large-scale, fully serviced industrial sites to secure and accommodate future semiconductor investments.

Through increased investment in Ireland's R and D capabilities, training and upskilling our current and future workforce, scaling our SME sector and strengthening our competitiveness, this strategy will continue to support existing and future investments in Ireland's semiconductor sector. Indeed, the strategy is already delivering for companies in Ireland, with a number of companies, including Openchip and Qualcomm, making major investment announcements in recent months. However, there is still more to do as a Government to advance this fast-growing sector, and the launch of the advisory council to the semiconductor sector will mark further progress on the next phase of the Silicon Island's implementation. This industry-led forum will support the ongoing growth and development of the sector and assist in making Ireland and Irish companies world leaders in this vital technological sector.

Deputy Joe Neville: I welcome the response, as well as the many announcements that have come in and the efforts that have been made. Even going back to last year's budget, one thing I highlighted beforehand and discussed was the importance of the R and D tax credit. We can see how companies like Intel benefit, and I would argue that a lot more Irish SMEs should. We should make it easier for them separately, but that is a different point. We have tax innovations in this way, which have strengthened the opportunity for the likes of Intel. At the same time, we need to ensure we have a plan in place, not only for Intel but for other companies that may wish to come here, as the Minister of State has outlined.

Semiconductors are also a strategic opportunity from an Irish perspective. We are ahead of the curve from a European point of view in north Kildare in that we have Intel, which many other countries in Europe do not have. We have a knowledge base and a history. Intel has been there since I was a child. With that local knowledge and capability, we want to ensure Ireland stays a step ahead.

I want to ensure we stay ahead of the likes of the Netherlands, Germany and Italy because ultimately, while we are all part of the EU, there is a lot of competition in this regard. We need to make sure Ireland continues to be at the forefront of such a strategic endeavour. We have seen the discussion worldwide about America wanting to get semiconductors because of their importance from a military perspective, and that will have consequences in Europe. We need to make sure Ireland is at the forefront. I know this is outlined in the plan, but ultimately, it is about getting those concrete steps to ensure that happens.

Deputy Alan Dillon: I thank the Deputy for raising this important matter and for his work on the artificial intelligence committee, alongside the critical infrastructure committee. We recognise the importance Intel brings, not just to Leixlip and Kildare but also to Ireland in general. It is the cornerstone of Ireland's semiconductor ecosystem and one of the most significant industrial investments in the history of the State. It is one of the largest private sector employers, and we need to continue to support it through the Government, the IDA and

Enterprise Ireland. We remain actively engaged with Intel to ensure it can continue to grow but it is also supported through its competitiveness, talent development and investment. I know the Deputy has had continuous engagement with the Minister, Deputy Burke, on that.

Getting back to Silicon Island, it is not simply a strategy document. It is very much a programme of investment in skills, research, infrastructure and competitiveness. We have started from a position of strength, and we need to continue that investment over the long term. That is why we are actively working with European partners on the chips Act 2.0. This will build on progress that has been achieved under the original European Chips Act.

As part of our European Presidency, we will work to advance the agenda and strengthen Europe's position on critical semiconductor technologies. That is why the Government is working with IDA Ireland to advance the next generation sites. We want Ireland to continue to be attractive to semiconductor manufacturers, enhancing the big multinationals that are already here. Through the continued support of firms such as Intel and investment in skills and innovation, we can continue to remain at the forefront of Europe's semiconductor future.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 9.48 a.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 10 a.m.

Sitting suspended at 9.48 a.m. and resumed at 10 a.m.

10 o'clock

A Place Called Home for Adults with an Intellectual Disability: Motion [Private Members]

Deputy Liam Quaide: I move:

That Dáil Éireann:

agrees that:

- every adult with an intellectual disability has the right to live as independently as possible in their own community, with the supports they need to live with dignity, autonomy and security;
- Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) recognises the equal right of disabled people to live in the community, with choices equal to others;
- each adult with an intellectual disability is a unique individual, with their own preferences, relationships, aspirations, needs and levels of support;
- a home is not simply a bed, a placement or a service vacancy, but a place where a person has belonging, continuity, relationships, choice, privacy, autonomy and support;
- planning for supported living and residential supports must begin before crisis arises, not only when an ageing parent or family carer can no longer continue providing care;
- supports should be organised around the person's will and preferences, with the involvement of family members or chosen supporters where the person wishes, and with access to supported decision-making and independent advocacy where required;

- family relationships, community connections and proximity to home should be supported wherever possible; and
- people should have meaningful choice over where, how, and with whom they live, and should not be forced into a single model of accommodation or support;

notes that:

- too many adults with an intellectual disability, and their families, are forced through a bureaucratic maze involving service providers, the Health Service Executive (HSE), local authorities and other public bodies;
- many families are left without a single public body taking clear responsibility for planning the person's future living arrangement;
- this failure to plan means that the State too often intervenes only when a family reaches breaking point, a parent dies or becomes unwell, or an emergency placement becomes unavoidable;
- the true level of unmet residential and supported living need for adults with an intellectual disability is not known, as the HSE has stated that there is no centrally maintained waiting list for residential services, and the HSE's Disability Support Application Management Tool records applications for additional funded supports, but is not a chronological waiting list and does not represent a statutory entitlement to services;
- available figures are, therefore, only a partial picture of need, and understate the scale of the crisis, as many disabled people and their families do not know that they are required to be on a local authority social housing list to be recorded within housing need;
- at the end of quarter 2 2025, HSE data recorded 1,389 applicants for new residential services, up from 776 in 2019, but the HSE has stated that this was a "point in time" analysis and may not include applications received but not yet processed;
- the Department of Health's Disability Capacity Review to 2032, published in 2021, projected a need for at least 1,900 additional residential places by 2032 under a minimum projection, and up to 3,900 additional places to restore provision to pre-2008 levels;
- the Before We Die campaign has highlighted the fear and uncertainty faced by ageing parents, who do not know where their adult son or daughter will live when they can no longer provide care;
- in evidence to the Houses of the Oireachtas, Before We Die stated that, of 1,000 families surveyed, only 2 per cent had a formal written housing plan for their adult son or daughter with an intellectual disability;
- Before We Die also stated that only 19 per cent of the adults with an intellectual disability in its survey were on the housing list, underlining that official housing and residential data cannot be treated as a reliable measure of true need;
- Before We Die has also stated that more than 2,000 adults with an intellectual disability live with parents aged 70 or older, including 500 whose parents are over 80 years;

- parliamentary question data has shown that at least 606 people with an intellectual disability in disability residential settings were living outside their home county, and at least 193 were living more than 100 kilometres from their family home or community of origin;
- these figures are minimum figures only, because major gaps remain in the State's data on how far people with an intellectual disability are living from home;
- the HSE has stated that information on residents living in residential centres more than 100 kilometres from their community of origin is not collated nationally;
- in HSE Dublin and Midlands, specific data on residential placements more than 100 kilometres from home was not available, with the HSE stating that a proposed information technology change to the National Ability Supports System would be required to provide this data in future;
- in HSE Dublin and Midlands, data was also not readily available on how long people had been living away from their home community, on moves completed closer to home, or on the reasons for out-of-area placements;
- in HSE South West, the reported figure for people living outside their county did not include people from Kerry placed in Cork, or people from Cork placed in Kerry, even where those placements may be more than 100 kilometres from home, because records only captured people placed outside the HSE South West region;
- there is no adequate system for routinely maintaining and publishing national data on the distance from home of adults with an intellectual disability placed in residential or supported living settings;
- emergency and out-of-area placements can become permanent by default, even where a person wishes to live closer to family, community and familiar supports;
- the latest available figures show a growing reliance on private for-profit disability residential provision, rising from approximately 8 per cent of residential places in early 2022, to approximately 16 per cent by the end of 2025;
- in 2025, approximately €526 million of public money was paid to around 220 private for-profit providers for disability residential placements, with approximately €306 million paid to the five largest providers;
- since 2021, there has been a doubling in the proportion of residential placements provided by for-profit companies, without adequate transparency on cost, location, quality, distance from home, human rights outcomes or long-term planning;
- the HSE, Section 38 and Section 39 providers, are expected to deliver complex services, while too often operating within short-term and uncertain funding arrangements; and
- younger adults with an intellectual disability should not be left in nursing homes, or other inappropriate settings, because the State has failed to plan suitable community-based alternatives;

further notes that:

- Inclusion Ireland, and other disability organisations, have emphasised the importance of Article 19, personal assistance, personalised budgets, person-centred respite and short breaks, therapeutic supports and a continuum of community-based supports;
- disabled people, families and representative organisations have led the struggle for independent living, deinstitutionalisation, and community inclusion over many decades;
- this advocacy helped secure Time to Move on from Congregated Settings, Ireland's ratification of the UNCRPD and its Optional Protocol, and the wider shift towards rights-based community living;
- a rights-based system must plan homes and supports around people, rather than placing people wherever a vacancy happens to arise; and
- public funding for long-term disability homes should build public, voluntary, not-for-profit and community capacity, rather than deepen a market in crisis placements; and

calls on the Government to:

- publish a five-year national community living strategy for adults with an intellectual disability, prepared jointly by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the HSE, local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs);
- include in that strategy projected need, regional planning targets and annual targets to reduce waiting lists, emergency placements, out-of-area placements and inappropriate placements, including younger adults living in nursing homes;
- ensure that the strategy includes a robust national assessment of unmet need, including people recorded through HSE disability services, local authorities, AHBs and service providers, and people living at home with ageing parents or family carers who are not yet captured on any formal housing or residential list;
- establish a single statutory community living pathway with one point of referral, one co-ordinated assessment process, one named responsible team, clear decision-making timeframes and access to independent advocacy;
- ensure that every adult assessed as requiring ongoing supported living has an individual community living plan developed with the person and, where the person wishes, with family members or other supporters;
- ensure that individual community living plans address preferred location, choice of living arrangement, support needs, safeguarding, healthcare, transport, day supports, family and community connection, decision-making supports and transition steps;
- provide a clear route for review, where the person, their family member or chosen supporter disagrees with the proposed pathway;
- fund a sufficient range of community-based supports, including supported living, personal assistance, personalised budgets, home support, person-centred respite and short

breaks, shared living arrangements, individual tenancies, therapeutic supports and intensive community supports where required;

- expand public and not-for-profit community living services through multi-annual funding arrangements for HSE and Section 38 and Section 39 providers;

- progressively reduce dependence on private for-profit providers for long-term community living services, while ensuring continuity of support, independent advocacy and protection from forced moves for existing residents;

- require written reasons, a rights assessment, a safeguarding plan, and a review timeline for any emergency or out-of-area placement;

- prepare a plan to support a person placed far from home to return or relocate closer to their family and home community, unless this is contrary to the person's will and preference;

- ensure that funding and service development are linked to transparent human rights, safeguarding and quality standards, including standards on choice, inclusion, privacy, advocacy, family and community connection, and restraint reduction;

- routinely maintain and publish national data on the distance from home of adults with an intellectual disability, placed in residential or supported living settings;

- publish an annual report, setting out by region and provider type:

- the number of adults with an intellectual disability awaiting residential, supported living or community living supports;

- the number known to be living with carers aged over 70, and over 80;

- the number living outside their home county;

- the number placed more than 50 kilometres, and more than 100 kilometres from their family home or community of origin;

- the length of time spent living away from home;

- the number of emergency placements;

- the number of placements arising from family crisis, including the death, serious illness or incapacity of a parent or primary carer;

- expenditure by provider type;

- progress in implementing individual community living plans; and

- the number of people with a documented plan to move closer to home, and the number of such moves completed each year; and

- present that annual report for debate to both Houses of the Oireachtas, and respond with actions, timelines and funding requirements arising from its findings.

Worried, anxious, fearful, angry, afraid, powerless, terrified, scared, overwhelmed, abandoned, hopeless. Words like these came up again and again in a survey the Social

Democrats conducted in the run-up to this motion. Most of the 513 responses came from families of people with an intellectual disability but we also heard directly from people with an intellectual disability themselves and from advocates. Then there were the written responses that stopped us in our tracks – parents saying in different ways that they hoped to outlive their own adult son or daughter because they had so little confidence the State would support them properly when they were gone. That tells us the depths of this crisis in community and living supports for people with an intellectual disability and the emotional reality for the many families caught up in it.

The Social Democrats are bringing forward this motion because adults with an intellectual disability are being left without a clear plan for where they will live, what supports they will have and what happens when a parent becomes ill, can no longer continue caring, or dies. Thousands of families are living in that kind of purgatory. When crises come, the answer from the HSE is too often whatever placement can be found, even if that means traumatic upheaval from family, community, routines and friends.

Each person with an intellectual disability is a unique individual with their own preferences, wishes, relationships, fears, strengths, vulnerabilities and support needs. The starting point must be the person - where they feel a sense of belonging, their relationships, connections, the pursuits that give their life meaning and the place they can truly call home. The current system could not be more jarringly at odds with that basic right. Too often it asks where is there a bed or vacancy - somewhere, someone can be put. This motion is about bringing humanity, planning and accountability into a system that has drifted for far too long.

The Before We Die campaign deserves enormous credit for taking this crisis out of the shadows and bringing it into public view, for uniting families in common purpose and for turning private anguish into a political force. In particular, I thank Tony Murray, his wife Susan Corrigan, their daughter Aoife, and also Sinéad McGrath, who has led the campaign in Cork and her sons Alex and Lee. Their dynamism, openness and encouragement have inspired many families and helped ensure that this motion is rooted in real lives and real experiences. I also thank Paul Alford, whose experience has helped inform this motion. Paul has an intellectual disability and spent 30 years in an institution before he was finally able to rebuild a life in the community. He now works with Inclusion Ireland. He has spoken about what the institutional life meant for him: very little freedom and other people making decisions for him. Paul is working to make sure nobody else has that experience. He is worried about people living far from their communities with no choice in their lives, and about Ireland ever going back to institutions.

As Tony Murray, chairperson of Before We Die, said at a recent public meeting in Cork, we have replaced the high walls of institutions with distance. For many people with an intellectual disability, moving on from congregated settings has meant a new form of alienation, dislocation from home, being placed in an emergency arrangement and being left there until it effectively becomes long-term exile.

Before We Die has highlighted that more than 2,300 adults with an intellectual disability are living with parents over 70, many with parents over 80 and some with parents over 90. Replies to my parliamentary questions show that at least 606 people with an intellectual disability in residential settings are living outside their home county and at least 193 are living more than 100 km from home. However, these figures are likely to be much higher because large parts

of the country were unaccounted for in the HSE's data. A major part of the current crisis is that we do not have a full picture of its scale.

The motion requires a proper assessment of unmet need; one integrated referral pathway with clear lines of responsibility so families are not passed between local authorities, the HSE and other service providers; individual community living plans built around the will and preference of the person; and a five-year national community living strategy with funding, targets, regional planning and public reporting. The motion calls for the provision of multi-annual funding so public and not-for-profit providers can plan and sustain proper supports and a phased reduction in reliance on for-profit residential provision. This is not about writing a blank cheque for service providers on a simplistic notion that non-profits are all good and for-profit companies are all bad. It is about ensuring that Government investment is tied to a strategic plan for services and to human rights standards.

We are approaching this constructively and are ready to engage with the Government on it. I acknowledge the valuable work of Fianna Fáil TD, Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan, in Cork, linking the Before We Die campaign with both city and county councils. This is a crisis that will require sustained efforts across the Oireachtas. To borrow one of Micheál Martin's favourite phrases: We do not claim to have a monopoly on compassion on this issue but we do have the drive to address it. We approach the crisis with ambition and humility. Ambition, because families have waited far too long for a planned system of community living. Humility, because the dysfunction in the system is so deeply entrenched. Entrenched does not mean inevitable. A crisis that has been years in the making will be fixed only by people who are in it for the long haul and by proper investment. If the Government is serious about this, we are ready to work with it. Families have had enough sympathy; they need a plan. They need to see political urgency in action. If the Government is serious about facing up to the crisis, we will support it. If not, we are ready to take on that responsibility ourselves.

Deputy Holly Cairns: First, I thank Deputy Quaide for his dedication and really hard work on this issue. Our motion today can be boiled down to one simple principle: disabled people have the same rights as everyone else. They have the right to a home, the right to decide where they live, the right to remain part of their community and the right to relationships, privacy, autonomy and dignity. These are not optional services to be delivered when a government feels like it. These are human rights, plain and simple.

Too often we see governments pointing proudly to their budget allocation for disability as though it is some kind of great act of generosity. Disability supports are not charity. They are the basic supports the State is obliged to provide to deliver on the rights and freedoms disabled people are entitled to. Those rights are recognised under Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Ireland ratified years ago but on which it has still failed to deliver. Instead, we have a system that fails disabled people and carers alike; a system where many people are denied the personal assistance hours they need; and they are cut off by an inaccessible public transport system and locked out of employment.

Many young disabled people are living in places they should never have been put in the first place. Over 1,000 adults under the age of 65 are still living in nursing homes. That is five years after the Wasted Lives report told the Government this had to end. Adults with intellectual disabilities are facing another heartbreaking housing crisis because of the State's

failure to uphold their human rights. That injustice is what sparked the Before We Die campaign which, in turn, has inspired this motion. One mother put it starkly: "Please let me live just one day longer than him. I am terrified for his future." That is the position the State has forced people into. Rather than planning for independent living, we wait until an ageing parent can no longer cope, until they become seriously ill or until they die. Only then does the State begin looking for somewhere for that person to live. That is not planning; it is negligence.

Only 2% of families surveyed had a formal written housing plan for their adult son or daughter with an intellectual disability and 92% still rely on a parent as their primary carer. Independence means having a choice in your care. For some, that may well be family carer but for many, being looked after by your parents into adulthood does not represent the independence that they want and are entitled to. The Government cannot even tell us how many people are waiting for appropriate housing and supports. How can you solve a crisis that you refuse to even measure? You cannot. Right now, when people's parents become too ill, die or simply can no longer cope, too many people are sent wherever a vacancy happens to exist, often far from their families, friends and communities. That is not a rights-based approach; it is institutional thinking. It is wrong.

This motion calls for what should already exist - one pathway, one assessment, one named team and one community living plan.

Crucially, it calls for planning that begins years before crisis, not days after one.

Disabled people must be at the centre of shaping disability policy. DPOs and advocacy services need sustainable funding so disabled people themselves can shape the decisions that affect their lives. We owe it to every disabled person in this country to finally deliver on the promise of the UNCRPD, to make Ireland's commitment mean something and deliver people's fundamental rights.

Deputy Gary Gannon: Yesterday, I stood in the Chamber and talked about women being turned away from refuge spaces when they were fleeing violence. Today, we are back here again, talking, fighting and asking for something once more that citizens in this country should never have to go without. It is not just a safe home, but a place of sanctuary, a residence for some of the most vulnerable people in this State - adults with intellectual disabilities. That should never be a luxury. It should never be seen as an aspiration. It should just be a basic need that is met. It is an indictment of one of the wealthiest countries in the world that so often Opposition TDs spend so much of our time in this House pleading for the most basic rights of some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

I know many of the families behind the Before We Die campaign. I met Tony Murray, his wife, Susan, and their daughter, Aoife, when I was out canvassing, as everybody in this Chamber has had to do. It was extraordinary when I was knocking on their door asking them for a vote and they were asking what I would contribute to the fact that their child may not have a place to live after they die. It was a conversation that will stay with me for as long as I remain in politics and afterward. I have watched Tony and Susan spend years carrying burdens that they should never have been forced to carry. They should never have to fight every single day, week or year just to get the State to recognise that their son or daughter deserves security, dignity and a future.

Equally, thousands of families are living with a fear that no parent should ever have to. It is not just the fear of growing old, but a fear of what happens after they are gone. Imagine carrying that every single day, wondering who will care for your child, where they will live, and wondering if they will be uprooted from everything and everyone they know because no one in the State has thought to make a plan. Some parents have said they hope to outlive their own children because they have so little faith that the State will protect them. That is a devastating thing for any parent to have to say, and it should be a devastating thing for any Minister to have to hear.

Our survey confirmed exactly what the Before We Die campaign has been telling us for years. A total of 86% of families told us there is no clear written plan for the future. Families describe themselves as worried, anxious, powerless, afraid and terrified. That is not because the families have not planned. It is because the State has not. Instead of asking what life this person wants to live, we wait until a family reaches breaking point, until a parent dies, until there is a crisis, and then we ask a completely different question - "Where is the nearest vacant bed?". That is not planning. Every person with an intellectual disability is an individual with their own relationships, routines, friendships and communities. Their life cannot be reduced to whenever a vacancy happens to exist. They deserve a place where people will know their name, where family can visit without driving halfway across the country and where their friends are. That is what Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities promises. It is what far too many people in Ireland are still denied.

Our motion asks for something very reasonable: a proper national strategy, real planning, real accountability and homes built around the person, not around whatever space happens to become available. Families cannot continue to carry this burden alone. Disabled people and adults with intellectual disabilities should not have to wait for a crisis before the State decides they deserve somewhere to call home. Every Tuesday evening in the handball alley in Ballybough, families, parents and guardians of adults with intellectual disabilities join each other in company to share stories, to have support networks and a place for their adult children to be present with friends. I have visited and been invited on a couple of occasions. When you stand in the room and hear the stories from people, some of whom who have lost partners themselves, their abiding fear is what happens after they die. It is an extraordinary indictment of our Republic.

This problem is not insurmountable. It requires resourcing, planning and not just listening, which I appreciate that the Minister has done, but immediacy of action. Tony and Susan's determination alongside their fellow campaigners in Before We Die should be an example to all of us, but we should not be back here in a year's time asking where the plan is. It should already be in motion. That is the minimum of what this motion expects of us. I thank Deputy Quaide for bringing this forward and for the diligence he has brought to this issue.

Deputy Eoin Hayes: By far the hardest conversations I have with constituents are the ones struggling with disability services for their children. I knock on the door and it opens, sometimes with their dependent adult child with an intellectual disability by their side. You can see the difficulty etched into the faces of those who care so deeply for those vulnerable family relatives and their despair with the State that continues to fail them so badly.

During my first elections, the local elections in 2024, I remember meeting the older sister, Lynn, who takes care of her brother while working full time in the Civil Service. She was deeply frustrated by a State that she works for that lets her brother down every day. When I first knocked on her door, she asked me what the State and I would do for her brother. She was clearly exhausted, clearly at her wit's end of interacting with the State that seemed to care about everything but her family. I told her I would do my best, as I hope I am now.

Months later, during the general election, I knocked on a door and Kieran and his son, Daniel, answered. Kieran told me that it was his wife, Mary, who makes the decisions on who they vote for. No wonder, because she has been fighting for decades for her son for services. Most recently, I fought alongside her for an adult drama programme to be continued for Daniel. Even in basic activities, these parents have to fight for everything.

This week I spoke to Katy and Felim, who care for their adult daughter, Ellie. Katy made an excellent point to me. The State has known about her daughter Ellie for the whole 26 years of her life, but at no point has any service thought to plan for her adulthood or independence. She said to me she had no faith in services at all, or in the quality of care and support Ellie would get, and that they had little understanding of her personal situation, her needs, or her wants or her dreams. Ellie is looking for the simple things in life - home, family, support, community and things to do - yet these simplicities seem too complicated for the State to grapple with. Across all of these stories, the difficulty is mirrored almost exactly from family to family. It should not come to this. For each of them, like the brave campaigners in the Before We Die campaign, they have had to bare their lives and souls to public representatives for their difficulty just to be heard.

A total of 2,314 adult children with intellectual disabilities are cared for by parents over the age of 70. Thousands more are cared for by siblings, parents who are younger or extended families. All have been told, officially, that they have "an indefinite responsibility" to provide housing and care for the disabled person in their family. What a gross abdication of a responsibility by the State that was supposed to help and not to hinder. At the root of this is an exploitation of familial love. There is a cruelty in a system that ignores the needs of our most vulnerable, whether it is as simple as accessing housing or care, or an outsourcing of emergency care to a private sector motivated by profit over human dignity. This is not the way that we should govern. This is not the way our people should be treated. It is not the way any well-minded person would intend it to be.

In speaking to these families, the same words come from their mouths. There is no planning, there is little understanding and they have no faith in a system that has let them down. Many are not in crisis, but too many are terrified to think of how that might change. Far too many are gripped by an existential dread, a cloud of anxiety hanging over their every living breath. We owe it to these families and adults to create a system that works for them. Our motion here clearly articulates how. I urge the Minister and the Government to support it or, at the very least, have the courage to acknowledge the problem and reimagine a system that treats every person in this situation with the dignity that they deserve. Anything less is an admission of failure. I ask the Minister not to fail. These people I meet are counting on her. The next time I knock on their doors, I will remind them of this day and of the Minister's inaction.

Minister for Children, Disability and Equality (Deputy Norma Foley): I thank the Deputies for bringing forward this Private Members' motion.

My Government colleagues and I are acutely aware of the challenges raised in the motion. At the outset, I sincerely recognise the work of all those who continue to advocate for and support people with disabilities and their families.

On the formation of this Government, the Taoiseach and Tánaiste were clear that a singular priority was to be given to disability so as to bring about a step-change in services for disabled people in Ireland. In this regard, as Deputies will be aware, for the first time, an office was established in the Department of the Taoiseach, Deputy Micheál Martin, dedicated to prioritising the needs of people with disabilities right across the whole of Government. Working with that office, the Department of Children, Disability and Equality is absolutely committed to seeking to expand and reform specialist disability services in order to maximise individuals' independence and support them to live lives of their choosing in places of their choosing.

Since my appointment as Minister, I have met with many disability groups, organisations, advocates and disabled people to hear first hand about their lived experience and, importantly, to hear from them what we need and what we must do better to ensure quality and equality of life. Long before I became Minister in this role, I engaged with many in a similar fashion. I have also met some of the family members involved in the Before We Die campaign and appreciate they have been referenced this morning. I absolutely accept they are fighting tirelessly to highlight the need for us to ensure their loved ones are cared for and provided with appropriate housing, as and when it is needed. For far too many families, placements are made at the last minute, causing distress to individuals and their families. I am also aware the Taoiseach, Tánaiste, Minister of State, Deputy Higgins, and many other members of the Oireachtas, including many present, as has been referenced, have done likewise. Along with many other disability advocates, they have collectively spurred on the Government and all in this House to drive on with this important work.

I must also acknowledge this focus on disability has not been limited to the Department of Children, Disability and Equality. I was involved in putting together the programme for Government and I can confirm it recognises the requirement for a whole-of-government approach to advancing the realisation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNCPRD. With that in mind, in 2025, the Department of Children, Disability and Equality published the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025-2030, which was developed with strong input from disabled people and representative organisations on the issues that matter the most to them. One of the key pillars of this strategy outlines the need for a collective approach to housing supports needed for disabled people. Under this pillar, the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, together with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, is working in collaboration with a number of other Departments and agencies, including the HSE and local authorities.

The National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027 provides the framework for the delivery of housing for people with all levels of disability. The Minister, Deputy Browne, and I, together with officials, have engaged for a considerable amount of time and have made significant progress through the implementation structures established under this strategy. This includes establishing the levels of unmet need for specialist disability residential services in

each county or local authority area to inform the setting of targets for the period from 2027 to 2030 in the upcoming local authority housing development action plans. Importantly, I welcome the circular issued by the Department of housing to local authorities, to communicate these levels of unmet need and set out their responsibility, in conjunction with the Department, in developing housing development action plans, which will set annual local authority social housing targets for delivering appropriate accommodation solutions for people with complex disabilities. While some local authorities have been proactive in doing so, this important step ensures that for the first time, all local authorities will now be building housing for those with complex disabilities. This will deliver a significant increase in the number of appropriate homes for people who need them, with a much better geographical spread to ensure they can remain in and of their communities. I thank my colleague, the Minister, Deputy Browne, for his commitment to this matter and for the work under way.

We know and agree that available housing is part of the challenge but we also know the system needs reform. In line with commitments contained in the programme for Government and the national human rights strategy, the Department of Children, Disability and Equality is now developing a new vision and reform strategy for disability services. This work will be critical in ensuring we can deliver high-quality, flexible, human rights based services to all those who need them into the future. It will set out an ambitious and far-reaching programme of reform to improve services over time. This work gives us a huge opportunity to look at how to fund and deliver services and set in place a plan to reorient and reform services to create more effective governance and more efficient systems, to work towards the delivery of more person-centred supports for disabled people.

In particular, I am keen that this new strategy prioritise early intervention as a principle, so we can strengthen planned provision. While certain services will always be required to address urgent and unforeseen circumstances in peoples' lives, I want to continue the move away from crisis interventions and towards more planned and person-centred provision. The Minister of State, Deputy Higgins, and I will be working to make the maxim "right support, right place, right time" a key pillar of policy and action. We have been working closely with stakeholders on this new reform strategy, including advocacy groups, disability umbrella groups and representative bodies, and will commence a further round of outreach in the coming weeks. I intend to bring forward specific proposals arising from this work towards the end of the year, depending on progress and the outcome of ongoing engagement with stakeholders.

In addition to the work under way to inform the vision and reform strategy, the Department is undertaking research and progressing policy development throughout 2026, with a view to developing a new policy framework for specialist disability residential services. This policy development process will consider a wide range of matters relevant to specialist residential services, including models of service and how we can ensure common-sense approaches to residential supports are taken.

The Department is also advancing the development of a policy framework on community-based supports, including home support and personal assistance. These supports play a critical role in enabling disabled peoples' independence and participation in their communities. The work will also consider the appropriate role of personalised budgets. The objective of the work is to explore opportunities for a more holistic and person-centred approach to how these supports are structured, organised and delivered, with the aim of enhancing autonomy and

choice and ensuring that supports operate as part of a more coherent and responsive system for disabled people. Engagement with stakeholders, particularly those in receipt of these services, will be an important part of the reform programme under way.

Alongside this significant policy work, significant levels of funding have been provided to specialist disability services in recent years, most particularly in budget 2026, which saw a funding increase of €628 million, an increase of almost 20% on 2025. HSE specialist disability services now have a record budget of €3.9 billion to support us to do the work we need to do.

I will turn now to the substance of today's motion. At the outset, I acknowledge that the overarching objective to provide timely and appropriate specialist services for people with disabilities is one that all of us, across the House, are working to achieve. I have alluded to some of the significant policy and reform work under way. Therefore, the means by which the motion proposes to address the challenges raised may not specifically align with the approach being taken, but I absolutely accept that the underlying goals are the same and I accept the Deputies' sincerity in seeking to achieve them. For example, while there are no plans for a strategy as specifically set out in the motion, I have referenced work that is well under way on a vision and strategy for the future of disability services, as well as specific policy work on areas including residential services, personal assistance and home support and the role personalised budgets might play. While the motion sets out various issues that such a strategy would comprehend, some of these issues are already being addressed and many others will be addressed in appropriate ways through the work currently under way.

I will speak about some specific issues referenced in the motion and take the opportunity to highlight examples of how some issues are being addressed. While the motion calls for a move to multi-annual budgeting, it is important we acknowledge that unlike the position for capital expenditure, where multi-annual commitments are made under the national development plan, the Estimates process for current expenditure allocates funding on an annual or single-year basis. The programme for Government includes a commitment to developing a multi-year capital plan and the Department is continuing to work closely with the HSE to develop a multi-annual strategy plan for disability capital. A number of new measures are in train to move towards planned provision of residential supports, including the provision of planned residential placements under a new initiative, as outlined in the HSE's 2026 national service plan. In addition, with additional funding secured in recent budgets, new HSE housing co-ordinators and residential planning and review teams will be in place this year to co-ordinate and oversee the delivery of the new residential placements.

The HSE continues to work to increase the capacity of section 38 and 39 providers and reduce dependence on emergency placements with for-profit providers.

Every effort is made by the HSE to provide residential services as close to family and natural supports as possible, and we need to more in this space.

I hope that I have demonstrated some of the important work already under way that addresses many of the concerns raised in the motion. We all want to ensure that services develop and grow to meet people's needs and that they do so in a manner that is person-centred. I absolutely appreciate the goodwill and commitment of everybody in this House. I look forward to working with Members to achieve the joint objective we have, which is to ensure a better outcome for people with disabilities.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: It is customary for a copy of the Minister's speech to be provided during Private Members' business and it is regrettable that was not done on this occasion. It is also regrettable that in a ten-minute speech, it was after eight minutes that the Minister decided to turn to the substance of the motion. Not all of it, but a lot of the contribution did not specifically address the items in the motion. That is regrettable.

On the approach of putting the responsibility on local authorities, they obviously have a role to play. However, it is not clear from what the Minister has said, and families will be asking and wanting to know, what targets are being set for 2027 to 2030. Are those targets going to meet all unmet need? What is the situation on that? While local authorities have a role to play, all responsibility cannot be shifted onto them. There needs to be ring-fenced funding and a clear plan directed by the Government. Without that, all we are going to be doing is making piecemeal progress.

I thank Deputy Quaide for his work on this motion. I thank everybody who is involved in the Before We Die campaign. I have had the privilege of meeting families and parents of adults with intellectual disabilities in my constituency. They have shared their stories and experiences. Of course, they should not have to do that. They should not be put through that to get access to what are basic human rights.

One parent who contacted Newstalk earlier in the year described being in an elderly couple, struggling significantly with health issues. They were told by a very good day service that there were simply no places. They will, sadly, die sooner rather than later because they get zero respite and never get a chance to recoup their energy. They were told that their son could be put anywhere in the country. That is the experience of parents all over the country. When parents die, an adult with an intellectual disability, their family member whom they love and care for, is left stranded. At that time, the person with the intellectual disability loses their mum or dad, their carer and advocate, their home and community, and potentially their friends too, all at the same time. It is incredibly traumatic and distressing. It is cruel. There needs to be ring-fenced funding and a clear plan.

The survey that was carried out showed that caregivers are asking for a proactive, multi-year transition model. They want their loved ones established in supported living or residential care while their parents are still alive and healthy so they can visit, help them to adjust to a new routine and ensure a smooth, trauma-free transition. That is not too much to ask.

I will read what was stated by one of the parents who contacted us as part of our survey. The parent, who is from Dublin, said that as an elderly parent, they are absolutely terrified about what will happen to their lovely son when they cannot care for him anymore. They do not want him put out to tender to the highest bidder like he is a job lot. He is, the parent said, a beautiful, loveable human who deserves better than this.

A parent from Galway described what it is like, at almost 70, to look at your 30-year-old daughter, who has tried so hard to live a good life despite her multiple challenges, and yet keeps giving to those around her. The parent said that they know in their heart that this country, and especially the policymakers, have abandoned her now and will continue to do so just because she is not characterised as a valuable voter. The parent went on to say that "heartbroken" is often a term loosely used, but as elderly parents they live a life of being exhausted and heartbroken.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I thank Deputy Quaide for all of his work on this motion. I thank Deputies Cairns and Cian O'Callaghan for regularly using their leaders' time to push this issue. I will also acknowledge one other person from our party, namely, former Councillor Dave Quinn, who is representative of this community, of families who essentially are caring for adults with intellectual disabilities, knowing that they are living in a State which now has an unwritten policy. That is what this is. After years and years of inaction, it becomes an unwritten policy that the expectation is that for adults with intellectual disabilities, their ageing parents will take care of them and if they are fortunate enough, their estate might be able to assist with their independent living after they die.

Like Deputy O'Callaghan, I think it is regrettable that we have only got the speech now. There was plenty I wanted to pick up on. I will pick up on one point that the Minister made towards the end of her speech. She said, "Every effort is made by the HSE to provide residential services as close to family and natural supports as possible", having regard to will and preference. Like other Deputies here, I have been fortunate enough to meet the inspiring families in my constituency who are dealing with this challenge. I want to talk about a specific story. A person approached the HSE. They were in a fortunate enough position to be able to say that they would donate to the HSE a home. They found a location where they knew the services were adequate for their child's needs. They said they would give the HSE this home so they would know that their adult child was able to stay in that location. The HSE's response to that offer was that it would take the home but could not guarantee where the child would be placed. They offered a house, and that was the response they got. That does not spell "every effort" to me.

The Before We Die campaign has been incredible in amplifying this issue and bringing it to national attention. We, as a party, are going to continue to maintain that pressure here in the Dáil Chamber and at every opportunity that we get to ensure we move from the listening mode, which the Government is clearly in, to the action that is required.

This State, sadly, has still not embraced the rights-based model for disability that is espoused in the UNCRPD. At best, we have moved towards a medical model of disability, but in many ways, we remain rooted in a charitable model of disability, which fails to recognise the fundamental rights that should be enjoyed by every person in this State, regardless of whether or not he or she has a disability.

I acknowledge the families to whom I have spoken. Three mothers recently came to a clinic of mine, namely, Claire, Noreen and Nessa. I want to specifically mention the "The ID Zone Podcast" that they have put forward. That is another example of how this community is supporting each other where the State has failed them.

Deputy Rory Hearne: I thank Deputy Quaide for the work he has done to bring forward this motion and, indeed, the commitment of the Social Democrats to prioritising people with disabilities through its policies and what it does.

We should be straight here. The Irish State has never treated disabled people as equal citizens of this Republic. One or both of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael has been in government since the foundation of the State. What is the history? It is one of shameful treatment. People have been hidden and institutionalised. What we are seeing today is a new form of individualised institutionalisation. Adults with intellectual disability, when their parents die or

they cannot be there for them any more, are being hidden in all sorts of individual privatised homes without the care or the connection to their community. It is an absolute failure, and it is failure because the Government knew about this. Disabled people have been denied their basic rights. This is why I have brought forward a Bill to put the right to housing in the Constitution. We are very clear that disabled people do not have that right. It is important because a right to housing is not just about a roof over your head. It is about adequate and appropriate housing so you are supported for your needs. One of the most shameful aspects of this is that the Government has been aware of this problem and has let it grow. It is a failure of the HSE and the Department of housing, but ultimately it is a failure of the taoisigh and tánaistí who have failed to prioritise the issue.

I highlight the Before We Die campaign for the work its representatives have done. They have brought the issue to light. They are saying that they are not accepting it, and that is the difference between now and other times in the history of this country. Disabled people and their families are saying they will not accept this any more. We in the Social Democrats stand with them and say that we are not accepting it either. This is not okay.

I will connect this issue to the issue of housing. Some 1,600 households with someone with an identified intellectual disability are on the waiting list, which is an 18% increase since 2023.

These are people who you know about, but, of course, the Government has privatised social housing and has not delivered social housing sufficiently in its broadest context, with support services as well. In my constituency, I visited St. Michael's House on the Ballymun Road. It showed me the great services it provides but it has a waiting list of 55 individuals. Eight are 66 years of age or over, 22 are aged between 46 and 65, and ten are aged between 18 and 30. Forty of these individuals are classified as high-risk, highlighting the urgent need for placements and increased resources to provide care for them, but St. Michael's House has had to pause the waiting list. We do not know how many more people need it. This is a failure. The position has to change now.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: I thank Deputy Quaide and the Social Democrats for tabling this motion. I commend the Before We Die campaign, particularly Tony Murray, his wife Susan and their daughter, Aoife. Before We Die is aptly named. At the disability committee, many people have spoken about the fact that many parents feel frustrated and are incredibly worried about what will happen to their adult children with an intellectual disability. They are not sure what the future holds and some even say they feel incredibly guilty because they think that maybe their children will die before them, which would deal with that issue. Imagine having to feel like that. It is obviously utterly scandalous. I do not know how many times recently we have discussed the issues that exist and the failure to deliver decent disability, respite and residential services. We know the 101 issues that exist in relation to schooling and education for those with disabilities. We are not at the races in any way, shape or form.

I also commend, in my constituency, the work done by the recently stood-down Inclusion Louth, which was previously Dundalk Parents and Friends of the Intellectually Disabled. I think of Eoghan Bailey, Mary Darcy, Mary Connolly and many others. They are a group of parents who came together because they needed to make sure there was a future for their children who had disabilities. It is hard to believe that I can talk about the work they were doing 30 years ago, or further back, and consider that we are still no further on.

What is the big issue that has been brought to us? It is that parents are worried that there is no plan in place for their child. If somebody cannot cope and that child ends up in an emergency department or somebody does die and there is nobody to look after that child, the State will then kick in. It will not have the preparatory work done beforehand but it will kick in, and then who is ready to jump in? It is the for-profit operators. There will be disputes about how much this costs, but let us assume on the basis of them being for-profit operators that they will charge more, because that is why they are in business.

What happens? We end up in the position that the only people who can operate are those who cost the State and the taxpayer more. They may have a house which could be three counties over. The perfect situation is one where there is a proper conversation between the local authority, the HSE and all the disability services. I heard Bernard Gloster, the previous chief of the HSE, say that the local authorities, from his point of view, should provide the housing and that disability services should be provided on top of that. If done in a completely planned and organised way, with the correct planning and funding, it is cheaper and better. An awful lot of parents are quite happy to look after their children. They just want to know there is a proper plan in place for the future. I find it hard to believe that we are still talking about this issue at this stage. The number of people who do not have a plan is through the roof. I commend the work of Before We Die.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: I join my colleague in thanking the Deputies for bringing forward this motion. I also commend the work of the Before We Die campaign. I had the honour of chairing the petitions committee when its members presented to us a couple of weeks ago. It was a very powerful meeting. I also pay tribute to Nora Roban and the Remember Us group in Balbriggan. Whether the Government works with them or against them, they are going to build their plan of Homes for Us because they are very determined and it is very needed. I urge the Minister to talk to her colleagues and revise her definition of what does and does not constitute a congregated setting. Nobody is talking about going back to the high-walled institutions of the past.

Last night, I spoke to a person I know very well about her daughter, who has an intellectual disability. I asked her how she felt about this campaign. She said that from the day after she was told of her daughter's diagnosis, the thought that has kept her up and awake at night, every night, is "What is going to happen to her when I am gone?" People say there is no point in worrying about the things that you cannot control, but this is a relentless worry, every night. Along with all the worries that every other parent has, and, believe me, that never stops, she worries about who will look after her daughter when she is gone. She has no faith in this Government. The Minister says in her script that she is aiming for the right support in the right place at the right time. Speaking on behalf of the people I have spoken to, there is no support in any place at any time, and the Minister needs to do better.

Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan: This issue is deeply close to me. For almost 20 years, I worked as a carer for older adults with disabilities. It was always so much more than just a job. In that role, I made life-long friendships with people I supported. To help them live their best life, independently and with dignity, meant so much to me. The harsh reality today is that the State is increasingly failing people with disabilities and their families. We have all sat across from parents in their 60s, 70s and even 80s who are still the primary carers for their

adult sons and daughters. They are exhausted, burnt out, and their own health is at risk. Many get little or no respite, but worse than that is the exhaustion and crushing, constant fear of what will happen to their son or daughter when they are no longer there. No parent should ever have to carry that burden. No parent should have to lie awake at night wondering if their child will have a safe place to call their own when they are gone.

The Before We Die campaign laid this bare. A survey of 1,000 families showed that just 2% had a formal housing plan in place for their son or daughter with an intellectual disability. This is not just a policy failure but a human rights failure. Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is crystal-clear that disabled people have the right to live in the community with choices equal to everyone else. The Government signed up to that convention and now needs to honour it. The Minister needs to stop burying her head in the sand. We need an ambitious plan for publicly owned housing, not a profit-driven private model that fails citizens and costs taxpayers dearly.

Deputy Pa Daly: Every parent worries about their children. That does not stop when they get to 18 years of age. I know many people have spoken about meeting the Before We Die campaigners and parents, and how inspiring they are. While I have great respect for the people I have met, I would not swap with them because they have come across to me as exhausted and depressed. When the Áras na Féile respite centre in north Kerry closed, I was in a room where the parents present were almost beaten by the difficulty caused by the one bit of respite they had being removed from them.

Across the county of Kerry, we have a centre in Cahersiveen which is only open 34 weekends in the year. Those facilities are there but the funding is not available to increase to weekly services or to even increase the number of weekends that facility is open.

I see the statement and the circular which has been issued by the Department of housing that the local authorities will have more responsibility and they will now be building housing but I have to say the Government's policy of increasing the number of units throughout the State is not going to make any difference. From what I have seen on the ground, there seems to be very little tie-in between the HSE capital projects and the local authorities. There should be a focus on more accommodation in town centres, close to services to help the parents of the adults with intellectual disabilities.

Deputy Ann Graves: I strongly support this motion which seeks to provide clear, identified and funded pathways for people with intellectual disabilities to move from home to a suitable residential placement and which supports the campaign by Before We Die, a family-led advocacy group seeking urgent ring-fenced Government funding for residential care and housing for adults with intellectual disabilities. Their needs are threefold: purpose-built housing; establishment of a clear, gradual transition plan rather than emergency placement; and a dedicated Government-invested programme rather than the current piecemeal funding which only covers a fraction of the necessary residential places.

I want to acknowledge the parents who founded Before We Die. They fear for their adult children's future when they pass away or can no longer provide care for them. This fear is very real. Over 2,000 adults with an intellectual disability live with parents aged 70 or over, with 500 of those over 80. Some parents are providing full-time care into their 90s. I have worked

with many parents who are distressed and heartbroken, worrying about what will happen to their adult children when they themselves are no longer able to provide care for them. Their biggest fear is that their children will end up in an emergency department.

Families need and deserve choice. This choice can be between purpose-built congregational living with multi-disciplinary teams in place or families may prefer that their children live independently in the community. This needs to be catered for. The Government has a legal and moral obligation to provide these services. Ireland has committed to protecting the rights of people with disabilities through legislation and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This convention recognises the rights of people with disabilities to live independently and be included in the community. Providing appropriate residential placements is essential, not only for improving quality of life but also for protecting human rights, supporting families and promoting social inclusion.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Darren O'Rourke): I call Deputy Ó Laoghaire.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Is it two or two and a half minutes?

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Darren O'Rourke): It is a minute and a half.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Go raibh maith agat.

Like many, I have engaged with the Before We Die campaign. The meeting I attended in Cork was one of the most powerful and affecting meetings I have ever attended. It was troubling as well but the fierce love of these parents was obvious. At the end of the day, they want to care for their children as long as they can but they are deeply frustrated. I want to acknowledge the fact that a lot of progress has been made by the group in Cork. I acknowledge Deputies Quaide and O'Sullivan who have been working with the city and county councils which have adopted a positive attitude and is making progress on a local level, to be fair. However, the numbers are absolutely enormous. I would never have realised that there are 2,000 adults with an intellectual disability with parents over 70 years of age, and 300 of them are in Cork, with 500 across the State with parents over 80.

Some of the circumstances we hear of are heartbreaking. I have heard of cases where people were advised by people in the HSE that if they are in a crisis situation to bring their child to the emergency department and it will resolve itself from there. This should be the most carefully handled sensitive transition and effectively people are being asked to go with a sudden rupture. It is completely unacceptable. It is a profound failure. What parent would want that for their child? It is not good enough. We need to do better.

The congregated settings policy may have come from a good place but we are letting the perfect be the enemy of the good.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Darren O'Rourke): The Deputy has a bit more time as a speaker dropped out.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: I am finished now, so it is okay. I thank the Acting Chair.

Deputy Denise Mitchell: I welcome the motion. Many families in my constituency contacted me ahead of this debate. Listening to their stories, it is clear they go above and beyond for their sons and daughters. Many of their sons and daughters have moderate, serious or profound intellectual disabilities. Some parents find it so difficult to find the time to campaign and advocate on this issue which is why it is up to everyone in here to do that on their behalf and address these issues head on. Over 2,300 adults with intellectual disabilities are currently being cared for by a parent over 70 years of age. These parents are terrified about what will happen if they can no longer provide that care. One lady in my constituency contacted my office and told us how she is putting off a hip operation she badly needs. Why? It is because she is a lone parent caring for her daughter who has high support needs. She fears that while she is recovering, she simply will not be able to care for her daughter. These are the kinds of choices people are being forced to make. It is a very simple question they are asking: who will care for my son or daughter if I am no longer able to do so? That is why we need a one-stop-shop that can process and manage applications and link to the Departments of housing and disability, the local authorities, service providers and families.

People with disabilities have the right to live as independently as possible in their communities. If we do not provide adequate residential and supported living options, we are denying these people their rights. The upcoming budget gives us a real opportunity to get this right. That means proper ring-fenced funding.

Deputy Louis O'Hara: No parent should have to worry about what will happen to their child when they can no longer provide care for them, yet years of underfunding and a failure to plan has left our residential support system in crisis and families are left carrying the responsibility even as parents themselves age into their 70s, 80s and beyond. I was even told about a woman who is 102 years old in County Galway caring for her adult child.

Yesterday I spoke to a family in my constituency in this exact position. The parents are in their 70s and care for their 25 year old son who suffers from severe autism and epilepsy. They are very worried about the future and what will happen when they can no longer care for him. They stressed that a transitional period is key, especially for people with autism. They cannot just be uprooted into an emergency placement down the line. The parents need to be there for the transition to ensure that it works properly and does not cause challenges for that person or, indeed, those who will be caring for them. However, as it stands, that will not happen because they cannot secure long-term residential care now that would allow them to begin that transition at their own pace. This is the experience of thousands of families. The Government has a responsibility to ensure that adults with intellectual disabilities have access to suitable housing and support services that meet their needs in their own community. Adults with intellectual disabilities have the same right as every other citizen to live with dignity, safety and independence and the Government has a legal and moral obligation to provide these services. There are so many basic things we are not getting right. The lack of data collection on the needs that exist in our community and the lack of personal transition plans, the challenges that exist with the social housing application process for adults with an intellectual disability, section 38 and section 39 providers are left completely unable to compete with private companies because they lack multi-annual funding, they cannot access community access support team, CAST, funding and, of course, the lack of ring-fenced funding to address this crisis is also an issue.

Parents deserve so much better as do the adults with intellectual disabilities. The Minister of State needs to listen to families, support the motion and, crucially, make the changes necessary to provide safety and security to families.

Deputy Mark Wall: I wish to start by thanking Deputy Quaide and the Social Democrats for bringing forward this motion.

11 o'clock

It is very important for so many people in this country. It is an issue that comes up very regularly in my own office. As has been said, over 2,000 adults with an intellectual disability in Ireland live with a family carer over the age of 70 and 450 of these adults are cared for by parents over the age of 80. We cannot imagine what that is like day to day for those parents, who ask who is going to look after their adult child when they pass away. It consumes them day in, day out. It is the one question they ask and it is the one question that is on their minds when they get up in the morning and when they go to bed at night. That is the reality for many ageing and older parents of adult children with intellectual disabilities in this country because they cannot bear the thought of not knowing what will happen to their loved ones should they pass away before them. That is the hardest truth in this country at the moment.

A serious issue has been neglected by Governments, which have failed to keep pace with the growing population of young adults who find themselves in such circumstances. Because of this, we are told Ireland could have a shortfall of up to 2,300 residential places since the recession and overall demand for nearly 4,000 extra places as we move forward. These are family carers who are working 24-7 without a break. They are adults living with a very uncertain future.

There is also the ongoing national scandal of young and middle-aged people with disabilities trapped in nursing homes. It has been five years since the Ombudsman published the Wasted Lives report, showing that over 1,300 young and middle-aged disabled people were being forced to live in nursing homes because of the lack of suitable accommodation for them to live independently. Five years on and more than 1,100 people remain trapped in nursing homes. This Government and the previous Government have barely managed to make a dent in this unfortunate figure, while more and more young people continue to be admitted into nursing homes year after year. This is an awful indictment of Government failure and we simply need to see action quickly. Mention was made of the competition between the HSE section 38 and section 39 organisations and private operators. It is simply not good enough that private operators have the advantage that they have compared with section 38 and section 39 organisations.

I will conclude on the matter of personal assistance hours. Under the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025-2030, the Government has set itself an ambitious target of delivering an additional 1 million personal assistance hours. However, between 2024 and 2025, the Government went backwards, with the number of hours decreasing by 0.5%. That is not progress; it is regression. If the Government is serious about its obligation under the UNCRPD, we must see a much greater investment in personal assistance hours to support people with disabilities to live independently, and that must include investment across home supports, day and community services, residential and independent living.

Deputy George Lawlor: I strongly support this motion. For too long, families across this country have lived with a fear that most of us here in this Chamber could scarcely imagine. It is not a fear of what will happen today or tomorrow but a fear of what will happen when they are no longer here. They lie awake at night wondering who will care for their son or daughter, where they will live, whether they will be safe, whether they will be happy or whether they will still be connected to the people and places that they love and know. That fear is real. It is lived every single day by families throughout Ireland.

I am thinking today in particular of my constituent Jane Johnstone and her two sons, Evan and Daniel. Jane and her late husband, Rod, devoted their lives to loving and supporting their boys. Like so many parents of adults with intellectual disabilities, they did everything the State asked of them and more. They carried the responsibility, the worry and the advocacy that should never fall on families alone. The loss of Jane's husband, Rod, in 2014 was a devastating blow for Jane and the boys but she is not asking for special treatment. She is asking for certainty, dignity and a plan. Surely that is not too much to ask in what we term a modern republic. Far too often the State intervenes only when a crisis exists - a parent dies or becomes ill or a family reach breaking point. That is not planning; it is failure.

This motion recognises that people with intellectual disabilities are not service users to be fitted into whatever vacancy happens to exist. They are citizens of this nation with hopes, preferences, relationships and ambition. We owe that to every person with an intellectual disability, to every ageing parent carrying the burden of worry, which is intense, to families like Jane, Evan and Daniel Johnstone, and to the memory of Rod, who wanted nothing more than what every parent wants, the knowledge that his children would be safe, supported and valued long after he was gone.

Deputy Robert O'Donoghue: I thank Deputy Quaide and the Social Democrats for bringing forward this important motion. I also want to acknowledge the Before We Die campaign in my own constituency of Dublin Fingal West and the Remember Us group from Balbriggan, which continues to campaign with such determination. I have met families in my constituency and listened to their very personal stories and I thank them for sharing them. Those conversations have stayed with me. I have heard the fear and anxiety of parents in their 70s and 80s who have spent their entire lives caring for their sons or daughters and now ask one heartbreaking question, "What will happen to my child when I'm gone?" These families have spent years navigating services that are fragmented and under pressure while housing supports remain inadequate. Families have also raised concerns about the growing reliance on private, for-profit residential services. They want something different. They want their sons and daughters to live as independently as possible in their own communities with choice, dignity and personal autonomy at the heart of every decision.

Ireland has committed to the principles of the UNCRPD, including the right to independent living and community inclusion, but there remains a gap between those commitments and the lived reality of too many families. That is why I want to recognise the Remember Us campaign regarding its Homes for Us pilot proposal. It offers a community-based model where people have their own homes, the supports they need and the opportunity to remain close to family and the communities where they belong. This is not simply about housing. It is about dignity, security and giving families the peace of mind that their loved ones will have a place to call

home. I urge the Minister to help Remember Us to fund this pilot and to roll it out in communities across Ireland.

Deputy Marie Sherlock: I very much welcome this very important motion and thank Deputy Quaide and the Social Democrats for it. I start by paying tribute to the Before We Die campaign, particularly Tony and Susan Murray, Alan and Vera Hughes and the thousands of other parents across the country who have had to tell their stories, lay their lives bare and tell the story of their children in order to advocate for others.

There needs to be a conversation. We very much supported the theory behind decongregation when it was put in place 20 years ago. While we recognise that the theory of decongregation made absolute sense in principle, there has to be a recognition that in practice, it is failing. It is failing because of the lack of forward planning and a failure to put in place the infrastructure to ensure that those with intellectual disabilities can live a fulsome life in the community.

The second key issue here concerns the theory behind the assisted decision-making Act. I very much welcome the intention to have a much greater human rights approach, but the reality is that the approach that was supposed to help the very people envisaged in that Act is actually undermining the State services that should be put in place to ensure that they live as full a life as possible. This State has failed to plan. When I talk to the section 38 and section 39 organisations, they tell me about the extent to which their hands are tied. They have properties but they can only put a certain number of rooms into them. There are other houses that are lying empty. There has been a huge issue with regard to State funding in this space, but the Government also needs to ensure that sheltered housing is put in place for those with intellectual disabilities when their parents or others in the family can no longer care for them. It is utterly unacceptable that people reach an older age and have nowhere to go but nursing homes.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I thank the Social Democrats for bringing forward this good motion and the Before We Die campaign for putting this on the political agenda. For too long adults with intellectual disabilities and their parents have faced the future with dread, not knowing what will happen to them after their parents pass away. The awful fear is that after they die, the adult child will go from a life where the best care has been lovingly provided by their parents to an uncertain, unplanned and even chaotic future. Over 2,000 adults with an intellectual disability are living with parents aged 70 or older, including 500 whose parents are over 80. This motion is urgent. It cannot just be allowed to pass because being seen to oppose it would be too embarrassing for the Government and then left on the shelf alongside everything else the Government knows it should do but will not because its priorities lie elsewhere.

If the mark of a civilised society is how it treats its most vulnerable members, then the lack of care shown towards adults with intellectual disabilities marks this State as a profoundly uncivilised one. Successive Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Governments, in power since the foundation of the State, have failed abysmally to care for people with intellectual disabilities. They have been the first group targeted for cuts and the last to have funding restored. This is what the Government means when it talks about hard choices. It is never about targeting about the rich or the powerful. It is always about kicking the vulnerable and the poor. The motion points out that the number of residential places has still not been restored to pre-2008 levels

and that an additional 3,900 residential places will be needed just to achieve that. If the Government cannot care for disabled people now, when it has billions of euro in surplus, when is it ever going to do it? The answer is never, unless it is forced to by campaigns like this one. The absence of State care was what prompted so many carers and disabled people to angrily reject the so-called care referendum, with its mealy-mouthed wording about striving to support family care. Carers have had enough of "Aren't ye great?" The Government needs to stop talking and start acting and develop a plan to implement all of the actions outlined in this motion.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I thank the Social Democrats for bringing forward this really important topic about older and disabled people, and what kind of home they can have. The current system is completely unsatisfactory. Older and disabled people are generally in private nursing homes run for profit. I spoke to a parent before this debate about the situation in my constituency. Her son, who gets respite four nights per month, was not able to get that respite for months because a client with severe needs was being accommodated and the whole building had to be cleared for that. It just shows the under-provision of the vital accommodation people need. People with intellectual disabilities losing that familiarity is very upsetting. There is also no respite care in Dublin 15, which is a huge part of the constituency.

This parent brought an issue to my attention. She is also thinking about what will happen to her son after she dies. She is an older parent, and her son was earmarked for a potential long-term place. She asked if she could view the property and was told no, that she could just be shown photographs as there were people living in the property. Is this for real? Obviously, a parent wants to see where their child is going to end up. Then the place just frittered away. That is something that needs to be looked at. This is a permanent home for somebody.

Another issue raised is the fear of violence against sons and daughters. This parent witnessed violence against a client when she was in a park. She duly reported it to the authorities and to the Garda, but if that is going on in a park, what is going on behind closed doors in these facilities where there are no cameras? That is a real fear so many parents have. Another fear is about money. This parent said her son's ATM card is taken off him when he goes into the accommodation. We are talking about private companies and agency staff. There are naturally fears among parents about what might be happening with that. We need a completely different system that is invested in, and not run by private companies for profit. It is time to deal with this with public investment.

Deputy Charles Ward: I thank the Social Democrats for bringing forward this very important motion. It calls for the Government to publish a five-year national strategic community living strategy for adults with intellectual disabilities. We are in desperate need of a strategic outline project for regional planning and annual targets to reduce waiting lists. Inappropriate placements for those with intellectual disabilities are happening throughout. The private model is benefiting from what should be a duty of care to our citizens. Disabled people, families and advocacy organisations have continuously called for progress towards community inclusion and away from the institutional model of care. Home support services must be designed around individuals rather than determined by available vacancies, which is the current model in Donegal. A home represents far more than accommodation. It provides security, privacy, independence and a sense of belonging and community. Planning for the future and

living arrangements should begin before a family reaches out at crisis point, as is currently happening. Ensuring people can decide where they can live into the future and who they live with should be planned well in advance. However, many families feel unable to make such arrangements in advance because of the system. Instead, they are forced to wait until a space becomes available. Greater transparency is needed. We are unaware of the numbers of people on waiting lists and out-of-area placements. The absence of a national waiting list is another issue. It remains unclear. People have nowhere to go, particularly in Donegal, where we have a defective concrete crisis. Adults with intellectual disabilities are living in homes that are crumbling and they have nowhere to go. I thank the HSE in Donegal, which recently expanded the community inclusion services in Buncrana, but the local services we need are multiples. We need this spread throughout and it is just not good enough at the moment.

Deputy Seamus Healy: Respite and residential services for persons with intellectual disabilities are in crisis. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provides the right to live independently in the community with choices equal to others. They must have access to a range of in-home, residential and other community services, including personal assistance. In Ireland these rights are honoured more in the breach than in the observance. The true level of need for residential and respite services is unknown and, consequently, there is no plan to deal with this, meaning that too often the HSE responds to emergency situations. A recent submission to the Oireachtas disability matters committee by the organisation Before We Die is worth quoting. It sets out the stark nature of the current situation. It states, "Our campaign started with a simple question: 'Who will provide the care my daughter needs when I am no longer able to care for her?'" It continues, "It is not uncommon to hear parents say; I would hope my son or daughter goes before me. Then at least I know he or she is safe. That's how bad the situation is." It further states:

There is an urgent need for systemic change in disability services. It needs to focus on housing and care for adults with [intellectual disability] whose parents are aging and no longer able to provide full-time care. Over 2,000 adults with [intellectual disability] live with parents aged 70 [years] or older, with 500 parents being over 80 [years of age] and some even in their 90s.

What is needed urgently and what is called for in that submission is, first, an emergency funded plan in budget 2027 to address the needs of parents in their 70s, 80s and 90s who cannot wait for systemic change. The Government in the medium term needs to publish a fully funded and resourced five-year plan for community living for people with intellectual disability. It should be prepared jointly by the Departments of disability and housing, the HSE, local authorities and the approved housing bodies. I support this important motion and thank the Social Democrats for bringing it forward at this time.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: I support the motion because there are thousands of parents, many now in their 70s and 80s, who are worried about what will happen when they can no longer care for their child with an intellectual disability. This fear is real because, as referenced previously with regard to the HSE, there is no centrally maintained list for residential services. I know the disability capacity review estimates that Ireland needs at least 1,900 additional residential places by 2032 but this is potentially up to 4,000 if we look at restoring 2008 levels. At the moment more than 2,000 adults are living with parents aged over 70 and, as has been

referenced, 500 are living with parents aged over 80. This is why upgrading the disability capacity review is urgent. We need a live database integrating disability supports, housing and people living at home who are not counted among any figures. We need proper capacity planning because we are way behind as it stands.

I believe that incremental progress is possible. Some ideas are to establish a single statutory community living pathway with one referral point, have annual regional targets as well as national targets to reduce emergency placements and out-of-area placements, expand public and not-for-profit provision through multi-annual funding while stabilising existing private placements to avoid forced moves - and as Deputy Coppinger has said, it is not ideal to have the private sector running the show - and publish annual data on distance from home emergency placements and progress on individual community living plans.

This model has worked elsewhere. The LSS Act in Sweden, for example, ensures that people with an intellectual disability have a legal right to community living and the CLBC model in Canada's British Columbia reports that over 90% of adults with intellectual disabilities live in community settings rather than institutional settings. Ireland can follow this path with proper targeted resourcing and recruitment. Every adult with an intellectual disability deserves to be treated with dignity, autonomy and security, and every parent wants this for their child.

Finally, I want to give a very special welcome to all of the visitors from Lucan Youth Fun today.

Deputy Paul Lawless: I thank the Social Democrats for bringing forward this very important motion, which Aontú will support. According to the Disability Federation of Ireland, there are between 5,000 and 6,000 households with a social housing need due to disability and a total of 10% of everyone on the waiting list are people with disabilities.

I want to raise an important issue in my constituency. A senior citizen who has been caring for her daughter with Down's syndrome for decades is afraid to die, not because she is afraid of death in itself but because she is afraid of the uncertainty about where her adult daughter will end up. This is a child, now an adult, who is being cared for in the most loving and special way and is such a valued member of his family. Unfortunately, however, he is an only child and there is no remaining close family member. This mother is well into her 70s. It is a shocking story that will stay with me forever. It is so sad to think there is no central agency where this family can go for help. There are 2,000 adults with disabilities living with carers aged over 70. This family in Mayo are not alone; indeed, I have met many others. It is sad that in the region of just 2% of these families have a housing plan. The vast majority of these 2,000 families are living in fear of dying.

This issue is very important. There are solutions and many of them are raised in the motion. We can no longer have a situation where families are passed between the HSE, local authorities and service providers in the various regions of the country. Nobody is owning the problem and families are being passed from pillar to post. It is very important that the Minister address this. One agency should be tasked with leading out and developing, in conjunction with the families, a plan for them. I urge the Minister to do everything she can to achieve this.

Deputy Michael Collins: I thank the Social Democrats for tabling the motion, which Independent Ireland will fully support. It is a brilliant motion. I want to put on the record my full support for the Before We Die campaign. I attended a meeting with the group in Cork city recently and I can honestly say it was a greatly attended and very moving meeting. Parents are being left in a crisis situation. This has been coming for a long time. People have been left on their own and it is time for the Government to sit up and take serious action.

The campaign is led by parents of adults with intellectual disabilities. These are not people looking for special treatment; they are mothers and fathers who have spent a lifetime caring for their sons and daughters, who are asking one simple question, which is what will happen to their child when they are gone. It is a question that no parent should have to carry alone, yet thousands do throughout Ireland today. Parents in their 70s, 80s and even 90s are still providing full-time care because there is nowhere suitable for their loved ones to live. Many are exhausted and worried sick about the future. They live with the constant fear that if something happened to them tomorrow, their son or daughter could be left without the support, security and stability they need.

The message from these families is simple and powerful. They want solutions to be put in place before they die and not after. This is a reasonable request. In fact, it is the very least they should expect from the State. Behind every statistic we discuss today is a real person and a real family. There are parents lying awake at night wondering whether anyone is listening. There are brothers and sisters worried about what responsibilities may suddenly fall on them in the future. There are adults with intellectual disabilities who simply want what the rest of us want: a home, community, independence and a good quality of life.

We need a system that plans ahead instead of reacting after the damage is done. We need proper housing options, supported living arrangements, respite services and community supports. We need clear pathways and certainty for families. Most important, we need Departments and agencies working together instead of leaving families to navigate an endless maze of bureaucracy. This issue is particularly challenging in rural Ireland, where families can find themselves with very limited local options. Nobody should be forced to move their loved ones miles away from families, friends and everything familiar simply because suitable supports are unavailable in their own community. We also need better data and greater accountability. If the Government does not know the true level of need, it cannot properly plan for the future. Families deserve transparency and they deserve to know that progress is being made.

Most of all we need compassion. We need to recognise the incredible dedication of parents and carers who have devoted their lives to looking after loved ones. These families have done their part. They should not have to spend their latter years living with fear and uncertainty. The families behind the Before We Die campaign have shown tremendous courage in speaking out. We owe it to them not just to listen but to act. I urge the Government to provide the long-term planning, resources and commitment these families so desperately need.

I was on the board of CoAction for a number of years in a voluntary capacity before I got into politics. That was 15 or 20 years ago and there was talk at that time about a model for independent living for people with intellectual disabilities. It never went from there to where we are today. That model has not really been exercised or brought forward and, where it has, some people find their accommodation might be 60 miles or 70 miles away. This is a bitter

pill for people who have cared and saved the State billions of euro down through the years, to think their son or daughter has been taken away from them.

We tried to exercise this model in my community and recently we built 12 houses in Schull. I am involved with Schull Community Care and we had difficulties with this. We paid into the project, which was one of these RAS schemes. We had difficulty in getting two people with intellectual disabilities into one of the houses. We did win the battle but my God it was an uphill battle. Our group struggled for it to happen. It has brought the people joy and this could be the same in every community in the country. Whether it is ten, 12, 20 or 100 houses being considered, a percentage should be given to people with intellectual disabilities to live independently, with a little bit of help. Their families will not be going away; they will certainly be helping and there will also be the help of others. The model in Schull should be copied throughout the country. If anyone wants to sit in a car to go down, I will show it to them in the morning.

There are other issues with regard to people with disabilities. I am fighting for the transport service from Castletownbere to CoAction in Bantry. People need this transport service but for the past six or seven weeks we cannot get answers on whether it will continue. Issues like this are of huge concern.

Deputy Grace Boland: I thank the Social Democrats for affording us the opportunity to speak on this important issue. It is one I have raised several times with the Minister of State. I know she is, as I am, committed to delivering homes for adults with intellectual disabilities in their own communities. I thank her for coming to Balbriggan to meet the amazing Remember Us, which is a parent-led organisation that supports not only children and adults with intellectual disabilities but also their families. It has built a wonderful community.

I have had the privilege of getting to know this community. Its members have shared their hopes and fears, and we have shared tears. The Minister of State has heard this already here today, but the question we all want answered is what will happen to people's sons and daughters when they die. We have to have a plan, we have to deliver and we have to do more than just listen. We all understand the challenges and the demands, but we need to work together across Government and the local authorities and with the HSE, and we really have to deliver for these families. The fears and uncertainty are too much for us all to bear, to be honest with the Minister of State.

As the Minister of State knows, Remember Us has proposed a pilot scheme, homes for us, which proposes a community-based model that allows adults with disabilities to live independently while remaining connected to their communities and where they have grown up. I know active work is ongoing with the local authority and the HSE on this project. I would really like to see us move forward with a pilot project on this proposal.

I also acknowledge the good work of Prosper Fingal in this space, which also provides residential homes for adults with intellectual disabilities. We owe it to these families to move from discussing these proposals to delivering and having clear plans in place.

Deputy Gillian Toole: I thank Deputy Quaide and his team for bringing this motion forward. Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities refers

to the equal right of disabled persons to live independently in their communities - not miles away and not in another county - to choose their residence, to have access to personal assistants and community services and to use public facilities on an equal basis, aiming to prevent isolation. All of that should be within a safeguarded environment as well, yet we have a situation where there has been a failure to plan, and that is planning to fail.

What is required? There are some simple steps that can be taken, which involve inter-agency co-operation and collaboration. First, we require a case management system that would be between the local authorities, the HSE and section 38 and section 39 organisations. The welcome transition funding for those changing from primary school to secondary school could be expanded to include transition in the area of residential planning too. There is also a need for financial supports, personalised budgets and personal assistants. We have to trust parents and advocates, and we have to allow them to control the future for their young person. Accessible transport is important in rural and urban areas. We have to value the role of the people who actually work in the area of personal assistant. We are human beings first and foremost and human beings secondly. I know this cannot be achieved without a very fluid and strong economy, but we have to look at the human economy in this instance and in future.

There is an excellent opportunity in Ratoath in County Meath, where there is an urban regeneration and development fund, URDF, project with planning approved for 14 age-friendly bungalows. We also have a very active and enriching rehab and Prosper group between Ratoath and Ashbourne that would benefit hugely. The amendments to the disability Act should include the right to services and the right to housing. The Planning and Development Act 2024 should perhaps be amended to include a minimum percentage of housing.

Deputy Barry Heneghan: Gabhaim buíochas leis na Social Democrats as ucht an rún seo a chur os comhair na Dála. I thank the Minister of State for coming out to my constituency and visiting some of the service users in the Irish Wheelchair Association, IWA, and the Central Remedial Clinic, CRC, and for the work she has done since in her role. I met many families living with constant uncertainty about what will happen to their sons and daughters. I met a lot of them personally in their kitchens. Looking into the eyes of those parents, you could see they feel this needs to be looked at. I understand why this is 100%. I was speaking to some of them during the week. When I rang them, they were so concerned about their children, which every parent would be, that they needed to come back to me once they processed their thoughts. I want to put some of them on the record of the House. I thank the members of the Before We Die campaign and the parents who have been in regular contact with me, including Nora, Una, Bernadette, Caroline, Lynn, Candi, Tony, Suzanne, JJ, Mary and Helen. There are many more such people across the country and they all face the same fear.

The current system is incredibly fragmented. I know the Minister of State is working on this issue now, but it is an exhausting process for these parents to navigate. I was speaking to Candi, who is a full-time carer for her daughter. She has shared her experience with me and has highlighted the need for housing that provides continuity, stability and rightful supports so that people with intellectual disabilities can live fulfilling lives. She also spoke about the additional pressures faced by many family carers, particularly single mothers, and the physical demands of caring, including manual handling and the impact on their health. There is an enormous strain on parents already providing care around the clock. Families feel they are under pressure. They need a plan and they need certainty. I do believe that the Minister of

State will give that to them. I look forward to her announcing this plan and to welcoming that announcement. The families deserve to know that their children will be supported, not only at a time of crisis but throughout their lives.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I thank the Social Democrats for bringing forward this motion and allowing me the opportunity to speak in support of the Before We Die campaign. This is a group of people I have had the pleasure to get to know over the last number of months. They are a group of people asking one simple question, which is what happens to their sons or daughters when they are no longer there to care for them. It is a question those families are raising and that my own family and many other families across the country are asking as well. I acknowledge the work of Tony Murray and Maria Moran in my own constituency who, along with the wider campaign in Cork and elsewhere in the country, have met a number of Ministers and the Minister of State.

Today, I am publishing a compilation of the targeted parliamentary questions I have submitted on behalf of the campaign and individual families. The answers confirm what these families have been telling us. Nearly half of the primary carers of adults awaiting a residential place are aged 60 or over. The State's own review found that we need at least 1,900 additional residential places. This is not a hidden problem. It is one that is going to happen whether we plan for it or not. It is also clear that while day services are important, there is very little transparency in respect of how requests for residential care are processed between the different day services, the HSE disability integrated healthcare area teams and the need at local authority level.

I am asking for two things today, which I think could be done immediately. First, I ask for a dedicated housing officer to be established in every local authority, seconded from and linked to the HSE, to finally bring together housing and health so families do not have to negotiate that. Second, I am asking for a guaranteed forward plan, triggered automatically when the carer of a person with an intellectual disability turns 65. This would mean that families get certainty and a progressive plan, not a crisis response. People have spoken to me about this. They have said that they often do not necessarily have an immediate need for a place, but they do have an immediate need for a plan for what will happen to their children.

Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Catherine Ardagh): I thank the Social Democrats for bringing forward this motion today. I thank the Before We Die campaign for leading this initiative. I am grateful to Lorraine Doyle, from Dublin South-Central, for having spoken to me. I met her in relation to the campaign.

From my own experience, I know just how much energy it takes to advocate for someone you love. Believe me when I say that as a public representative it is much easier to advocate for people who you are not related to or do not have a vested interest in. I know this from the experience of fighting for services for my own child. It takes huge strength as a family to advocate for your loved one. It is not easily done. I thank everyone for the huge amount of work and advocacy they have put into fighting for their family members.

I spoke before about my son having level 3 autism, with high-support needs. He will, most likely, need a residential place in the future. This is not something I have considered as much as the parents in this campaign, so this is why I am so grateful for all the work and advocacy

they are putting in. Like every parent, I want my son to have the opportunity to live in his own community surrounded by people and places he knows. None of us wants to be left wondering what will happen when we are no longer there to care for our children.

I know the Minister, Deputy Foley, and the Minister of State, Deputy Higgins, have been engaged with stakeholders and colleagues across Government. A huge amount of work has been done on this issue and new initiatives are coming down the pipeline. What is happening is really positive, but this is only because of the advocacy work the parents in this group have done. Families are sending us a very clear message via this motion from the Social Democrats. They need to see urgency.

Too many people are left teetering on the edge of an emergency placement and this creates enormous trauma for individuals, their families and their wider circles. We have to move away, as my colleague has said, from a system that reacts to a crisis to one that plans ahead. I thank the Social Democrats again and I hope we can match the determination of these families with the urgency they deserve.

Minister of State at the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (Deputy Emer Higgins): I thank all Deputies for their passionate contributions on what is a very important topic. The issues highlighted are very important but we all share a common objective of ensuring people with disabilities receive timely and appropriate specialist services and placements when they need them. While there may be different views on the measures needed to achieve that objective, ultimately we are all seeking better outcomes for people with disabilities. As the Minister, Deputy Foley, outlined, substantial work is already under way to improve services, build capacity and ensure people can access the supports they need.

As the Minister of State with special responsibility for disability, I am determined to work across Government to make that happen. Just last week the Tánaiste and I met members of the Before We Die campaign. I welcome them here and commend them on their advocacy and the detailed research they have collected, collated and presented. Most importantly, I thank them for their practical suggestions, which I look forward to working with them on. I have also met members of Remember Us alongside Deputy Boland. Parents in both groups but also right across the country know better than any of us in this Chamber how complex an area it is. They know we must work together across Government to meet growing demand for the required services because we require action, and action across a range of interconnected areas, many of which the Minister touched on earlier.

Ultimately, we need to be able to deliver timely and appropriate data and that needs to be used to help build timely and appropriate responses. This means understanding outcomes are achieved for people who use services and it means ensuring those services are delivered in a safe, high-quality and person-centred way. We can only achieve that with the right people and with access to the right housing needs. Addressing workplaces challenges, including the recruitment and retention of a strong workforce, and having the right regulatory environment for the sector in place is key. So too is access to appropriate and adequate availability of housing. In that regard, I echo the Minister's welcome of the circular from this week to local authorities on housing development action plans. Those plans will deliver more appropriate accommodation solutions for people with complex disabilities in local authorities across the country. It is a really positive step and follows a significant amount of cross-sectoral work,

which was driven by the Taoiseach and Ministers at the special Cabinet committee on disability. I recently met the director of housing in Mayo County Council and with the access officer in Donegal County Council. I would like to recognise the local authorities that are leading the way on this. The introduction of new plans and targets will focus each and every local authority so they will give this the priority it needs. To support families with adult children with intellectual disabilities, and indeed families of children with all disabilities, the HSE is putting in place housing co-ordinators to develop housing opportunities together with approved housing bodies, service providers and local authority housing teams. That is the kind of interagency co-operation Deputy Toole called for and I confirm it is happening. The HSE is also establishing residential planning and review teams to enable us to better plan our responses to residential needs and to ensure placements - especially those where people are placed outside their county, which many Deputies referred to - are reviewed regularly. It will also help us deliver a system that plans ahead better. This year we are, under a new initiative, delivering planned residential placements as well as emergency placements. We need to build on the number of planned residential places delivered this year and I will be working with the Minister to fight for additional budget to deliver additional planned placements next year.

As the Minister outlined, a range of policy and strategic responses are currently being developed to support further improvements across disability services and many of those are being developed in a cross-Department manner. The key now is implementation. We want to deliver these improvements at the best pace and we want to deliver them to the highest standard possible. That requires both human and financial resources, which is something we are working on. Behind all this are the people who are making those services work every day and I pay tribute to the contribution of staff up and down the country in the HSE, section 38s, section 39s and private providers who are supporting people in this situation. It is also important to recognise the absolutely invaluable contribution of families and the natural support networks people have. Most importantly, we need to ensure the voice of the person with a disability remains at the centre of everything we do. As we look to the future that means continuing to build services that provide greater choice, greater flexibility and more individualised responses while also ensuring those services remains sustainable and make the best use of available resources. Achieving that balance will be really important. It is a big challenge but the most important thing we need to do to meet that challenge is to plan ahead.

To support this, the Government has continued to invest significantly in specialist disability services over recent years. We received a 20% increase in funding this year compared with last year. Specialist disability residential services represents the largest areas of HSE disability spend and accounted for almost 60% of the total budget. This year €65 million has been allocated to disability residential services to support new developments. This includes €40 million in funding to provide approximately 199 new residential responses and 152 new residential placements comprising 72 planned placements and 81 priority 1 placements to meet urgent need, as outlined in the HSE national service plan. Importantly, that service plan places increased emphasis on longer-term planning for residential placements with strengthened operational processes being put in place to respond to the current high demand. Funding will also be provided to further support the HSE's under-65 programme, as mentioned by Deputy Wall and others, and further transitions from congregated settings. Since 2020 additional funding provided to the HSE has supported the creation of over 1,000 additional new priority 1 residential places for people with a disability. These placements largely support people

moving from their family home to residential services and are in addition to transitions from congregated settings. Between 2022 and 2024 €52.4 million of CAS was provided by the Department of housing to deliver 280 units of housing for disabled people.

In addition to supporting residential services this year's budget also provides funding for the provision and expansion of a variety of services to support people to live in their community, including in local homes. This includes €25 million in new development funding for respite services, €44.3 million for day services and €12.1 million to support home support and personal assistance services, as mentioned here. Deputy Sherlock mentioned the challenges being experienced by some families with assisted decision-making. I confirm we are bringing forward the planned review of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act and look forward to engaging with families and people with disabilities on that. Work is also under way to ensure the support for future development of disability services in terms of a multi-annual strategy for disability capital. This will allow a more strategic approach to disability capital investment, especially in light of the recent national development plan review. It will also allow a potential investment in disability capital for residential, respite, day services and assessments in multidisciplinary teams of up to €278 million between now and 2030.

Alongside this work, and as referenced by many contributors, the Department is also developing an updated capacity review for specialist disability services which will project demand, need profile and required resourcing across key service areas up to 2040. It is expected to be completed by the end of this year. This updated review will provide an important evidence base for future project demand, need profile and resourcing and will allow us to plan better. However, while planning for future services and supports is essential we know meeting the needs of people with disabilities requires action now and a much broader, whole-of-government response.

In recognition of the cross-departmental nature of the supports required by people with disabilities, the Department of Children, Disability and Equality has published the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025-2030, as co-designed by people with disabilities. The implementation and monitoring group on it, which holds all of us Ministers to account, has representatives of disabled people and their DPOs. Collaborative approaches are needed and they are going to be central to meeting the challenges ahead and delivering better outcomes for disabled people and their families. Today's discussion has highlighted both the scale of the challenges that remain but also some of the progress that is being made. Our focus now needs to ensure that we continue to invest in services, grow our workforce and plan for future demand, and work across Government to remove barriers for people with disabilities and provide better supports for families who are caring for their loved ones.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Darren O'Rourke): We will go back to the Social Democrats to conclude the debate. I call an Teachta Farrelly.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: I thank the Minister of State for being here. Like my friends, I commend Deputy Quaide on his sincere work on this over recent months. I also welcome most warmly those who are here in the Gallery who for some warped reason have had to tirelessly work and campaign for so long for what is such a basic entitlement.

I am really disappointed because today was not a day for either the Minister of State or the Minister, Deputy Foley, to talk to us about strategies, policies and all the great potential work that is happening. Today was a day to cohesively, all of us together, have a conversation about how poorly people with disabilities are served by the State. Otherwise, we would not have thousands of people fighting. Both speeches have missed the mark on this. That is not a political point I am trying to score. That is me being quite genuine here. There are many great things that are happening. This is not an area where we should be trying to say all is okay because it is not.

Deputy Emer Higgins: I am not saying that.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Neither should we be saying that the course that is set out and laid out will meet the needs because it will not. It is as simple as that. I believe today could have been an opportunity for us to come together, but it is actually a day that will empower the Before We Die campaign to work even harder, grow in momentum and somehow find even further resolve and determination. I do not think that it will in any way give people hope of a brighter or more optimistic day because the evidence shows us that the policy has successively failed those living with disabilities.

I do not have a lot of time but we really need to emphasise, having worked in disability services and residential settings for so many years, that the ideology of relying on small private institutions is one of the corner-stones of this abject failure, when their sole responsibility is to make profit off those who live in these cold, clinical, isolated settings in the middle of nowhere, in rural communities, where they do not know anybody or anything. Quite often, the staff are agency reliant and they come and go. This is going to have a catastrophic effect. We know it now but I am telling the Minister of State that in years to come, we are going to know it even more. Those organisations we have grown up with that have been the corner-stone of our community are becoming so difficult to run because the funding levels are so low, yet there are these one- or two-unit companies just focused on running a private enterprise. It is not going to work. The Minister of State mentioned those 1,000 beds with regard to the HSE. We have to be sincere. They are not 1,000 HSE settings.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Darren O'Rourke): I thank the Deputy.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Is my time up? I apologise.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Darren O'Rourke): I call Deputy Cummins.

Deputy Jen Cummins: I thank and congratulate my colleague, Deputy Quaide, for the work he has done on this topic. Since he was elected to Dáil Éireann, he has been relentless in getting information and making sure that people who are vulnerable are represented in this Chamber. He has done so well to get this prepared and has worked so well with the Before We Die campaign.

The numbers have already been stated. There are 2,300 adults with an intellectual disability living with their parents who are aged over 70. Of those, 500 are living with parents who are

over 80 and then there are people living with parents who are over 90. All of us who have spoken today have talked about the fact it is heartbreaking that any parent would have to say, "I hope I die before my child because I do not know what is going to happen to them". This is 2026. It is an utter disgrace that anybody would have to feel they are pushed to that limit and that is how they would view the situation. We have let them down so badly.

I want to praise the Before We Die campaign. Those people have had to come into this House and to the Seanad to tell personal stories and private things. They should not have had to do that. They should not have to do that. The structure should be there. Their children are adults, but they are their children. I have adult children. I still call them my children. The fact of the matter is we should have a stepping stone in this country for them when they leave school to say this is their employment, this is their education and this is what they want to do, and here are their friends and family and this is their neighbourhood. They need a choice in that. They need options but they are not freely available. Everything has to be a fight. All those things are set out in the UN conventions. There are protocols, but there is basic decency that we need to be providing in this country for people with disabilities. I am very happy and quite relieved that the Government is not opposing this motion we have put forward.

As the previous speaker, Deputy Farrelly, said, it is important this is not seen as a political point-scoring situation. This affects everybody in this Chamber and outside this Chamber. This is a human decency issue. We need to be able to move that forward and work together. We will push the Minister of State. She should please accept our pushing. We are doing it in a respectful way, but she should please accept it. If we do not move along and have this issue sorted, and if we do not have proper dignity and not have people coming here and sharing their private, personal stories, there will be a State apology. I will say that again - there will be a State apology about this issue and how we institutionalise people with intellectual disabilities. We need to get this right. We will keep pushing the Minister of State. We hope she will listen and do all in her power.

Deputy Liam Quaide: I came here today in a genuine spirit of constructive engagement with Government. I have no interest in reducing this crisis to party politics, but I have to say the response of the Minister, Deputy Foley, and that of the Minister of State, to this motion has left me utterly deflated. I have no doubt that sentiment will be shared by many people who have tuned in today who are counting on Government to take comprehensive and decisive action on this crisis. Out of a ten-minute statement, the Minister, Deputy Foley, spent eight minutes on broad statements, aspirations from Government, future strategies and general concern. She only engaged with the actual substance of this motion in the final couple of minutes, and I did not detect any engagement with the motion on the Minister of State's part. That is exactly the problem families are facing; generalities instead of commitments, process instead of urgency and strategy instead of action.

This motion is about people with intellectual disabilities living far from home, parents in their 70s, 80s and 90s being terrified about what happens when they are gone and families being left in a state of constant worry and stress because successive Governments have failed to plan. What we needed today was a reckoning with that failure and leadership in addressing it. What we got instead was a rehearsal of perceived Government achievements that are not being felt by families on the ground and more vague gesturing towards future strategies. I do not say that lightly. There was no clear commitment to a national plan for people living many

miles from home. The contention that the HSE does its best to offer placements close to a person's community, in line with his or her will and preference, could not be more detached from reality. There was no real answer on the growth of private provision. We know that the proportion of services being provided by private operators is increasing significantly year on year and that is hugely problematic. Families have waited long enough. They do not need another promise that a strategy may emerge at some point in the future. They need a Government willing to face the scale of the crisis now.

There was a passing reference to working towards multi-annual funding in the Minister's response. Our non-profit disability providers are unanimous in their message to us in the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Disability Matters. They cannot develop services and they cannot plan for the future under the current year-on-year model. We have drifted into an expensive crisis-led model. The proportion of residential placements provided by for-profit companies has approximately doubled from around 7% in 2022 to over 15% in the latest figures. That did not happen because of a clear rights-based strategy. It happened because the State failed to build enough planned public and not-for-profit capacity.

An example shared by the Muiríosa Foundation captures the absurdity of the current system. The Muiríosa Foundation is a respected not-for-profit provider operating across a wide geographical area that includes Laois, Offaly, Westmeath, Meath, Longford, Kildare, Tipperary and Kilkenny.

12 o'clock

Its CEO, Siobhán Bryan, told the Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters in February that the Muiríosa Foundation was reliant on the private rental market for 46 of its 142 residential properties. It may spend tens of thousands of euro bringing its properties up to HIQA standards, and then potentially lose all of that investment if a landlord decides to sell. This is the predicament of many other service providers. This is one of the reasons service providers need multi-annual funding. Not only is there an immense human cost to the current fragmented, reactive system where residents may lose their home at the whim of a landlord, but the system makes no financial sense either. Meanwhile, for-profit companies are in a position to build up substantial property portfolios while long-standing not-for-profit providers are left trying to patch services together year on year. We need to see a full plan from the Government, with timelines, funding, accountability and a clear path away from crisis-led provision.

It is important to say that this motion responds to one crisis, that of adults with an intellectual disability, often living with ageing parents, with no secure plan for the future. Today we are asking Government to face that crisis robustly, not with another strategy in the distance or soothing rhetoric about how great disabled people and their families are, but with the urgency, seriousness and leadership that families have been waiting years to see.

Question put and agreed to.

Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: During the 1960s, young boys suffered horrific daily sexual abuse at the hands of former Christian Brother, Seán Drummond, at Creagh Lane national school in Limerick. Some of the survivors of that abuse are in the Public Gallery this afternoon. I welcome David Phayer, John Boland, Tom Hogan, Ger Smyth, Christopher Rainbow and Thomas Hogan. Tá fáilte rompu. These men were failed catastrophically as children and treated appallingly as survivors. For years, they had to fight the State for recognition, justice and full compensation. They were locked out of redress for years. Even following the landmark Louise O'Keeffe judgment by the European Court of Human Rights in 2014, they were still prevented from accessing compensation. This was because they had not made a prior complaint of sexual abuse to authorities, even though their abuser was convicted in open court five years earlier. They had endured a lengthy Garda investigation which required them to relive the abuse and trauma they had suffered as children, yet the State Claims Agency and the defendants persisted in challenging the survivors.

The anguish for these men did not end there, because later it emerged that Drummond wrote a confession letter, dated as far back as February 1970, in which he admitted abusing pupils in Creagh Lane school. Correspondence showed that the Christian Brothers in Dublin and Rome were fully aware of the abuse committed by Drummond, but the confession letter was concealed. It was never given to the survivors. The investigation, the criminal case and the survivors' civil cases were conducted without this key piece of evidence. The confession letter itself constituted a prior complaint. Had it been disclosed, the men would not have had to fight until 2021 to access compensation. The concealment of Drummond's confession letter resulted in further pain, trauma and years of unspeakable distress for these survivors.

We should not lose sight of what these men went through as children. John Boland spoke of the horrors endured. He said: "You'd be called up to the front of the class for some reason or another, [he] would put his cloak around you and start interfering with you." John told of a full school year hoping just to get through the days without being molested. Creagh Lane national school should have been a safe place for children but Seán Drummond turned it into a living nightmare. Tá íospáirtigh Creagh Lane ag troid ar son ceartais agus cúiteamh iomlán le blianta fada. Theip ar an Stát iad a chosaint. Tá sé in am an rud ceart a dhéanamh faoi dheireadh do na fir seo, atá tar éis fulaingt an oiread sin.

In 2018, the Taoiseach described the State's treatment of survivors like those from Creagh Lane as extraordinary, cruel and insensitive. Many of the men are now in their 60s. Some have died without seeing full justice and it is now finally time to do right by them. They have asked me to put some questions to the Taoiseach. Will he support the establishment of an independent investigation into the concealment of this letter and whether State agencies knew of its existence? Will he commit to the survivors that they will now finally be paid all of the compensation owed to them? These men have fought for years and they should not have to fight another single day more.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. I appreciate that the survivors of the horrific abuse perpetrated by Seán Drummond are in the Gallery today. I was not aware that they would be here today or that the issue would be raised but, notwithstanding that, there is no question that the trauma experienced by them and others as a result of the heinous acts of this individual, Seán Drummond, and indeed many others in previous years in our schools and

across other areas of society, has been truly traumatic and has had a life-changing impact on the people abused and on survivors.

There is a shocking history of child sexual abuse in this country and there has been in many institutions. As the Deputy knows, the report of the scoping inquiry into historical sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders was published in 2024. It recognised the significance of the issues for survivors, the issue of redress as well, and their expressed wish that those running the schools, in this case the Christian Brothers, where child sexual abuse happened should be held accountable - not just held accountable in terms of what happened but held accountable financially. An interdepartmental group was established on foot of the scoping inquiry report, to each recommendation of that report. The interdepartmental group recognised that there were far-reaching implications, so there is a lot of detailed work under way now, as the Deputy knows. It is examining mechanisms that may be brought to bear to ensure that those responsible for the schools where sexual abuse took place meet their obligations to survivors. It aims to complete its work by May 2027 and will make a report to the Minister, based on which the Government will give consideration to that.

While I appreciate the specifics of this case, there could be many more involved. The issue for Government more generally is to try to look at this comprehensively in terms of all issues that may arise in the context of the work of that interdepartmental group. That said, I was not aware of the confession letter of Seán Drummond, which the Deputy outlined. I would like to get more background on that and to see what is the best way to take it from here in respect of the specific issue of an independent investigation into why that letter did not appear before now. That is where we are right now in relation to it.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Seán Drummond received a sentence of two years and he served five months. These men - not just them, but their entire families - serve a life sentence on account of this abuse. The worst thing about it, of course, is that they were faced down so viciously by the State. Even when Louise O'Keeffe won, the State still faced them down. The information that then subsequently emerged was that a letter of confession had been written in February 1970. This demon had conceded and had confessed to the abuse he had carried out on these innocent children. That letter was concealed from the survivors and they want to know who knew about this letter. I think this is a matter of the utmost seriousness. There has to be a comprehensive investigation of this matter. Furthermore, full compensation is due to these men, as is their right. Nothing takes away the pain, nor ever will, but they have to be fully compensated. Will the Taoiseach agree to both of those because that is why they are with us in the Gallery today?

The Taoiseach: As far as I can see, this is new information in respect of this letter. Was this a confession letter written to the Garda at the time or to whom? I am not sure as to who, but we can discuss that.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is a rhetorical question.

The Taoiseach: I will take this further, and I will examine this. To be fair, I did not anticipate that this would be raised this afternoon, but I certainly will take the issue the Deputy raised in respect of this letter that written by Seán Drummond in the 1970s further and see how best to

examine and deal with that. As I said, there is an interdepartmental group, but I will reflect on this and discuss it with the Minister for education and others in respect of this specific case.

An Ceann Comhairle: I welcome all the visitors in the Gallery, in particular the victims. They are most welcome.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Holly Cairns: Schools are closed, teachers are on leave and families are on holidays. Incredibly, I have to ask the Taoiseach if the Department of education knows that. If it does, why did it choose this week to announce a whole new application process for special class and special school places for the 2027-28 school year? Parents and schools only found out yesterday. To add insult to injury, the portal closes on 1 September. We all know that so many parents rely on teachers to help them with these hugely complicated applications, yet the Department somehow expects them to do that by the first week back to school. The circular says the Department will have a targeted communications strategy to reach out to parents over the summer and that it wants schools to "assist" it in doing so, even though, I repeat, schools are closed.

We also learned yesterday that, for the first time, children's student support plans will be used to help determine eligibility for a place in a special class. Currently, these plans are created by teachers to support children in their existing classes. They are not supposed to be the determining factor in whether a child can access a special class or not. The fear now is that the Government is changing the eligibility requirements for special classes by stealth. Last December, the Minister, Deputy Foley, announced that assessment of need would no longer be required to access special classes or special schools. Now, we have a hint of what may be coming down the line, namely, reports created by teachers as learning and support aids for children replacing psychological reports, placing huge pressure on teachers who, instead of writing a report on how best to support a child in their own classroom, will know that what they write could be the difference between that child getting a special class or not. This massive change in policy is being slipped through quietly in a circular during the summer break.

In all fairness, I have to ask about the carelessness in the way in which this Government consistently treats special education and the level of disrespect being shown to families and school communities. Will the Taoiseach explain why this announcement was made when schools are closed? Will he do now what will inevitably be done later and postpone the closure of the portal until at least October? Can he confirm that this Government is changing the eligibility criteria for special classes and schools?

The Taoiseach: The Deputy's portrayal of the Government's position on special education is wrong and does not accord with the facts. We have expanded provision for special education year after year, and we continue to do so, with thousands of more places, hundreds of extra special classes, new special schools, thousands of additional special needs assistants, SNAs, and additional special education teachers. The numbers speak for themselves. It is not credible for the Deputy, notwithstanding the trauma and pressure that parents are under, to portray a picture of a Government that is not engaging with special education, because we are. The figures speak for themselves. The number of extra teachers and SNAs all speak for themselves.

Last year, we brought it forward to 1 October, correctly, because it was too late in previous years. The result was a dramatic increase in the numbers applying. Applications were received from about 7,860 children for a special placement for September 2026. That is more than twice the number who did so ahead of the 2025 school year. Bringing the date forward was effective and impactful, resulting in a substantial increase in the allocation to education to cater for the additional needs in terms of special classes. About 580 new special classes have opened as a result of that initiative last year. There are 60 new inclusive special classes and so forth.

In relation to 1 September, there has already been huge engagement from parents. Parents are engaging with the portal. Again, that will facilitate earlier planning and earlier provision to make sure we can get as much as we possibly can done before the school year. There has not been a change of policy in respect of the circular that issued. The Department is seeking information, which is something that should always be done. The Deputy is now saying the date should put back. In many respects in the previous year, the information was coming in too late to organise the new special classes and provision. Bringing it forward has enabled us to do an awful lot more this year, for the current school year, than we would have been able to do in previous years. A very significant additional €646 million on top of the allocated Estimate to education was given by the Government in response to the increased demand. In total now, there will be about 4,200 special classes operating in mainstream schools next year. That is an increase of about 130% since 2020. Our objective is that every child will receive a special school placement by September.

Deputy Holly Cairns: I do not know how the Taoiseach can stand up in here and say there is not a change when this is very clearly a huge change for schools, teachers and students, without engagement with them, without understanding of the impact and, seemingly, without even understanding the school calendar. If it were not so serious, it would be comical. The Government has failed to provide school places for hundreds of children, attempted to slash the number of SNAs in school and botched the roll-out of the summer provision, and the Taoiseach stands up here and tells everybody that things are going great. Given that schools are closed now, people thought they might get a break from this kind of mess, but no, here we are again.

I will ask the other two questions that the Taoiseach did not answer again. Why was this announced when the schools are closed? Will the Government postpone the closure of the portal until at least the first week in October?

The Taoiseach: Thousands of additional places were secured last year. Where-----

Deputy Holly Cairns: Will the Taoiseach answer the questions?

The Taoiseach: Sorry, I am answering the questions but the Deputy is making false assertions.

Deputy Holly Cairns: I am not-----

The Taoiseach: The Deputy is.

Deputy Mary Butler: She is.

The Taoiseach: She keeps with her feigned horror and all the rest of it. It is a feigned kind of presentation.

Interruptions.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, allow the answer without interruption.

Interruptions.

The Taoiseach: We are involved with parents. We have all been involved-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputies were not interrupted.

The Taoiseach: -----in special education.

Deputy Rory Hearne: The Taoiseach knows all about-----

The Taoiseach: We know about it. The Deputy is not the only person who knows about special education. We all know about it because we all go about our work. I know about it. I have known it for a long time.

Deputy Holly Cairns: It is not all about the Taoiseach. It is about-----

An Ceann Comhairle: We will have one voice and the Deputy has had her time.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Cairns made it about me. She made it about us. She made the remarks. It is a serious issue. It was the Deputy who started throwing them out again, not concentrating and focusing on the actual key point.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The Taoiseach is being very defensive.

Deputy Holly Cairns: Answer the question.

An Ceann Comhairle: Respect the Chair.

The Taoiseach: There is ongoing engagement by the NSCE and the Department with schools and parents. There was a dramatic-----

Deputy Holly Cairns: Engagement when the schools are closed, is that it?

The Taoiseach: In the past two years alone, there have been 2,000 additional special classes.

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

The Taoiseach: Come on, acknowledge the expansion that has occurred.

Deputy Eoin Hayes: We are talking about this year, not last year.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy is incapable of acknowledging it.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Bacik.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: My deepest sympathies are with the family of Jamey Carney, the Killarney-based woman who was killed. Local gardaí are preparing to open a murder investigation. We note that a man has been charged with the murder of Adina Raluca Constantin who died after an assault in Laois on Saturday. Our thoughts are with their families, friends and communities as they reel from that brutal and tragic news.

As of yesterday, the number of women killed violently in Ireland this year has overtaken the figure for the whole of 2025 in just seven months. Rich, full lives have been extinguished. Families have been deprived of mothers, sisters and daughters. Communities have been deprived of family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. It has become a cliché to describe violence against women as an epidemic and fatal violence against women as femicide but that is the reality.

Women's Aid tells us that one in three women has experienced domestic violence in some form. Domestic violence is lived, endured and survived by women every day but, tragically, as we see, sometimes women do not survive. Almost 90% of women murdered in Ireland in recent decades were killed by a man who was known to them. Domestic violence kills and study after study shows that the behaviour of coercive control increases the risk of fatal violence.

We know the patterns that exist so our national response has to become something more than ritualised shock after the fact. We must have a concerted strategy to stop perpetrators of this horrific violence and to close the policy gaps into which victims are falling. We cannot continue to tolerate the intolerable.

There is much we can do but I want to ask about one policy in particular. Front-line organisations, like Women's Aid, tell us that financial insecurity and the housing crisis are trapping women and children in violent homes. They simply cannot afford to leave and they have nowhere to go. Their abusers know this. Labour has proposed a €3 million safe fund to provide fast financial support for those who need an escape route. Administered by Women's Aid, it would not be means tested.

Just weeks ago, I raised the epidemic of violence against women and girls with the Taoiseach and I did so in the context of a number of policy calls, including establishment of this safe fund. He gave me a welcome reply, saying he would ask the line Ministers to engage with us to explore how to ring-fence funds for this proposal. He said he was open to constructive engagement but we have heard nothing since then and we know budget negotiations are already under way. A safe fund cannot resolve the deeply embedded misogyny that exists in Irish

society but if it can save a life or protect one woman, or one child, from the torment of domestic violence, it will be worth doing.

Can the Taoiseach confirm whether he plans to bring our proposal to Cabinet? Will we see a safe fund for women in this year's budget? If not, could we have a timeline for this necessary change? It would not be hugely costly but it would be something that could have a huge impact on the lives of vulnerable women and children.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. The loss of life and the murder and killing of women is shocking. As the Deputy said, a large percentage of women are killed by people known to them. The horrific killings of Jamey Carney and of Adina Raluca Constantin in Portlaoise are quite shocking and the numbers are not going in the right direction in terms of the continued extreme violence that is occurring.

There is a societal response required, more generally. Obviously, there will be investigations in respect of the most recent killings and those who committed these crimes need to be brought to justice. More broadly speaking, we are supportive of any measure that would help women who are victims of continuing domestic violence. There does need to be a far greater degree of flexibility in housing policy, for example. The Minister for housing has, since the Deputy last raised this issue, updated Cabinet in respect of measures to transfer time in social housing between local authorities to facilitate women to leave where they are and to go another location but also to develop protocols with local authorities in respect of how women in circumstances of domestic violence can avail of housing, the provision of safe houses and, of course, additional refuge spaces. Cuan, the new agency the Government established for domestic violence, is leading that.

I will speak to the Ministers concerned in terms of the Deputy's proposal around the safe fund; it is not a huge amount of money. We would have to engage with the organisation in terms of the specifics of that. We want to make sure there is a programme of additional refuge places and safe houses. Also, in every local authority allocation, there should be a reserve held to facilitate women fleeing domestic violence. I will ask the Ministers for housing and justice again to talk to the Deputy in respect of the specifics of what she has put forward. I favour as broad a degree of flexibility as possible to facilitate women who are under the constant threat of either coercive control or violence in any shape or form that might take. We have to provide opportunities for people to flee that violence, to leave it behind them and to take that decisive step. I will leave it at that for the time being.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: I thank the Taoiseach for that substantive and positive response. I do appreciate that and I appreciate the Taoiseach's indication he will engage seriously on this issue. Clearly, there is more to be done also on the provision of refuge spaces and on local authority allocation rules.

It is regrettable that during yesterday's debate on the Istanbul Convention, we saw an insufficient number of TDs who were scheduled to speak show up for the debate. The debate collapsed and that is unfortunate in a national emergency. It is an emergency not just in this jurisdiction but across this island. We have seen some shocking figures also in the North, so public representatives need to treat it seriously. Again, I thank the Taoiseach for his engagement.

Of course, we all know that women and children should not be forced to flee their homes. We need to develop a means of ensuring that it is perpetrators who are removed from their homes, and speedily. However, we also appreciate that in an emergency, victims need support to flee and to escape violence. Freedom from violence should not be a luxury.

I thank the Taoiseach for his commitment, in principle, to a safe fund of this nature. The details can certainly be discussed and clarified but the support of Government, in principle, is vital. Can I ask that we might see funds allocated in this year's budget?

The Taoiseach: Again, I thank the Deputy for raising this. I should have referenced that the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Dara Calleary, has announced the introduction of domestic violence travel supplement. The Deputy is probably aware of that.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: Yes.

The Taoiseach: It was announced since the last time the Deputy raised this. That is an important additional measure. Broadly speaking, we have a significant issue more generally in terms of the level and scale of violence and attitudes. In particular, and separate from the murders that occurred, access to violent pornography, for example, by young males is an issue as well, which could be creating an environment that is leading to the kind of shocking levels of violence perpetrated against women. We need to look at this more broadly, which we are doing, but we have to continue to look at what is the most effective way to change the societal context of all of this.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I will start by paying tribute to the Creagh Lane abuse survivors who have had to fight tirelessly, although they should not have had to, for justice in the face of a conspiracy by the church and a cover up and absolute obstruction by the State.

Tonight, TDs will have an opportunity to ban the barbaric practice of hare coursing; to join the North and the rest of Europe in saying that terrorising animals is not entertainment or sport; to stop thousands of Irish hares being captured from the wild every year, crammed into crates and then into enclosures with other hares despite them being solitary animals; and to then make them run for their lives from dogs that are ten times their size and with hares being pinned to the ground, thrown into the air and killed every single year. We know that many Fianna Fáil TDs have told constituents that they are opposed to hare coursing and want to vote against it.

What is the Taoiseach's position? Is he personally in favour of hare coursing? Does he think it is okay to torture wild animals for fun or for gambling? Will he let his TDs vote with their consciences or is this a case of Fianna Fáil running with the hares and hunting with the hounds; saying one thing to one audience and then doing another thing?

A new poll published this morning confirms the vast majority of people right across this country are opposed to hare coursing. We know there is no urban-rural divide on this issue despite what the tiny minority of people who enjoy torturing animals try to make out. There is a troubling part of the debate on this issue so far which needs to be cleared up before TDs vote tonight.

In the debate on Thursday, the Minister of State, Deputy Niall Collins, said, "In 2022, an independent economic analysis estimated that coursing contributed approximately €70.7 million annually to the Irish economy." The same figure was repeated on the airwaves by other Fianna Fáil TDs and by the Irish Coursing Club. This, however, is a very elusive report, shyer than the hare itself. It was supposedly done in 2022 but was not mentioned literally anywhere until last week. Parliamentary questions were asked in 2025 and this report was never mentioned. When asked by *The Journal*, the Irish Coursing Club refused to provide this report, supposedly because it has to be presented to the club's members first - four years after it was written. So, we have a report, apparently produced in 2022, with an unbelievable finding of a value of over €70 million for hare coursing, which conveniently has not been published in four years, so nobody can actually scrutinise it. It is all a bit mysterious, would the Taoiseach not agree? Has he seen this report? Does he agree that if it exists at all, it needs to be published before the vote so that TDs can assess for themselves the supposed economic benefit of continued cruelty and barbarism towards Irish hares?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising the issue. In the first instance, each political party has its own rules in respect of a vote of conscience. In the Government parties' situation, it is in respect of human life issues. That is well known. Across the political system, parties vote in accordance with internal debates and under the Whip system. That is the position. Coursing is regulated significantly more tightly here as a result of previous legislation. The post-ban experience in Britain and Northern Ireland witnessed a rise in illegal hunting and poaching and the need for dedicated police operations. If you over-regulate or introduce a ban, it can lead to worse practices. That is something that has to be factored into this.

More generally, in terms of any change in practice, you do have to bring people with you. I can recall earlier periods in this House when other practices were legislated for and the campaigns that developed around them were far in excess of the specific issue. In other words, people felt that their entire way of life was going to be challenged.

The Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 has very specific regulatory protections involved, with far greater penalties for violation of the regulations on hare coursing. Regulated muzzled coursing, operated chiefly by the Irish Coursing Club, ICC, exists under a significant overlapping statutory framework: the Wildlife Acts of 1976 to 2018; the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013; the open seasons order 2005; the Greyhound Industry Act 1958; and the ICC rules, directives and guidance notes. Coursing licences carry 44 separate conditions overseen by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, NPWS. Those coursing meetings are supervised by the NPWS to ensure compliance with those 44 conditions, associated with the section 32 and section 34 licences issued by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage. A panel of pre-coursing inspectors, selected for hare expertise, inspects every club in advance of a meeting and issues a certificate to courses only where standards are met. There is a monitoring committee involved in the Department of agriculture with the ICC and the NPWS to monitor developments in coursing. The situation is kept under constant review to ensure that this is done in accordance with the law and the regulatory framework that governs it.

Deputy Paul Murphy: The Taoiseach says you have to bring people with you, but the people are miles ahead of the politicians on this one. In today's poll, when you exclude the undecided, 74% of people support a ban on hare coursing. In the poll a number of years ago, it was 77%,

and higher in rural areas than in urban areas. The problem the people often face is that they have to try to drag the politicians with them because this place remains an outlier compared with society at large, where there is potentially going to be a majority support for hare coursing.

Second, we have heard again and again that this industry is highly regulated. The whole essence of the thing is terrorising hares. It does not have animal welfare at its heart. Despite what a Fine Gael TD tried to suggest in the debate on Thursday, the hares actually do not enjoy it. They are not running for the laugh; they are running because they are utterly terrified by dogs that are ten times their size.

Third, I come back to the question of the report. It is very troubling that in the debate the Government relied on a figure from a report that has not been produced, cannot be analysed and cannot be scrutinised.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Paul Murphy: How can people vote when they are told there is €70 million from Irish coursing? That does not make any sense whatsoever.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Paul Murphy: They are told it is in a report but they do not have the capacity to analyse that. That is a problem.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, the time is up. The Taoiseach has your point.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Will the Taoiseach accept that the report needs to be published before a vote takes place?

The Taoiseach: I have not seen the report-----

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Nobody has.

The Taoiseach: -----and to be frank with the Deputy, the provenance of the report is not something that I have knowledge of. It is not surprising that people would have done studies and analysis on this, but it is more than just economics in any event.

When I referred to bringing people along, I meant there are people in rural Ireland who would have diametrically different opinions or approaches from the Deputy, and there are. That is what I meant about engaging with society on these matters because over time people have felt that their way of life is under sustained attack and threat, no matter how alien it might be to the Deputy's perspective or other people's perspectives. Whether that is justified or not, that is the reality. In many ways these measures can actually create a counter reaction that is far disproportionate to the actual specific issues that have been raised here from time to time. That is a factor in our society, whether the Deputy likes it or not. It ultimately has manifestations that are much broader than the specific issue of hare coursing itself.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach. Before we move to Other Members' Questions, I have some people to welcome. In the Visitors Gallery we have relatives of the last political prisoners to be released from British prisons following the conclusion of the War of Independence. In attendance are Linda McManus, Conor McManus, Conor Flood, Dr. Pat McGarty, Vincent Reynolds and Councillor Debbie Coyle. They are visiting today for a briefing hosted by Senator Cosgrove later this afternoon. You are most welcome.

Ceisteanna ó na Comhaltaí Eile - Other Members' Questions

Deputy Noel McCarthy: I wish to address the ongoing need for the repair of the Fermoy Weir in my constituency of Cork East. I brought the matter to the Taoiseach's attention as recently as March, so I know he will be familiar with this situation, and I thank him for that. He will be aware the weir is a protected structure and a very important part of the river and the wider Blackwater region. However, he will also know that, unfortunately, the weir sustained considerable damage as a result of a flood event in 2016. During this flooding, the greatly increased flow through the breach eroded a section of the southern end of the weir. This threatened to scour the channel and undermine part of Fermoy's flood defences. It required urgent intervention by the Office of Public Works, OPW, to stabilise part of the foundation. This breach, unfortunately, had the effect of lowering the river level upstream, which significantly impacted upon those using the river for recreation and leisure. We have a very successful rowing club that uses the river on a permanent basis and its members find it very difficult to participate in their sport when the river is low.

Cork County Council began consultation on a project to remediate the weir in 2017. Following the consultation with Inland Fisheries Ireland, it was revealed that repairs to the weir would not achieve compliance with the habitats directive unless a new fish bypass channel was also constructed. The proposal for the installation of a fish pass, in addition to the full repair of the weir, is currently estimated at around €6 million. Planning permission for these remedial works was approved in February 2024 but, unfortunately, we are no closer to works beginning as funding cannot be secured. Cork County Council acknowledges the importance of this structure and its obligation to remediate the weir as a protected structure in its ownership. I understand from direct engagement with Cork County Council officials that it is willing to contribute greatly towards the cost of the overall works. However, the fish bypass channel element of the proposed upgrade accounts for the majority of proposed costs, at around €4 million, and involves the provision of new infrastructure beyond the resources of the local authority.

I understand that senior council officials have written to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage with regard to this as the original planning phase for this project was co-financed by that Department.

I recently met with the Minister of State with responsibility for nature, heritage and biodiversity, Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan, to discuss the matter, and I thank him for his engagement as we seek further discussion between the Department, the council, local stakeholders and public representatives.

With this in mind, will the Taoiseach please directly engage with the appropriate Ministers and with Cork County Council officials to ensure that Fermoy Weir is restored to its former glory sooner rather than later? It is an enormously important feature within the town, and one that Fermoy locals would love to see repaired at the earliest convenience.

The Taoiseach: I thank Deputy McCarthy for raising this issue. I share his frustration with the progress of this project because it goes back to that storm in 2016. I subsequently visited the rowing club and am well aware of it. I have spoken to the county manager about this and to the Deputy's good colleague Councillor Frank O'Flynn. I hope the Deputy does not mind.

Deputy Noel McCarthy: Not at all.

The Taoiseach: All things Fermoy and all that, as the Deputy knows. I spoke to them to get the background to this because different Departments have said that it not their responsibility. I will convene a meeting between the OPW and the Department of housing - I have spoken to the Minister of State, Deputy Moran, and the Minister, Deputy James Browne - as well as Inland Fisheries Ireland and the Ministers of State, Deputies Dooley and O'Sullivan, in terms of the NPWS and so on.

The council will make a contribution. The cost could be higher than €6 million. The documents are ready to go to tender, but it seems each Department says it is someone else's problem. However, this can be resolved. We can find the capital for it. If the documents are ready, the council should maybe go to tender, and I suggested that to the county manager. I know the council wants to have everything guaranteed, but at least we would have an idea of what the cost is.

This has to be done because it is a protected structure. It dates from the early 19th century and is a beautiful area in itself. The manager also indicated that the council is going to apply to the Minister for rural and community affairs for grant funding under the rural regeneration and development fund, RRDF.

If we can pull people together, it will enable us to get this done. It has to be done, and I am now taking it under my responsibility to make sure that we pull people together to enable us to get it done.

Deputy Noel McCarthy: I thank the Taoiseach for his positive response. It means a lot to the people of Fermoy, as I said already. The Taoiseach mentioned Councillor O'Flynn. I want to acknowledge all the councillors in the Fermoy municipal district for all the work they are doing. I know at first hand that they are working hard to achieve what I am trying to achieve here today. I am the only public representative who lives in the town of Fermoy, so I know at first hand the frustration that the locals are feeling about this because they feel they are being neglected. Every town, village and city has a focal point. We in Fermoy have the River Blackwater, so when people come to visit our town, they say how lovely the Blackwater is but, unfortunately, the weir is in disrepair at the moment. The job needs to be carried out on it and the work needs to be done because it is unfair to people who use the river on a regular basis and all of the people living in the town and surrounding areas.

The Taoiseach is right. It is about working with all the different Departments and everyone else to achieve what we are trying to achieve, and I thank him for taking a personal interest.

The Taoiseach: The application was originally made for barrier mitigation funding. The Fermoy project involves the rebuilding of a weir and then the barrier mitigation programme deals with mitigating existing barriers to fish passage, but both are combined in this project.

It is about pulling people together to make sure that this can be done, and we need to get it done or costs will escalate, but it is important that it gets done for leisure, sporting, fishing and other activities, as well as for the wildlife, biodiversity and so forth. It is an important project and I will certainly keep a focus on this. I appreciate that the Deputy has now raised this twice in the House.

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

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The former Carlton Cinema site, which is at the heart of Dublin's historic 1916 battlefield and, of course, is core to the regeneration of the north inner city, has been bought at a cost of €80 million to facilitate the development of the MetroLink. Some €354 million has already been spent on MetroLink and not a single train has run. It now seems that the costs for this project are set to climb from the original estimate of €7 billion to €12 billion or maybe more. The Minister, Deputy Chambers, cannot give any definitive information on this. What will be the final cost of this project? Are we witnessing another national children's hospital fiasco unfold before us? Is there no point at which the Government will intervene to give clarity on the cost and to ensure that taxpayers are getting value for their money?

The Taoiseach: Forgive me; I understood that the Deputy wanted the State to buy this site.

An Ceann Comhairle: No rhetorical questions.

The Taoiseach: That was my understanding, so I thought the Deputy would be standing up to welcome this. Two weeks ago, she called for the State to buy this site.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I am asking about MetroLink.

The Taoiseach: The somersault this morning is interesting.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: What would be interesting is if the Taoiseach answered the question.

The Taoiseach: Either the Deputy is for the acquisition of this site, or she is not for the acquisition of this site.

Deputy Martin Heydon: Two weeks.

Deputy Thomas Gould: That was not the question.

The Taoiseach: Regarding the metro, the Minister is not in a position to put a definitive price tag on it right now-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: That is my point.

The Taoiseach: -----but the focus is on getting the metro built. Again, I presume that is something the Deputy supports.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Jesus, he really is a tosser.

Deputy Holly Cairns: Two weeks ago, I raised with the Taoiseach the issue of the 19 survivors of Dunderrow National School.

(Interruptions)

Deputy Holly Cairns: A Cheann Comhairle, week after week, the Taoiseach does not seem to be able to hear me in the Chamber. Do we need to examine the microphones?

(Interruptions)

An Ceann Comhairle: It is the background noise. The Deputy is being interrupted. Please, go ahead.

Deputy Holly Cairns: Two weeks ago, I raised with the Taoiseach the issue of the 19 survivors of Dunderrow National School in Kinsale, who are being denied redress. I told him that the Government's strategy in these cases is "delay, delay, delay". He said, "It is not delay, delay, delay in respect of the mediation that has been sought". Lo and behold, what do we have? A delay in respect of the mediation that has been sought. The women, who have been waiting 15 years, have been told the Government needs more time to consider their request and will get back to them on 17 July, conveniently the day after the Dáil rises for the recess and less than two weeks before the end of the law term. Delaying mediation and accountability sounds a lot like "delay, delay, delay".

Will the Taoiseach give a cast-iron commitment today that details of the mediation process will be communicated to the survivors before 17 July?

The Taoiseach: Again, the Deputy has her perspective or characterisation of the communication between the State and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, IHREC. It is not delay, delay, delay. The Government will enter into mediation and will be communicating to the legal representatives of the survivors. The fact it is the day after the Dáil rises is neither here nor there. The issue is going to be pursued.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for welcoming to the Gallery the relatives of the Peterhead Ten, the last political prisoners released from British prisons after the War of Independence, who are here with Senator Nessa Cosgrove.

On Monday, the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste met the Irish Thalidomide Association to discuss the long-delayed State apology. The Tánaiste said that this year is the one when we bring some degree of closure to people who have been treated so badly, and indeed thalidomide survivors have been treated so badly by the State. There are just 40 survivors in Ireland and, as I have said before, all this group is asking for is a State apology, recognition, statutory supports and a fair compensation scheme for this small cohort of people.

I again ask the Taoiseach for an apology. Justice for thalidomide survivors is long overdue. Britain made an apology more than 15 years ago. Can we say thalidomide survivors will finally see justice this year?

The Taoiseach: First, that is not all that is being asked for. We had a good meeting earlier in the week. I am as frustrated as anybody with the inability to get these issues resolved. I articulated that, as did the Tánaiste, at the meeting. I believe these issues can be progressed. The enhanced supports are there and are being availed of by survivors. They are significant. I believe that at the meeting earlier this week, particularly in terms of the unacknowledged, we agreed a process to try to get that resolved once and for all. I do not want to go into any further details at this stage because we have agreed a process. It is our objective and our desire to get these issues resolved as quickly as possible.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Transgender, non-binary and intersex people face discrimination and persecution worldwide. This Saturday, Trans & Intersex Pride will march in Dublin at 2 p.m. I have drafted a Bill, the non-binary and intersex recognition Bill, which I am hoping the Government will support, to give legal rights to such people. It recognises a non-binary gender in the gender recognition certificate - an X marker. It would allow parents the option of an X marker if their child is born with intersex characteristics, something that forces many parents to carry out dangerous surgery. It would provide equality in the law in Ireland, which the Department of Social Protection, in its LGBT+ plan, says it is committed to doing. Many countries recognise non-binary and intersex people, such as the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Malta, Iceland, even the USA, Australia and New Zealand - I could go on. Will the Government get behind this Bill? It can introduce a Bill of its own, if it likes, but I ask it to support my Bill.

The Taoiseach: Forgive me, but I have not quite read the Bill in its entirety yet. The Minister for Health and the Minister of State at the Department of Health, Deputy Mary Butler, are looking in particular at the healthcare needs of trans people more generally. Again, whether the legislative route is the route to go is an issue I would raise with the Deputy. She is correct that, in Ireland, many within the intersex community are coming under a lot of attack, some verbal, some physical. We had a meeting with representatives of the LGBTI+ recently. It was quite disturbing in terms of the different atmosphere out there now compared with would have been the case a number of years ago. We have to give all of these issues careful consideration regarding the protection of people and the creating of space for people. The priority for us---

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

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: The HSE has rejigged the way it operates regionally and locally, but we still have issues with the recruitment of public health nurses, particularly in the Lucan, Clondalkin, Newcastle, Ballyfermot and Palmerstown CHN areas. I have previously raised issues like the Dublin allowance, pay restoration and other measures, such as building houses specifically for staff. We are told the HSE will not divvy out the limited resources equally. In my constituency, there are people suffering disproportionately when other areas are getting a much better service. What Government approach needs to be taken? Does the Taoiseach agree it is only fair that limited staffing resources for public health nurses should be divided out equally, if one area is suffering badly, as in my constituency of Dublin Mid-West?

The Taoiseach: First, I think every effort should be made to have balanced and equal provision of staff. I am not aware of the specifics of the area. The Minister stated that she has raised this with the Chief Medical Officer with a view to examining it. If the Deputy can give us the details, we will pursue it.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: I have raised it before.

Deputy Shane Moynihan: For the last few months, in this House and at the transport committee, I have been raising the need for increased regulation and enforcement in the area of e-scooters. I welcome the statement this week by the Minister of State, Deputy Canney, that he will look at registration and insurance requirements. These are things that need to happen. We heard from the Road Safety Authority, RSA, in the Oireachtas joint committee this morning that it believes the structures exist to roll that out efficiently. Safety is also something that I have raised on the floor of the House with regard to high visibility and helmet use by those operating e-scooters, and educating parents that minors should not be operating them. The third piece in this puzzle is gardaí feeling they have the support to make tactical interventions to prevent e-scooters from continuing, and to be able to intervene and confiscate an e-scooter that is being used illegally and unsafely. A very clear signal needs to be sent to them that they are able to do that.

I thank the Taoiseach for his support on this so far. Will he support that call for additional support for An Garda Síochána and roll out the registration and insurance requirements that are central to dealing with the scourge of e-scooters on our streets at the moment?

The Taoiseach: I think we need to stand back and have a fundamental review of e-scooters more generally, given the level of injuries that have been reported by medical consultants. That needs to be examined in more detail in light of the statements they have issued recently. That level of brain injury among children suggests society has to really stand back and review the entire role of e-scooters, to be frank. It is unacceptable that there would be those numbers. I am informed that gardaí have significant legislative powers to combat the antisocial and dangerous use of e-scooters. The Garda authorities report 754 incidents in which an e-scooter has been seized in the first quarter of this year, compared with a full-year figure of 931 for 2025. Therefore, from what I am being told, there has been a higher number of seizures of e-

scooters, which indicates perhaps the bad use of e-scooters in given locations. On the Deputy's call for regulation, the answer is "Yes."

Deputy Joe Neville: RTÉ is now asking the Government for a 32% increase in its licence fee top-up this year, which is worth under €55 million. We must ensure that any money allocated to the broadcaster is not outbalanced by overspends by RTÉ in other areas. RTÉ is in front of us at the public accounts committee tomorrow. It has stated that TV licence sales have declined by 19% since 2022. It claims this is caused by households not necessarily having TVs, but we all know that is only part of the story. A major possible cause of the drop in sales is the fact that there have been financial scandals and unnecessary overspends. Spending in areas such as the limousines for €35,000, the high spending on termination payments last year, as well as €56,000 in expenses being spent on 41 members of RTÉ going to Czechia for the Ireland qualifier earlier this year, are issues that are coming up. With such levels of public spending on the broadcaster, while RTÉ provides a good service for the country, we need clarity on what the future funding model is.

The Taoiseach: The House has been divided on the correct funding and revenue response to public service broadcasting more generally. Various Oireachtas committees in the last number of years have had different proposals. One was for an overall levy on all devices including tablets and so forth, which would create a resource to enable public service broadcasting. We then had the wider issues of accountability and so forth. While all of those issues that the Deputy referenced have to be interrogated, and people held accountable for them, the bottom line is that when we add it all up, it does not come near the more global issue. The general financial requirement of RTÉ is in the millions. The big issue, I believe, is that the licence fee does make a contribution, so this constant undermining of it only makes things worse. People are not prepared to support the universal levy, and there is no consensus on that in the House. We have problems here, but we need to make up our minds on what we want for RTÉ.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: The Galway housing crisis is just getting worse. I genuinely cannot believe that it is getting worse year on year. This year, we are not seeing the housing stock that we need coming on stream. I am dealing with a couple in their 60s who have been nine years on the housing waiting list. They have to leave their rental property, and they are being told that the only option available to them is HAP. Anyone who knows Galway city knows that getting a HAP property is impossible. We are now at the stage where we cannot house our babies, our children, our adults or our older people. We are literally saying to people that the one thing this Government can guarantee them is that it cannot house them, from the cradle to the grave. This is getting worse. It is a disaster. I am asking the Taoiseach to help and intervene for people in crisis in Galway city who cannot find a place to live.

The Taoiseach: It is not actually getting worse.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: It is in Galway.

The Taoiseach: The number of houses being built is increasing, and the numbers of social houses are at record high levels.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: I am not making this up.

The Taoiseach: There may be specific issues in Galway. The Deputy needs to talk to the county manager and the city manager in respect of getting projects built more quickly and removing any barriers to getting housing developed.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: Come to Galway.

1 o'clock

The Taoiseach: All the permissions are up in terms of planning permissions for new homes. The number of houses being delivered has gone up, particularly social housing. Close to 10,000 were built last year. The highest number of social houses are being built annually since the 1970s. Some local authorities do better on social housing than others.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: I am not making it up.

The Taoiseach: The reality is that we are making the allocations to local authorities.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: Come to Galway.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am not making it up either. The rules are the rules. Stop interrupting.

Deputy Mark Ward: Grace Lynch died in January after being hit by a scrambler. This came after years of calls for increased action against illegal scrambler use. Grace's law has been passed and this is welcome, but we have not seen the benefit or significant changes in our communities. Scramblers are still being driven recklessly. Grace's law made it very clear that the illegal use of scramblers in public spaces is against the law. The Garda Representative Association, GRA, has said not one member of the gardaí is trained in pursuit driving. It has called for its members to be trained and protected if they pursue a scrambler. Scramblers and e-scooters go hand in hand. In the past two weeks, six children have been admitted to Temple Street hospital with traumatic brain injuries because of e-scooters. Does the Taoiseach believe that gardaí have proper training and protections to tackle this scourge? Does he believe that adequate regulations and laws are in place to protect our communities from the scourge of dangerous scramblers and e-scooters?

The Taoiseach: I dealt with this earlier. There has been a substantive body of law enacted in respect of scramblers, in particular. On the enforcement side, gardaí are seizing scramblers and e-scooters. In quarter 1 of 2026, 94 scramblers were seized, tracking well ahead of 2025's full year figure of 159. I gave the figures for e-scooters earlier. About 754 were seized in the first quarter, compared to 931 for 2025. On the training side, we are determined to provide resources to the Garda in terms of equipment and training in all matters pertaining to this issue. Over 38 e-scooters and 17 e-bikes were seized across the three days of Operation Meacán, which is An Garda Síochána's proactive response to the issue.

Deputy Barry Heneghan: Mount Temple Comprehensive School in Dublin Bay North, my constituency, is more than just a regular school. It is one of Ireland's greatest success stories. U2 began there and the school is synonymous with creativity, culture and opportunity for students. Today, its arts and performance hall is facing demolition as part of redevelopment. Nobody opposes development of the school building or hall, but the concern raised with me by past students and parents is whether the hall can be retained for refurbishment or adapted for reuse. For decades, the hall has given young people a stage to perform, build confidence and discover talent that cannot always be measured in the exam hall. Parents and former students have asked me to raise this issue. A campaign is seeking a pause in demolition until an independent feasibility study or meaningful consultation is carried out and before an irreversible decision is made regarding the hall where U2 performed. This will happen with or without you, a Taoisigh. Will he intervene and make it a beautiful day for the next generation of musicians?

The Taoiseach: I want to commend U2 on its recent philanthropic contribution to Music Generation, which is one of the great legacies of U2 that has brought music to many children the length and breadth of the country who would not otherwise have had that experience. Funding has been matched by the Government. The more recent decision by U2 to contribute substantially has been matched by the Government and Ireland Funds. I was at a dinner two weeks ago to announce that. The legacy and heritage of U2 are phenomenal. It has brought worldwide attention to Ireland and Irish music and culture. I am not aware of the specifics of the situation the Deputy raised. I do not know whether the school board of management is building a new hall. Perhaps whatever new facility is being created can in some way capture the magic that led to the emergence of U2 in the first instance.

Deputy Thomas Gould: I have campaigned for years for extra dementia unit beds and nursing home beds on the northside of Cork, especially in Heather House. Some 19 dementia beds have been built in Heather House. They were announced in 2022 and built and finished last November. I have campaigned to get them open. I was told in May that they would be open in June. They were supposed to be open in June but were not. I have been told by members of staff and families that there is no definite date. People have family members in nursing homes right across Cork, in hospitals and at home with families who are struggling to look after their loved ones, while a nursing home is built, ready to go and fully kitted out. Will the Taoiseach give a commitment to speak to the HSE to open the dementia unit beds in Heather House immediately? People are crying out for them.

The Taoiseach: It is good that it was built. It was committed to 2022. In my experience, when we build nursing homes or facilities, current revenue or annual funding has to be allocated and staff have to be recruited. I will engage with HSE in respect of this to have those beds occupied and provided for families and those who need inpatient residential care.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Commuters woke up this morning to the news that Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, is considering putting up tolls on the Dublin Port Tunnel. It recommended an increase from €13 to €14 and said it was modest. On what planet is a €14 toll modest? We are told that the increase is to stop congestion. Why is it that when it comes to congestion the only tool in the Government's toolbox is a stick - a toll hike to beat people

off the road? What about providing more public transport? This year, the Government will provide no new net public transport capacity. Projects such as the Navan to Dublin rail line and MetroLink are proceeding at a glacial pace. The Government operates in slow motion when it comes to infrastructure. Both these projects have been discussed for decades and neither are likely to happen in the next ten years. Will the Government make a commitment to stop the increase in tolls? Will it commit to stop punishing commuters and start to provide the public transport capacity that is needed?

The Taoiseach: There has been huge investment in public sector transport. On rail, very good progress has been made on the Navan rail line over the past number of years in terms of funding provision. I do not operate every State agency. State agencies are legislated for in this House and are charged with responsibility to do things. The issue of congestion is a broader one. In terms of the specifics of the tunnel, it is not an area that seems overly congested at times. That is a matter I will take up with the Minister and will raise with TII more generally as to its strategy and whether it will be effective in this case.

Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan: A month ago, a group of people living with Friedreich's ataxia, along with their families, were present in the Dáil as the urgently needed drug Skylarys was being discussed on Leaders' Questions. It is important to acknowledge the hurt the Taoiseach caused that day when he gave incorrect reasons for why the drug was not on the agenda at the last HSE drugs committee meeting. The group will make the journey to the Dáil again next Tuesday. Will the Taoiseach and Minister make the time to meet with them? Will the drug finally be on the agenda for the drugs group next Tuesday?

The Taoiseach: I did not cause anybody any hurt.

Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan: It was the dates you gave.

The Taoiseach: One does not cause hurt if one tells the honest position. I was not responsible for whoever built up the expectation that it would be on that meeting. It was never said to me. There are a number of ways we can approach this. My only objective, like most Deputies on this side of the House, is to help those who have Friedreich's ataxia. That is all. I do not try to score political points with other people on issues as serious as this. I have to say that now. On the issue of confirming drug accreditation and so on, there is a system in place, whether one likes it or not. My understanding is the next drugs meeting will deal with this issue. I am not comfortable with the approach that is now being taken that every single meeting of that group will have this level of pressure. That is not great either.

An Ceann Comhairle: Your time is up, a Thaoisigh.

The Taoiseach: It may lead to wrong results-----

An Ceann Comhairle: We have ten Members left and five minutes remaining. Everyone needs to understand that. We do not have enough time and we have too many Deputies who want to speak.

Deputy Louis O'Hara: I raise the case of a constituent in County Galway who has experienced lifelong difficulties and trauma as a result of historical abuse at the hands of a member of the Christian Brothers who was his primary school teacher. The individual who carried out the abuse has since been convicted. My constituent's legal representatives have written to successive Ministers requesting redress from the State but those letters have fallen on deaf ears. His solicitor has advised him that he may have to initiate High Court proceedings, which would cause him further grief and trauma and would be extremely costly. He should not be forced to go through the courts system. He is simply asking for the compensation he is entitled to without being subjected to further trauma. Specifically, he is asking for the same opportunity for mediation as was offered only recently to other survivors of abuse. Can that be facilitated? My constituent wishes to remain anonymous but I am happy to pass on his details.

The Taoiseach: I may be familiar with that case. Deputy Albert Dolan may have contacted me about it; I am not sure if it is the same one. I cannot deal with every individual case on the floor of the House. I outlined earlier the broader approach the Government is taking. Each case will have to be examined on a case-by-case basis at the moment.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: The Oireachtas education and youth committee, which I chair, recently compiled a report on school meals. It is a fantastic scheme led out by our colleague, the Minister, Deputy Calleary, and was hugely supported by the Minister, Deputy Foley, when she was at the Department of education. One of our recommendations is that we abolish water charges for schools. The meals are free in the classroom but the water children drink from the school taps is charged for. A lot of schools are in arrears on their water bills. I do not imagine anyone will shut off a school's water. It just seems like an accounting exercise, with one Government agency paying water charges to another body. As preparations for the next budget gather pace, is there any chance school water charges can be abolished in line with free school meals? Could such a striking out of charges possibly be considered in the upcoming budget?

The Taoiseach: In the last budget and the one before it, we substantially increased the capitation grants allocation. I think it was by €50 per pupil; that might have been the year before last. There was a very substantial increase for primary pupils in particular and also an increase for post-primary pupils. The Department of housing has always been reluctant in terms of incrementally dropping water charges for different utilities and areas because people would come forward looking for the same for other deserving causes. I am not sure of the impact of water charges on schools' individual budgets. I would have to examine that. I will talk to the Minister in respect of it. The school meals scheme has been fairly extensive, as the Deputy said. It is a huge investment now and it has happened very rapidly across all our schools.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: The utilities regulator recently imposed a €31 million negative revenue adjustment on Uisce Éireann for underperformance and failures relating to its leakage performance target. Meanwhile, Uisce Éireann is giving out performance-related bonuses to its management teams. Its annual report for 2025 shows €18 million worth of bonuses have been paid. How can I explain to people in Kildare, who are so often without water, that the

regulator has imposed a €31 million fine on a body that at the same time is choosing to pay 94% of its staff their full performance-related bonus, to the tune of €18 million?

The Taoiseach: I will ask the Minister to engage with Uisce Éireann on that specific issue. In some areas, it is performing. The €31 million negative finding in terms of leakage is clearly an issue. It is not just to do with leakage. There have also been issues articulated by the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, in terms of lapses to do with the operation of wastewater treatment plants in some areas. Overall, however, Uisce Éireann is investing a lot and getting a lot done in respect of the upgrading of our water infrastructure and in terms of newer wastewater treatment plants. Those getting bonuses could be the people who are performing well in achieving objectives the company has set itself. We cannot just juxtapose the two and assume the bonuses apply to those are not performing on the leakage front.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Pico Lopes put it clearest when he arrived back in Ireland from the World Cup: "Some things are bigger than football ... The game for me has to be stopped. It shouldn't be played". Tonight, delegates at an FAI extraordinary general meeting will vote on whether Ireland should play Israel. I hope the delegates do the right thing, which is to say that a state like Israel, which is engaged in genocide and apartheid, should be isolated, not played. Will the Taoiseach assure the delegates that if they do the right thing by not playing the game, the Government will step in to ensure there is no loss to Irish football as a result?

The Taoiseach: How can we do that?

An Ceann Comhairle: There should be no rhetorical questions.

The Taoiseach: The Government cannot affect the seedings that will result from doing that.

Deputy Paul Murphy: What about-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Murphy, the Taoiseach's question is rhetorical.

The Taoiseach: We see what is happening at FIFA at the moment. Do we think FIFA would really concern itself too much if the Irish football team pulls out and damages its own prospects for the future? I think the world would carry on, unfortunately. I think FIFA would carry on, unfortunately. The Government is doing a lot in respect of this issue. Our view is that we should deal with it from a governmental level and at a political level and not have to ask everybody to carry-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Taoiseach. The next speaker is Deputy Brennan.

The Taoiseach: In my view, the implications for Irish football are serious, given the wider governance of football globally. That is enough said.

Deputy Brian Brennan: I am looking for an update on the straw incorporation measure. It is my understanding that there will be a significant oversubscription to the scheme, with

expected payments exceeding the €10 million budget allocated for 2026. It is essential that we find a way to extend the budget of this scheme to meet all expected payments. In my constituency of Wicklow-Wexford, we have a proud tradition of tillage farming but, putting it bluntly, pride will not pay the bills. Tillage farmers have never been at a lower ebb. Any reduction or non-payment under the scheme will be a devastating blow to the sector. The scheme targets the reduction of carbon emissions. Therefore, we must continue to encourage farmers to participate, not dissuade them. To put it simply, the tillage sector is on its knees and farmers within the sector are dependent on these payments as a means of survival. I appeal to the Minister, Deputy Heydon, and the Taoiseach to ensure there is no shortfall.

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Martin Heydon): I thank the Deputy for raising this really important issue. I know how important tillage is for the south east and the Wicklow-Wexford area. The straw incorporation measure is a really positive support measure for tillage farmers, with very positive impacts on organic carbon levels in soil. I am acutely aware of how important it is to farmers from an income perspective as well. This year has seen a really high level of applications, far exceeding the €10 million allocated for it. At present, all possible options are being considered. A decision will be made shortly and farmers will be notified as soon as possible of the details of the scheme for 2026.

Post-European Council Meeting: Statements

An Ceann Comhairle: I call on the Taoiseach to make his opening statement. Under Standing Order 133, he has 15 minutes.

The Taoiseach: Before I speak on my attendance at the European Council on 18 and 19 June in Brussels, I recognise that we are now one week into our Presidency of the European Union. The first week has been positive. On 1 July, I was honoured to welcome President Costa and President Zelenskyy to Dublin Castle for the opening ceremony of our Presidency. With the members of the Government, I was also delighted to welcome President von der Leyen and the College of Commissioners to Cork for very productive meetings. Yesterday, I was in Strasbourg to present the priorities of the Irish Presidency to the European Parliament. I also met with President Metsola as well as the Irish MEPs. I look forward to addressing COSAC, which is the conference of EU committees of national parliaments, next week in Dublin Castle.

My key takeaway from all these meetings is that while there will be many challenges ahead, all EU colleagues want to see a successful Irish Presidency. Success will mean delivering on our shared agenda for driving Europe's competitiveness, promoting and protecting our Union's values and enhancing the security of our citizens. There is also broad agreement on continued strong support for Ukraine, progressing the EU enlargement agenda and working to successfully conclude the negotiations on the European Union's next multi-annual budget by the end of the year.

Many of these issues were discussed at the meeting of the European Council in June. The discussions among leaders on many of the key priorities for the EU were very instructive for the work of our Presidency over the next six months.

There was a full agenda, with leaders having discussions on Ukraine, the Middle East, the next multi-annual financial framework, competitiveness and global economic challenges, and migration. Other items on the agenda were, among others, European security and defence, illicit drugs and support for Moldova. I will set out the main results of the European Council meeting on Ukraine, the conflict in the Middle East, competitiveness and the multi-annual financial framework. The Minister of State, Deputy Richmond, will speak later on the other issues.

We were joined by President Zelenskyy for an exchange of views on the situation on the ground in Ukraine, and how the EU can help Ukraine defend itself against Russian aggression and work towards peace. Ukraine's future is in Europe and it was very positive that we were able to welcome, as 27, the formal start of EU accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova, with the opening of cluster 1 on fundamentals on 15 June. This step was well overdue and sent a positive signal not only to Ukraine and Moldova, but also and especially to their citizens. As recognised by the European Commission, both Ukraine and Moldova have met the technical conditions for the opening of all six clusters. The aim of the Irish Presidency is to open all remaining clusters with both countries by the end of our term, an ambition I reiterated to President Zelenskyy in my meeting with him in Dublin last week. This is not without its challenges. The opening of clusters requires agreement among all member states. As part of our Presidency, we will engage with the Commission and all member states to advance both candidacies in line with the merit-based approach.

I look forward to the planned strategic discussion on enlargement, and associated reforms, that is now planned for the October meeting of the European Council. As Russia's aggression against Ukraine continues into a fifth year, Ireland and the EU continue to stand in full solidarity with the people and Government of Ukraine. During our Presidency, we will work to deliver continued support for Ukraine. This commitment was symbolised by the presence of President Zelenskyy in Dublin for the opening ceremony of the Presidency last week. Russia has shown its disregard for peace and human life once again by launching intense attacks on Kyiv and other cities over the past number of nights. This is utterly contemptible. Our sympathy and solidarity are with the Ukrainian people.

The European Union remains steadfast in its support for a just and lasting peace in Ukraine. It is crucial that any agreement upholds the fundamental principle that borders cannot be changed by force. We welcome progress on the first disbursements of the Ukraine support loan and, as part of our Presidency, we will work to ensure a steady disbursement of the €90 billion loan. We will support efforts to ensure that Ukraine can defend itself, including by advancing the disbursement of EU military assistance and facilitating the integration of Ukraine into the European defence industrial base. We will also support the continued evolution of the EU military assistance mission and facilitating discussions on the future adaptation of EU support as part of the EU's longer term security guarantees to Ukraine. It is also crucial that the EU continues to step up pressure on Russia to agree to a ceasefire and engage in meaningful negotiations while also undermining its ability to wage war. Work is continuing on the 21st package of sanctions against Russia, which will target the energy sector, financial services and crypto trade. We will work during our Presidency to secure early adoption of this package.

The European Council welcomed the memorandum of understanding between the US and Iran and stated its commitment to engage in diplomatic efforts to secure peace. It stands ready

to support the implementation of this memorandum. The escalation in the conflict in recent days is deeply troubling. De-escalation and dialogue are required. Both sides should return to talks and work to achieve an agreement that addresses all issues, including Iran's nuclear programme, and achieves a comprehensive peace settlement, which is vital for wider regional stability.

We also wish to see freedom of navigation fully restored through the Strait of Hormuz. EU leaders called on the Council and the Commission to continue monitoring the impact of the closure of the strait on energy supply routes. EU leaders also condemned the ongoing violence and repression at the hands of the Iranian Government against its own people, as well as its use of proxies to destabilise the region and the threat it is posing to its neighbours.

The European Council also reaffirmed the EU's continued support for Lebanon and the Lebanese Armed Forces. Leaders made a clear commitment on continued emergency aid amid the devastating destruction and displacement experienced by the people of Lebanon. European leaders also agreed on the need for a potential post-UNIFIL, common security and defence policy, CSDP, mission, aimed at supporting stability in Lebanon and a continued role for the UN, which we welcome, in line with our long-standing commitment to peacekeeping there.

The deteriorating situation in Gaza and the West Bank was also discussed by European Union leaders. As the House will recall, I wrote to President Costa ahead of this meeting of the European Council setting out Ireland's deep concerns and our position on the need to examine the EU's relationship with Israel, given its ongoing actions in both Gaza and the West Bank, and called for an urgent discussion among leaders. Importantly, at our meeting in June, European Union leaders expressed concern about the lack of progress by all actors in the implementation of the ceasefire agreement in Gaza and again called on Israel to allow immediate, unimpeded access and sustained distribution of humanitarian assistance at scale into and throughout Gaza. We also condemned Israel's unilateral actions in aiming to expand its illegal settlements in the West Bank. These actions, among others, are posing an existential threat to the two-state solution. While these statements are important, I was clear with my colleagues that action by the European Union is required. It is therefore important that the European Council acknowledged the Commission's intention to present options on action against illegal Israeli settlements to the Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 13 July. I called for this to include a proposal on banning trade with the settlements. I also raised this with President von der Leyen during our meeting in Cork last week and I look forward to seeing the Commission's proposed options.

While the passing of the occupied territories Bill by this House yesterday is a significant step, it has always been my view that action at EU level is also required and would be more effective, if we are to have the desired impact. Our long-standing position remains that the EU-Israel Association Agreement should be suspended, or at a minimum that the trade elements should be suspended. While we all agree that more action is needed, it is also important to acknowledge the positive role the EU is playing in supporting a viable two-state solution. The EU is the single largest donor to the Palestinian Authority and to the people of Palestine. A key focus of Ireland's Presidency will be to reaffirm the European Union's commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on the two-state solution.

I would also like to take this opportunity to address the situation in Sudan, tragically the forgotten war. It is over three years since this terrible conflict began, causing untold suffering,

with almost 14 million people displaced and the biggest humanitarian crisis facing the world today. The European Union is supporting efforts to bring this devastating conflict to an end, including through the international Sudan conference held in Berlin in April. It has called on all sides to respect international law, to protect civilians and to guarantee the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance. At the Berlin conference, the EU and its member states pledged €812 million in aid. Ireland has donated nearly €16 million in 2025 and 2026 in humanitarian assistance and supports.

The June European Council reviewed progress in strengthening the EU's competitiveness and called for decisive progress on the One Europe, One Market agenda. Leaders also held a strategic debate on global macroeconomic imbalances. I have made clear my very strong support for the clear political agreement that has now been established on the need for urgent action to enhance Europe's competitiveness and productivity. We must secure an economic future that meets the needs and expectations of Europe's citizens, while advancing our commitment to global economic co-operation. At the informal European Council meeting in Cyprus in April, the European institutions collectively agreed a One Europe, One Market roadmap, which sets out the priority work to be undertaken over the months ahead. The roadmap includes targets for legislative proposals and agreement by the co-legislators, quarterly reviews to monitor progress and clear responsibilities for all EU institutions. With many of the files falling for implementation by the end of 2026, this comprehensive agenda provides Ireland's Presidency programme with a very strong strategic focus.

We will work to make decisive progress across the five strategic building blocks of the One Europe, One Market roadmap: promoting simplification; deepening the single market; championing fair and open trade; reducing energy prices while decarbonising our economies; and driving the digital and AI transformation.

We will work closely and cooperatively with member states, the European Parliament and the Commission to make as much progress as we possibly can.

Leaders have also committed to keeping up the momentum for implementation through regular stocktaking at each of our European Council meetings. I look forward to reporting to my fellow EU leaders on the progress the Irish Presidency is making on the implementation of the roadmap at our meetings in the autumn. Our goal should be nothing less than making Europe the best place in the world to start and grow a business, including through a significantly modernised digital environment and significantly strengthened research and innovation system. This will be the foundation for future prosperity that must underpin our shared values and wider political objectives.

The June European Council discussed the EU's next long-term budget, also known as the multi-annual financial framework, MFF, based on the negotiation box, with figures presented by the Cyprus Presidency. Leaders called on the incoming Irish Presidency to advance work by the October European Council meeting. As we have made clear in setting out the Irish Presidency programme, the European Union's ambitious agenda for the coming years will need a budget that is appropriate to this ambition. Ireland is ready to play a key role in advancing the negotiations and presenting workable compromises for a new EU budget that is both strong and sustainable.

I understand that many countries have different priorities and pressures when discussing the creation and funding of EU programmes, but we also need to collectively bridge the gap between what we expect the EU budget to deliver and the funding we are willing to provide. We remain committed to agreeing the overarching MFF package by the end of 2026. We know that this will not be easy. Difficult decisions and compromises will need to be made by all member states. The demands for expenditure are many, with a need to support long-standing priorities, such as CAP and cohesion, while also investing in our future competitiveness and economic prosperity, as well as our security. There is still much work to be done in these negotiations and the Government will make every effort during its Presidency to secure a fair and balanced outcome.

The European Council had a busy agenda to work through in June, with a focus on many areas that we will be seeking to advance in the coming months during our Presidency of the European Union. I look forward to continuing our discussions in this House on these matters. A successful European Union Presidency is a strategic priority, as a stronger European Union means a stronger Ireland. This is a unique opportunity for Ireland to lead on the world stage and to copper-fasten our reputation as bridge builders, rooted in our commitment to effective multilateralism and universal democratic values. This requires a collective effort, and I know that we rely on the support of this House as we endeavour to deliver an ambitious agenda for the people of Europe over the next six months.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union comes at an important moment, not just for Europe but for Ireland. Across Europe, people face increasing uncertainty. The war in Ukraine continues, the cost of living remains a daily struggle for many families, farmers face growing pressures and confidence in political institutions is being tested. It is at moments like this that leadership matters. Ireland has the opportunity not simply to chair the European agenda but to help shape it, and we should do so with confidence, purpose and a clear understanding of Ireland's national interests.

We believe this Presidency should be guided by three priorities. First, and of immense domestic priority, we must use the Presidency to begin practical preparations for Irish unity. The European Union has made clear that in the event of reunification, the entire island of Ireland would return within the European Union. Responsible governments prepare for foreseeable constitutional change. They do not wait until the last possible moment. The Government should use Ireland's Presidency to begin structured engagement with EU partners on preparations that constitutional change in Ireland will require. As the only all-Ireland party represented in the European Parliament, in this Dáil, in the Assembly and across the island, we will continue our work with others throughout Europe to ensure that serious, responsible and detailed preparation replaces hesitation and delay. Ireland's constitutional future deserves nothing less.

Our second priority is to ensure that Europe works for ordinary working people because workers, families, farmers and small business continue to struggle with the cost of housing, energy and everyday life. Ireland's Presidency should champion an agenda that protects decent jobs, supports family farms, strengthens public services, delivers genuinely affordable housing and energy and ensures that economic progress benefits working people. The European project will only command people's confidence if it delivers real, tangible improvements in their daily lives.

Third, Ireland must use this Presidency to stand firmly for peace, international law and military neutrality. In that regard, the case for comprehensive sanction of Israel is now unanswerable. The fact that Israel still enjoys a privileged trading relationship through the association agreement amplifies the egregious failures of the European system and its leadership of the people of Palestine, who face not just a deteriorating situation in Gaza and the West Bank, but who are being subjected to a genocide. It is very important that is named without equivocation. The agenda at a European level now needs to move absolutely clearly and frankly to a calling to account of Israel. Nothing short of that will bring about the necessary change that is required to protect the very survival of the Palestinian people.

Ireland should also use the Presidency to ensure that voices and perspectives of militarily neutral states enjoy a greater place within the European Union. This Presidency gives us the chance to show the very best of who we are, to prepare for our constitutional future and stand with workers, families and farmers, to be the voice for peace, democracy and international law and to ensure that Ireland's voice in Europe remains independent, constructive and true to the values that have long defined this nation.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: To pick up on some of the international issues in the Taoiseach's speech, I will take this opportunity to once again condemn the attacks on Kyiv in recent days that resulted in the deaths of many civilians. It is a clear demonstration of the war of aggression that has been waged by Vladimir Putin and the Russian Federation. There was a vote today in relation to Aughinish Alumina and exports to Russia. We cannot have a situation where profits can flow to a country violating international law in relation to products potentially aiding the Russian war effort. The Government should not be passive bystanders. It should use its position to ensure the EU steps in and purchases the alumina. The workers of Aughinish do not make export decisions. Their jobs need to be protected and that is the reason we have supported the amendments in the European Parliament today regarding ending the exports of alumina to Russia.

We welcome the fact that the European Parliament is taking an interest in this issue. However, it is hypocritical that we cannot apply the same standards or urgency to arms exports to Israel or banning trade with illegal settlements. Clearly, that needs to be escalated, particularly the issue of the EU-Israel Association Agreement. It is still the case that we are reading daily reports of civilians being killed in Gaza. Five or six people are killed every single day, including children and medical professionals. It makes a mockery of the notion that there is a ceasefire.

I welcome reference to Sudan in the Taoiseach's statement. It is vitally important. While the conference earlier this year was welcome, the EU needs to do more than just provide humanitarian assistance. Ultimately, it needs to be part of a political solution and end the flow of weapons that continues uninhibited.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: As we take over the EU Presidency, we have an opportunity to demonstrate the kind of leadership it should embody. The agenda rightly includes competitiveness, security and Europe's economic future. However, competitiveness cannot simply mean protecting profits and expanding markets. It must also mean protecting workers, strengthening strategic sectors and ensuring that European businesses operate to the highest ethical standards. This means legal entitlement to collective bargaining. That is why the

continued exports from Aughinish Alumina to Russia remain so deeply concerning. At a time when Europe is united in imposing sanctions in response to Russia's illegal war in Ukraine, Ireland cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the commercial links that undermine that collective effort. We await the findings of the investigation from the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, but the Government must ensure there is full transparency and very decisive action, where required.

For as long as this is not dealt with, it will cast a shadow over Ireland's EU Presidency. This Presidency must reflect Ireland's values of the rule of law, human rights and equality.

Over the weekend in Ballina, I attended the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council hosted by the Minister, Deputy Dara Calleary. When I was there, I also met and joined the protestors from the Mayo branch of the Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign, who were peacefully demonstrating in solidarity with the people of Palestine. In particular, I commend those who organised the protest and also note that Medea Benjamin was at it. It put across a powerful, peaceful message to all of those participating in the EU Presidency here that Ireland stands with Palestine, in particular, in relation to what needs to be done regarding the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: I raise the issue of Cuba with the Aire Stáit. The lives of the Cuban people have been devastated by the US blockade, coupled with two executive orders. The impact is incalculable. It has meant that fuel and essential goods are just not flowing into Cuba. The infant mortality rate among vulnerable newborns has now increased to 9.9% due to the fuel sanctions and electricity outages. While some hospitals have generators, it is impossible to gauge when the electricity is going to be switched off. It takes time to get the generators restarted, so all that staff can do is rush to the wards and manually fan the infants when this happens, which is daily, until the generators kick in. Some 1,800 children have died as a consequence of the tightening of the blockade, as well as the extra 343 sanctions Trump imposed at the beginning of his first term as President.

The survival of children with cancer has decreased by 20% and the national immunisation programme, one of the main achievements of Cuban public health which protects millions of Cuban children, is seriously at risk, hindered by the unavailability of raw materials, equipment and financial resources to sustain domestic vaccine production. The blockade is severely hindering the domestic production of several disease diagnostic tools developed by national industry, including essential tests for the early detection of cancer.

Logistical and payment difficulties in purchasing wheat have resulted in only 50% of flour being delivered to the regions, and the weight of bread, which is normally 80 g, has to be reduced to 60 g.

I am saying this because we all know how terrible it is in Cuba at the moment. What we need now is a collective ability to stand up and do something for the Cuban people. This is literally killing their babies and we cannot let it continue.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I welcome the opportunity to again make statements post European Council. I wanted to pick up on one of the parts of our Presidency that have been outlined. The three priorities being talked about are security, values and competitiveness. I wonder why

"values" is in there. For me, "values" is a separate pillar from priorities, if the Minister of State sees what I mean. Why is peace not a priority? The Government is framing it as "security". I was interested, during the launch of the Presidency, that the Minister of State's colleague, the Tánaiste, dedicated a substantial part of his speech to peace, which I really appreciated. Unfortunately, that was not the case with the Taoiseach's contribution, which barely mentioned peace. For me, this is crucial right now because the European Union was founded as a peace project and we are losing our way. We are spending more and more on the military, we are framing things as "security" and we are not focused on peace, which we do not mention it enough. If it had been mine choice, peace would have been one of those three pillars. Under "values", we have to make sure that peace remains high up there as a value. Unfortunately, it seems to be slipping from people's discourse again and again.

Those priorities regarding our European values ring hollow when we refused to ban services in the occupied territories Bill yesterday, when the Taoiseach's party colleagues in the European Parliament are sitting on the fence on the sale of alumina to Russia and when this State refused to stand up for the rights of European citizens to be protected from harms caused by big business with regard to both environmental and online harms. The way this Government blames the EU for domestic refusal to take action on Gaza, saying it has to be done at European level to be effective, is a sentiment that is problematic for me. This should be a time when we are showcasing and fighting for a European Union that takes positive action, and one which defends democracy. As for the current budgetary changes, for example, the reduction in social cohesion funding and the lowering of standards, all of that feeds authoritarianism within Europe and boosts the far right, which is such a growing and powerful force across Europe. We need to be careful and aware and we need to bring this into our language.

On defence spending, it is deeply concerning that in his opening comments, the Taoiseach highlighted the advancement of European military assistance as a key point for the Irish Presidency. Military aid should not be under the remit of the EU. This should be a matter for member states and, as a militarily neutral country, we should have no part in providing weapons, either directly or through the EU.

Moving to Aughinish Alumina and the urgency of action required on that, I welcome that the European Parliament voted today in support of a motion to ban alumina sales to Russia. I welcome that the Minister of State's grouping, the European People's Party, EPP, backed the motion. It is disappointing that Fianna Fáil MEPs indicated they would abstain on this motion and, unfortunately, it is also being reported today by the *thejournal.ie* that Independent Ireland voted against those sanctions. All of that needs to be examined and called out.

When it comes to doing the right thing and protecting jobs, the Government needs to be decisive and proactive. We cannot feed Russia's war machine and if we want to protect people's jobs, our Government needs to accept that fact and plan for it, not simply allow complicity. That is true of Ukraine and it is true also of Palestine. The principles and standards of international law and our values and policies should not be available to pick and choose when it suits us.

On the online harms I mentioned and our responsibility as member states to protect against them, I looked at the Council website and there are announcements around the protection of girls and women online. There was also an announcement on child sexual abuse material. Meanwhile, the digital omnibus has been agreed, which essentially guts the artificial

intelligence, AI, Act from within. The Minister of State's party's grouping in the European Parliament supported and championed that. We have opened up a window, through the passage of the digital omnibus, whereby high-risk systems will be allowed to be registered before we have the governance framework in place to respond to it. In regard to all of the issues we have seen this year around Grok and online harms that people are talking about on daily in these Houses, we are not putting our money where our mouth is when it comes to a European regulatory framework. Instead, the Government and its colleagues in Europe are pushing for the simplification agenda and harmonisation and always thinking about it from an industry lens, while failing to capture the bigger harms that are being wrought on society by the tech industry and the big players in these platforms. We need to get back to those values and make sure that peace and the needs of our consumers and citizens are foregrounded.

Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil: I will focus on the competitiveness element of the European Council and Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union because this may become one of the most important parts of our Presidency.

Europe is at a crossroads. We face an uncertain geopolitical environment, slower growth, pressure on households and businesses and a technological transformation that is moving faster than our institutions are used to and what they have been built to do. In that context, competitiveness is not just an economic issue; it is about Europe's security, resilience and ability to shape its own future.

Two reports have helped frame this debate. Enrico Letta's report asked Europe to complete and deepen the Single Market, particularly in areas such as capital, energy, digital infrastructure and telecommunications. Mario Draghi's report is even more direct. It tells us that Europe is falling behind on productivity, innovation and scale and we need to act with far greater urgency. Ireland should use its Presidency not just to manage that agenda but to help shape it. Indeed, the Taoiseach has mentioned the focus on the one Europe, one market agenda.

Artificial intelligence is a good example of the opportunity and the challenge. AI can support healthcare, education, research, public services and small businesses. It can help improve productivity and help Europe compete but we have to be honest as well. It raises serious questions about jobs, creative work, journalism, young people, copyright, democracy and the energy required to power these systems.

Europe's task is not simply to embrace AI blindly; it is to shape AI in a way that serves its citizens in their best interests. That means investing in skills, digital literacy, worker protection and innovation. It means ensuring that creative workers, journalists, young people and ordinary citizens are not left behind.

It is also means recognising that AI is now an energy issue. Data centres and AI infrastructure require significant electricity. We cannot allow the digital transformation of Europe to come at the cost of higher bills for households or less capacity for communities. Affordable, clean and reliable energy must be treated as central to European competitiveness. If Europe wants to lead on AI, advanced manufacturing and innovation, as outlined in the Draghi report, then energy policy is linked with industrial policy.

Europe needs to think more seriously and strategically about sovereign AI capability. That does not mean trying to build an EU version of every major American or Chinese model. That

is simply not realistic or within our means. However, Europe should not be wholly dependent on models built, controlled and governed elsewhere. As we have seen with Anthropic, such models can be switched off at the drop of a hat. There is a strong case for Europe to work with trusted, democratic partners, such as the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia, to develop AI systems that reflect our values. While these models may not compete with the newest frontier models from the United States or China, they could deliver the majority of the AI benefits to European citizens, businesses and public services. A trusted European AI capability could support SMEs, public administration, translation across European languages, healthcare, education, research and democratic resilience. It does not need to be the biggest model in the world to be useful. It just needs to be secure, trustworthy, affordable and, most importantly, aligned with our values in the European Union.

Digital sovereignty should not mean isolation, however. It should mean choice. While Europe does not need to build every AI model, it should not find itself, as it has in the past, in the position where it cannot choose, or is dependent on, systems not under its control or remit. That is where the Letta and Draghi reports come together. The Letta report tells us that Europe must remove the barriers that stop businesses and ideas from scaling across the Single Market. The Draghi report tells us that Europe must invest, innovate and act with far greater urgency. AI, energy and innovation sit right at the centre of both reports.

I will mention enlargement and the accession of Ukraine and Moldova to the European Union. This issue is not entirely separate from the debate around Europe's future; it is actually part of it. As we are all aware, Ukraine is defending not only its sovereignty but the security and democratic values of our Continent against Russia. Moldova has shown real courage and commitment on its European path. Of course, its future membership will be contingent on a merit-based process and the required reforms being implemented. Its accession would strengthen Europe strategically and politically.

Ireland has always understood that the European Union is more than a market; it is a community of values. However, if those values are to endure, Europe must be strong, innovative and competitive. During our Presidency, Ireland has an opportunity to help make the case for a Europe that, in Enrico Letta's lines, completes the Single Market and, in Mario Draghi's lines, invests in innovation. Ireland should make the case for a Europe that leads in human and value-centred AI and in our overall values, and one that delivers affordable and clean energy and remains open to those who share our democratic future and values. That is the type of competitiveness agenda Ireland should champion. I see that a lot of it is being championed already with the One Europe, One Market roadmap. It should not be a race to the bottom, particularly when it comes to artificial intelligence. Rather, we should build a stronger, fairer and more confident Europe where our values always ring true.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: I raise first the situation faced by the people of Cuba, an island that has been under an illegal blockade for many decades. It is a blockade that the world, through the United Nations, has condemned year on year. Despite the blockade and siege by the world's superpower - its nearest neighbour - Cuba has shown the way regionally in terms of health outcomes for its people. That progress on health is under attack, however. We are seeing a slow war of attrition against healthcare, nutrition and civilians by the United States through the ongoing blockade and the escalation of same. Ireland and the European Union need to make a humanitarian intervention in this regard. They also need to make a political

intervention to get a resolution on this, both through the United Nations and bilaterally with the United States.

I raise the issue of a young 22-year-old man from County Waterford, Rory Byrne. He was arrested and detained in Croatia over the weekend. I have written to the Minister for foreign affairs, Deputy McEntee, about this but I wish to raise it in the Chamber with the Minister of State, Deputy Richmond. I will share the details when I finish speaking. He was arrested following a fracas at a festival with a number of other young men. He has type-1 diabetes and is very unwell. Consular officials were told by prison authorities that he has refused consular assistance, but his family contests that. He has not been able to access medical help, consular assistance or legal advice. Obviously, there is a language barrier there as well. I ask the Department, the Minister of State and his colleague, the Minister, Deputy McEntee, to urgently intervene to ensure that Rory's rights are upheld and that he can access medical intervention, particularly a transfer to a hospital facility given that he has been without insulin for a number of days.

Later this month, as part of Ireland's Presidency of the European Union, the AGRIFISH Council meeting will take place in Cork. This gives the Irish Government an opportunity to set the agenda and push for the long-overdue reform of the Common Fisheries Policy. It also allows Ireland to set the stage for the negotiations that will take place later this year on fish quotas and avoid the shameful outcome of the AGRIFISH Council's meeting in December last year when Ireland, the Irish fishing industry and coastal communities were subjected to a calculated ambush by some of our European partners and fellow member states. We now have a situation where Belgium, with a coastline of some 70 km, enjoys more fishing quota than this entire State for a number of species that are found off our southern shores, in Irish waters. I ask the Minister of State to relay those points to his colleagues in Government so that they will be actioned in the AGRISIFH meeting in Cork this month.

Deputy Robert O'Donoghue: I will start with a comparison. There is perhaps no clearer illustration of the value of European membership than the experience of our nearest neighbour, as mentioned by the Taoiseach in a different speech yesterday. A decade has passed since Brexit. Of course, that decision was for the British people, and we respect their democratic choice. It is equally important, however, to recognise the lessons that have been learned. The warnings of economic disruption, barriers to trade and increased costs were dismissed by some during that campaign. Today, however, many of those concerns have become a reality. Businesses face additional burdens and trade has become more complex. Some British SMEs no longer export to the EU. Investment has been affected and opinion polling suggests that the British public consider it to have been the wrong decision.

By contrast, Ireland has chosen a different path. We remain fully committed to our place at the heart of Europe. We worked constructively with our European partners through the challenges of Brexit. Together, we protected the Good Friday Agreement, safeguarded the integrity of the Single Market and defended Ireland's national interests. Our economy has continued to grow and employment has reached record levels. Ireland remains one of Europe's leading destinations for international investment. Our exporters continue to enjoy frictionless access to the Single Market, which comprises hundreds of millions of consumers. Rather than being diminished by standing apart, our voice carries greater weight because it is amplified through co-operation in the EU. That is vital in a multipolar world.

This is not about celebrating another country's difficulties or reopening old debates. The UK is one of Ireland's closest friends. Our relationship is deep, historic and enduring and we want it to flourish. Nonetheless, it is entirely appropriate to recognise that Ireland's decision to remain fully engaged in the European project has strengthened our economy, enhanced our influence and secured greater opportunities for our people.

This month, we assume the Presidency of the Council of Europe at a defining moment, both for Europe and our country. It is an opportunity to demonstrate leadership, build consensus and advance the interests of Ireland and all Europeans.

I welcome the vote in the European Parliament banning Aughinish Alumina sales to Russia, albeit it was a non-binding vote. Any party that voted against that ban should be condemned. It is a shocker.

Our Presidency will be guided by the three clear priorities, namely, competitiveness, security and shared European values. Competitiveness means ensuring that Europe remains in a place where businesses can innovate, workers can prosper and investment can create opportunity in every region. Ireland knows better than most that access to the Single Market has transformed our economy. It has helped create jobs, attract investment and provide opportunities for generations of Irish people.

2 o'clock

Our task now is to ensure Europe remains competitive in an increasingly global economy while reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and supporting innovation. The Savings and Investment Union, the 28th regime, has huge potential to boost competitiveness. That is all from the Draghi report mentioned by Deputy Ó Cearúil. I hope the Government is going to vigorously pursue these proposals during our Presidency while also protecting workers' rights.

Security has taken on a new meaning in recent years. It means supporting peace and stability across our Continent, standing with Ukraine as long as it defends its sovereignty, and strengthening Europe's resilience against threats to our energy supply, critical infrastructure and democratic institutions. Ireland will play its part, consistent with our values and long-standing commitment to peace and international co-operation. That is why we must continue to put pressure on Israel to stop its destruction of Palestine.

A third priority is democracy, rule of law and respect for human dignity. These are not simply aspirations but the foundations on which Europe was built. They have delivered peace across a Continent that tore itself apart for thousands of years. That is why EU enlargement is crucial. In a world full of conflict and uncertainty, we must develop our own defence capabilities.

As we begin this Presidency, let us approach it with confidence, champion policies which strengthen Europe's competitiveness, protect its security and uphold its values. Let us continue to show that a small nation like Ireland can provide meaningful leadership through partnership and co-operation. Ireland has always achieved more by building bridges rather than building barriers. I believe the Minister of State has a similar outlook to me on this. That is the spirit we should bring to our Presidency. That is the future we want to shape for Europe.

Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan: It is now clear that as a result of the climate crisis, we are entering an era of more extreme weather in every sense. Summers are growing relentlessly hotter followed by winters of torrential rain. Earlier this year, we saw first hand the devastating damage from floods across Carlow and Kilkenny. In response to the extreme weather, the EU moved to provide emergency support for farmers who suffered significant damage from adverse climate conditions - €56 million in aid in total. Portugal, due to crop damage from heavy rainfall, is to receive €30 million, Romania and Cyprus are set to receive almost €20 million, and the list goes on. Which country is not on that list? Ireland. Not a single cent of this funding will make its way to our farmers.

Last week, I met a man who lost his entire crop of potatoes due to floods. He suffered losses of well over €500,000. He is crippled with debt and struggling in every sense of the word. It was heartbreaking to hear about the ordeal he has been through. To try to make sense of it, and to secure some supports from the State, farmers like this man provide food security but since the flooding, he has been unable to farm, denying us significant yields from prime land. When farmers like him who feed the nation fall on hard times through no fault of their own, the Government fails to stand with them. Worse still, the Government has failed even to apply for EU funding that could have changed this man's life. It begs the question: how many other funding opportunities for our farmers has this Government simply not bothered to pursue?

Earlier this year the European Commission announced that Brazilian beef would be removed from the EU food safe list due to high public health risk. Yet rather than act decisively in the interests of public health, the Commission gave Brazil until September to get its house in order. It is now clear it has not done that and is never going to do that. Instead, it has chosen to export beef to Ireland and the EU at volumes we have never seen before. Throughout 2025, 172,000 tonnes Brazilian beef were imported into Ireland. In the first three months of 2026, that figure has already reached 229,000 tonnes, flooding Irish shops and restaurants with a product that is being banned because it risks public health. What was the logic in allowing this beef to continue to be imported into the country up to September? Was it simply a case of profit over public health? If this beef causes health problems, the potential damage to individuals and the State is absolutely enormous.

Deputy Paul Murphy: The Government likes to tell us it does not have our neutrality in its crosshairs. It tells us it is planning to drop the triple lock so that a future government or this Government could send troops outside of the framework of international law on NATO missions to invade countries in the Middle East or elsewhere. However, we should not worry; neutrality is not under threat. It tells us it wants to triple our military expenditure but we should not worry, neutrality is not under threat. It participates in the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, described as a NATO alliance by the US Secretary of Defence. We have now attended 30 of these meetings, which take place either online or in NATO headquarters, either in Brussels or the air command in Germany. It engages in training Ukrainian troops involved in a war against an imperialist invader-----

Deputy Neale Richmond: It removes landmines for children.

Deputy Paul Murphy: It does not. The Minister of State is misleading the Dáil. For the record, the Minister of State said this group removes landmines. It does not.

Deputy Neale Richmond: It trains people to remove landmines.

Deputy Paul Murphy: It does not just train people to remove landmines. That was the propaganda put out at the time but if the Minister of State read into the detail, he would know that is not what it stated. He will be able to go and check it later. The Government attempted - it appears the armoured vehicles were too rusty and perhaps would have presented a threat to the poor Ukrainian conscripts - to offload armoured vehicles which were armed with grenade launchers or machine guns. It still tried to pass that off as being non-lethal military aid. However, we should not worry; neutrality is not under threat.

As part of the national maritime security strategy, the Government participates in the Joint Expeditionary Force - an alliance made-up of ten NATO members and led by Britain. However, we should not worry; neutrality is not under threat. If anybody believed this guff, they should go and pay some attention to what the Government is openly saying are its priorities for the European Presidency. Ireland is President of the European Council for the next six months and it has three priorities; values, competitiveness, and security. We are supposedly neutral State, saying that one of our three priorities is security. What does that mean in detail? I quote: "The Irish Presidency will advance work on the measures set out in the White Paper on the future of European defence and the associated defence-readiness roadmap 2030 and on defence procurement." The Government is saying openly it is going to advance the White Paper on the future of European defence and the defence-readiness roadmap.

What does the White Paper for European defence say? Section 8, enhanced security through partnerships, states:

NATO remains the cornerstone of collective defence of its members in Europe. EU-NATO co-operation is an indispensable pillar for the development of the EU security and defence dimension. The EU's unique tools of regulatory power and financial instruments help the 23 EU Member States in NATO to achieve their capability targets.

Explicitly, a Government that says it is never going to go near NATO or anything like that is now saying a priority is to uphold this indispensable pillar of EU-NATO co-operation.

Section 7 looks for a surge in defence spending. That is what is promised and what is in reality already under way via: a new dedicated financial instrument to support member states' defence investments. The Irish State has said it is going to sign up to this Security Action For Europe, SAFE, project and borrow money in order to invest money in the military; the co-ordinated activation of the national escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact. The fiscal rules are not going to apply to military expenditure. We are falling deeper and deeper into a housing crisis that is not only in Ireland but across Europe. We have never suspended fiscal rules for the housing crisis but they are getting suspended for militarisation; making existing EU instruments more flexible to allow greater defence investment; contributions for the European Investment Bank; mobilising private capital; and financial predictability.

If we read the associated defence-readiness roadmap 2030, it is the same stuff.

Europe has turned the corner on decades of underinvestment in defence. Member States increased defence budgets from €218 billion in 2021, to €343 billion in 2024.

This is all explicitly, positively referenced in the programme of the Irish Presidency. A neutral State is saying this is great and is driving the further militarisation of Europe. It is driving greater spending on weapons in Europe and it thinks that is a good thing. Mark Rutte, the NATO chief, said spending more on defence means spending less on other priorities. That is the mantra of political establishments across Europe. You will not get investment in housing or transport and you can forget about action on climate because they will spend more on weapons that do not make ordinary people any safer but make armaments companies a lot richer.

Deputy Thomas Gould: In 2008, the then Minister Phil Hogan announced a local government fund allocation in budget 2009 of €1.6 billion. In budget 2026, €670 million was allocated to the same fund. That is almost €1 billion less. Has the Minister of State, Deputy Richmond, considered asking the European Union how member states fund local authorities and how European local authorities have more democracy and autonomy and are not in constant crisis? Local authorities around this State are in crisis at the moment for funding because of cuts to the block grant. How can they be getting it right in European countries and the Government is making a bags of it here? In Dublin, we have seen increases in rents, rates and local property tax. It will be coming to Cork and to every local authority. Local authorities are using funding collected in rents for parks, playgrounds and footpaths because they are not getting the support of this Government and have not been since the financial crash.

I have a situation today where a man will be coming home from hospital after major heart surgery. When his family checked his house last week to get it ready for him to come home, a broken pipe had flooded the house. Cork City Council officials told the family they do not have the staff to get the house ready. They have to dump the carpets and floors. There is a smell of damp and mould in the house now. That man is after having open-heart surgery and he is going home to that because the Government will not fund local authorities.

I will give the Minister of State one last figure. Last year, local authorities had a combined deficit of €470,000. Local authorities are not allowed to run a deficit, so that tells the Minister of State the level of cuts and slashes there has been to services. This Government has to step up and look at a European model of funding and investment and at democracy for local authorities.

In 1990, as part of German reunification, 18 members of the East German Parliament attended the EU Parliament as non-voting observers. I speak to young people today and they want to see a united Ireland. They want a new vision. I spoke to Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael TDs in the Dáil last week who told me they would support the vote tonight on Sinn Féin's Bill, which will bring about the beginning of dialogue, debate and consultation around a united Ireland. Instead, the Taoiseach has come out and blocked it, and he will be whipping every Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael TD to oppose our Bill tonight. It is unbelievable. The party that calls itself the republican party will vote against a discussion on Irish unity. What is even worse is that Fine Gael members, who have a plan, to be fair to them, will be whipped into line tonight. Fine Gael members believe their party is descended from Michael Collins. What would Michael Collins think when they come in tonight to vote against a discussion on Irish unity? One man, Micheál Martin, is blocking the way. It is an absolute disgrace that he will whip this Government into line because of his own prejudice. Shame on him.

Deputy Michael Collins: Deputy Gould is correct. I am not one bit impressed, and the other Michael Collins would not be either. While the discussions at the General Affairs Council were not directly about the Common Agricultural Policy or the Common Fisheries Policy, they were about something just as important, the money that will be available for both from 2028 onwards. Farmers and fishing families across rural Ireland are deeply concerned that new EU priorities such as defence, migration, AI and competitiveness could end up being funded at the expense of traditional programmes that support rural and coastal communities. For many farm families, CAP payments are the difference between staying in business and walking away from the land. Likewise for our fishing communities, funding through the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund, EMFAF, is essential for harbour infrastructure, fleet development, seafood processing and sustaining jobs in coastal areas.

With Ireland set to play a key role in these negotiations, will the Minister of State give a clear commitment that the Government will oppose any reductions in CAP funding and will fight to protect fisheries funding? Does the Government support ring-fencing these funds so they cannot be diluted or absorbed into broader national spending priorities? Our farmers, fishers and rural communities need reassurance that they will not be asked to pay for new EU spending priorities.

There is a rumour out there that in CAP negotiations the full-time farmer and the part-time farmer will be separated. The man or woman who has to go out to work every day to make a living and to keep the farm going could be degraded. Independent Ireland will fight that tooth and bloody nail if it is the case. It is time to stand up and make clear that a part-time farmer will be respected the very same as a full-time farmer. Every farmer wants to stay at home and work if they can, whether man or woman, but they are left with no choice.

In relation to piers and funding, we need to find out. I have been down in Union Hall looking for funding for the past ten years. Every Minister and Taoiseach has arrived down there to promise them funding for the pier and they have never got a brown cent.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: I will try to stick to the subject as much as possible. Europe has achieved a great deal through co-operation, helping to promote peace, expand trade and tackle the challenges that no country can solve alone. We owe a great deal to Europe when it comes to that, but the co-operation works best when respect for the independence of democracy is put above the member state. Most European citizens, and certainly a lot of Irish citizens, see a tremendous disconnect between Europe and themselves. People see European legislation or policy introduced in this House. We put the belt and braces on it and gold-plate and stamp it. People feel Europe is not helping them any more and is, in fact, hindering them when it comes to a number of policies introduced through Europe. For instance, we are the only region in the world that punishes its own citizens for problems created in the United States, China and Vietnam, and that is pollution. Carbon tax was introduced to this country via Europe was legislated for here. We are the only place punishing citizens, who cannot really do anything about it. We have to face the facts. China and America are the biggest polluters. They have walked away from the table.

The old phrase is America innovates, the East replicates and Europe legislates. We have to get away from that and back to what Europe was about. It was about making life better for

European citizens. We have the Presidency and the opportunity to fix that and change things in Europe.

Deputy Paul Lawless: I want to be clear from the outset that I support the right of Ukraine and Moldova to develop, prosper and integrate, but I have serious concerns about this Government's Presidency. The Taoiseach is on record as stating that Ukraine belongs in the EU. As we take up the Presidency, it is the Government's stated ambition to make historic progress on the accession of Ukraine and Moldova.

I condemn Russia's actions in relation to the war in Ukraine. Precisely because I condemn them and believe in peace, I believe we should be cautious about fast-tracking the accession of Ukraine and Moldova into the European Union. The timing is critical. Ukraine is at war. Many decades ago, during the Cuban missile crisis, it was unthinkable to the US and its allies to have missiles belonging to the USSR in Cuba. It is a similar context for Russia. It is hypervigilant - paranoid, even - about western states encroaching on its borders. That needs to be considered but the Government has not considered it. The European people have never been consulted on this massive change to the European Union.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We will move on to questions and answers for 20 minutes, starting with Sinn Féin.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: I will ask two questions and the Minister of State can take them together. While we are not saying it needs to be the number one priority, a couple of Deputies have mentioned the opportunity for the Presidency to be a vehicle to discuss Irish unity and how the EU can be a part of that. The slogan of the Presidency is "strength through unity", ní neart go cur le chéile. If any unity is a priority for us as a political party and for many other Deputies, it is that unity. There is an opportunity.

In relation to Aughinish Alumina, there is a solution here that ensures we end the flow of alumina to the Russian war effort and protect the jobs. In the negotiations and engagements the Minister of State and Irish officials have had at the European Council, what is on the table? Some leaked reports have talked about nationalisation. There is also scope for a purchase scheme by which the Irish Government or the European Commission would purchase the alumina and sell it to new buyers that are not part of the Russian war effort. Are discussions happening at European level, either at the Council or otherwise?

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: We have all had discussions in this Chamber about the genocidal action of Israel with the backing of the United States and the absolute madness of where we have found ourselves. It is particularly painful for those in Lebanon and Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. When we do have the Presidency, it is a means of moving on as much as we can in respect of the EU-Israel Association Agreement and, if we can, getting movement. I have heard from the Minister of State, the Minister, Deputy McEntee, and the Taoiseach and Tánaiste about that. It is a matter of us seeing progress, ensuring that we can deal with the trade element. The occupied territories Bill is as it is. We would much prefer if it covered services, but we have to use the absolute maximum that we have as regards leverage on Israel. We must follow what Mary Manning and those very brave women did when, as Dunnes Stores workers, they decided not to handle South African goods. I have said this before. It was a very

small act in one way but it turned out to be part of a much bigger boycott project, which became a major part of the anti-apartheid struggle. Sometimes you have to take a first step yourself. We will only see movement when we, alongside others, force the issue, and when the regular Israeli is made to feel like a pariah, when the American allies feel that there is too much heat even for them, and when capital interests in Israel feel they are not able to trade as they were previously. It is unfortunate that this is the road the world has to go down but we have been witnessing a brutal, genocidal action. We have seen that Benjamin Netanyahu is absolutely committed to ensuring there is no two-state solution. We have to stand by the Palestinians in the way we can.

I echo what a number of my colleagues have said. It has been a disappointing week for us as regards what we saw as very sensible initial moves on preparation for Irish unity. I do believe the framework within Europe provides us with a facility to deliver this. There is an absolute need for us to engage with European partners on the supports that will be available from Europe if a united Ireland is to happen. I have no doubt that if Irish unity is to happen, it is in Europe's interests that it is as seamless as possible.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Gould is waiting to come in.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: I have no doubt the Minister of State himself is disappointed by the move that has been taken by the Government and particularly by the Taoiseach. The Tánaiste seemed more open to a dialogue across the House on coming up with a solution for making those preparations, which are absolutely necessary. We are only talking about starting a journey, which should have started a long time ago, to deliver on Irish unity.

Deputy Thomas Gould: An issue that has rightly got a lot of coverage over the last few months is the disease called Friedreich's ataxia. There is a drug out there called Skyclarys. Citizens of a number of European countries are able to access that medicine. We have come here and families have come here and spoken about it. I appeal to the Minister of State. I know a meeting is to take place this month. I have been dealing with Craig Coady in relation to his son Paudie, who is dying. They lost another son to the same illness. It is an horrendous situation. Is there any way possible? I have pleaded with the Taoiseach and the Minister for Health on humanitarian grounds, under exceptional circumstances, because Paudie's position is so vulnerable now. This will not save his life but it will extend it and give him a better quality of life. How can it happen in other European countries but not here? There are great things being done in Europe, and then we look at this. People are talking about the disconnect with Europe. I appeal to the Minister of State on that.

Deputy Ó Murchú touched on my next point. We want to have the conversation about preparing for Irish unity now because Europe could play a really important part in supporting it, coming up with solutions and funding as part of it. There is an open door in Europe when it comes to Irish unity and peace in this island. If we are going to convince people in the Six Counties - unionists, loyalists and others - that a united Ireland would be better for them, we should have the conversation in Europe now and show them that this is what Europe will bring to the table. One of the questions that really affected the Scottish referendum was what the currency would be. It was a huge issue in the last week of the debate. That is what we need to

be able to talk about now. I assume it will be the euro, but that is not for me to assume. It is part of the debate, and that is why we need Europe at the heart of this conversation.

I cannot say this often enough. Every night on social media we see the genocide that is taking place in Gaza and the West Bank, how people are being driven from their homes and their land stolen. There are nearly 1 million settlers now in the West Bank. Where is Europe? It is a mark of shame on the European Union that it is standing idly by while genocide is being committed. At the same time, it is allowing weapons to be shipped to Israel and bonds to be sold in Europe. The EU at this moment is complicit in genocide for not stopping, or doing everything it can to prevent, the genocide.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I mentioned in my earlier remarks this drift that I see the European Union has taken away from its origins as a peace project towards a defence union. There are multiple milestones - I will not revisit them all - such as appointing a defence Commissioner who openly talks about a European defence union. I really was surprised to hear the Taoiseach describe this as a priority for Ireland's holding of the Presidency, with the disbursement of EU military assistance and the facilitating of the integration of Ukraine into the European defence industrial base. That really is a departure from any kind of policy of military neutrality that we hold as a nation. I appreciate that the Minister of State personally does not support that policy of military neutrality but that, as a member of the Government, he does. How is that compatible?

How and why are we prioritising such a defence-based mechanism and defence-based priority that threatens our own military neutrality? Many of us on the Opposition benches struggled with that package of aid because it could not be divided into non-lethal military aid versus arms. This is questionable and undermines our policy of military neutrality. It is something that I would like to hear more on.

My second question relates to Aughinish Alumina. There were sanctions voted on today. While I appreciate and acknowledged earlier that the Minister of State's grouping voted in support of those sanctions, we are going to need to hear as a Chamber about why on earth his coalition colleague partners - I know he cannot answer but he has to answer as a Government - abstained from that vote.

Deputy Neale Richmond: I thank all the Deputies for their contributions to this important regular debate, particularly those who have placed very pertinent questions that I will try to answer as thoroughly possible in the time available to me.

I will start with the issue of Irish unity and how Europe relates to that as raised in questions by Deputies Ó Laoghaire, Ó Murchú and Gould and, indeed, in their party leader's opening intervention. One thing that is important when we talk about the constitutional future of our nation is how Europe fits into that. Referred to by their party leader, but without much detail, was the agreement by the European Council, which was the first European Council subsequent to the fateful Brexit referendum that Deputy O'Donoghue spoke about in some detail. The fact is it was former Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, who secured the absolute acceptance from the European Council that when or if - I hope it is when - our nation is reunited, it will automatically be a united state within the European Union. There is no question there. That is quite simple. If we go on the journey, the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland calls a border poll

and we have ratification of a united Ireland North and South, that will be an Ireland part of the European Union. That is it. That is the first and most important thing. That is a case that is raised repeatedly with me by people from the North who say, "We did not vote for Brexit. We certainly did not vote to lose our European citizenship". Thankfully, most of them have Irish passports and they are able to retain their European citizenship, but they are no longer in the EU jurisdiction. That is the first and last discussion when it comes to Europe.

There were a couple of subsequent things raised by Deputy Gould that are worth reflecting on. We talk about European funding. Europe is not going to pay for unity. We have to be quite clear about the status of the economy at this point, for example, of the Republic. At this stage, we are a net contributor to the European Union. Even based on the current economic forecasts and the status of the North in terms of employment, we would still be a net contributor as a united Ireland. That is a mark of something we should be proud of. We spent so long - decades - receiving huge amounts of structural and cohesion funding because when we joined the European Economic Community we were, in many arguments, what was then known as a Third World country. We are not like that, certainly not in this jurisdiction. When we take any European mapping pre-Brexit and post Brexit, the part of this island that is, perhaps, in need of the biggest focus of co-ordinated support would be the Border region. Deputy Ó Murchú has raised this very eloquently. That is why it is about the importance of retaining programmes, such as PEACEPLUS, which celebrated its thirtieth anniversary in Iveagh House ten days ago, receiving over €1 billion in European funding to drive projects North and South that deliver real levels of community building, reconciliation and some sort of move away from the societal and economic harm that years of conflict led to on this island. I take the point made more widely.

Regarding the Scottish referendum, the two issues that really focused that was what Scotland's status would be. We saw the former President of the European Commission, José Barroso, pour cold water in that there was no guarantee that Scotland would automatically be part of the European Union. They could not decide among themselves in the "Yes" campaign whether they would have a new form of sterling or a currency pegged to sterling or adopt the euro. That is not an issue for us. We join the European Union and we join the euro. It is simple as. The Deputy said that is not an issue for us to decide, but they are the rules and those are the rules that are in our interests as well as our responsibility.

Moving more broadly into the areas raised by Deputies Ó Laoghaire and Gibney into Aughinish Alumina relating to the *status quo* and where we are, I recognise the vote in the European Parliament. It was not just Fine Gael's political grouping. It was all four of our MEPs who voted in that direction. Again, I cannot speak for my coalition partners but I will invite them to, perhaps, take the Deputy up on her kind offer. Regarding the *status quo* from a Government point of view, we have a twentieth sanctions package. We have supported every single one of the sanction packages where alumina is not listed. We are moving towards a twenty-first package. It must be noted that the independent accreditation audit, for want of a better word, by former Secretary-General of the European Commission, David O'Sullivan, has consistently stated that Ireland is one of the top countries for implementing the sanctions. Alumina is not a sanctioned material. That is simply a statement of fact. It may be in a twenty-first package of negotiations.

More pertinently to the Deputy's questions, very real charges have been placed in *The Irish Times* and by other investigative journalists stating that the amounts of alumina being produced from Aughinish are going indirectly to the Russian war machine. If that is the case, it is completely unacceptable. There is currently a Government investigation being led by the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment. Deputy Ó Laoghaire asked about what sort of conversations are happening with the Commission. Any sort of investigation requires a member state government to maintain regular contact with the Commission in terms of the status of the investigation. This is not a straightforward investigation. We have already seen the reporting that the CSO figures have been withdrawn and there are complications there. We see months of investigative journalists' work leading to, perhaps, areas of the supply chain. When the investigation is produced, the Government is open to all suggestions and working with the European Commission to a future, bearing in mind the very real economic impact and the importance of jobs in the region, but also our very clear obligations to ensure that we have no complicity in the Russian war machine and its campaign of terror on the Ukrainian people.

To go back to Deputy Gould's points in relation to the Coady family and access to medicines, it is a harrowing case. My heart goes out to the entire family. Of course, we know that when medicines go to the European Medicines Agency, they then have to be verified on a domestic level as well. Part of the subsidiarity mechanism is making sure that it is fit for purpose, such as a medicine or treatment that may be available in other EU members states that is not yet perhaps available here in Ireland. We have all heard about and had constituents who had to travel to the Netherlands or Germany to receive treatments, for example, with new cancer drugs or whatever may be the case. However, as that is of little comfort to the Coady family, what I can commit to is that I will engage directly with the Minister, Deputy Carroll MacNeill, and see through her offices what the status is with the domestic regulation and implementation of this drug, bearing in mind the need to do this as quickly as possible given the situation facing the Coady family.

Deputy Thomas Gould: Sorry. Can the Minister of State also look at if it is passed in Europe, that it is in each individual country then? It is the bureaucracy, red tape and time. It is not about this specific drug. I ask the Minister of State to look at it from a European point of view-----

Deputy Neale Richmond: It is the same with every medicine, treatment or equipment used in medical advice. It gets approved on a European basis and then has to be approved. It is just like when we pass legislation at a European level, it has to be transposed into domestic legislation. I take the Deputy's point, however, that it is not quick enough. When other member states are doing it quicker than us, that is something we need to reflect on. It goes to the point more broadly of competitiveness and the interests of the competitiveness agenda in delivering for citizens.

I wish to close on two points in my very brief time. I apologise; I do not perhaps have as much time as I would like to go into them. In relation to the situation in Gaza, the genocide and Ireland's approach at a European level, we were the first member state, along with Spain, to ask for the EU-Israel Association Agreement to be reopened. It is our position that the trade element should be suspended in its entirety. I recall the first time it was brought up only three member states backed us. In May, I attended a European Council meeting where we got that

to 19 member states. A sanctions package was produced last September. The Minister, Deputy McEntee, has this on the agenda for the Foreign Affairs Council meeting next week and will continue to push this vigorously as we engage, which was discussed in our debate more broadly yesterday evening.

On Deputy Gibney's point on values from her opening iteration and how that reflects her subsequent question, peace is the top value. Peace is a value. Peace defines European values. It is why we repeatedly refer to values in the European Union. It can be everything to do with AI regulation and making sure that it is a human generating aspect. This is a peace project. I am delighted we agree on that. One would argue that if you believe in peace, you have to prepare to pay to defend that peace. The Deputy is right that I do not agree with the Government's position on military neutrality. I would much rather that we were doing other things, but we are not. That is not only because it is the collective Government agreement, but it is the position of my political party, this Dáil and the Irish people. However, supporting the people of Ukraine to build and purchase defensive systems and to clear landmines is compatible with that policy of military neutrality. Making sure we have real spending on security is just common sense, particularly when we are seeking to protect peace.

We are not in an era where Europe is spending more on defence than ever before. *Per capita*, it is actually much lower than it was in the seventies and eighties.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That concludes the statements. Does the Minister of State want to make a general comment?

Deputy Neale Richmond: I will make a few concluding remarks to follow on from some of the points made by the Taoiseach in his opening iteration because in his 20 minutes he did not cover them all.

In regard to the items discussed at the June European Council meeting, as we just finished off on the crucial issue of European defence, it was revisited at the meeting and leaders took stock of progress on the implementation of the defence readiness roadmap. Of course, security is one of Ireland's overarching priorities and that is why we will continue to take forward the European defence readiness agenda. Deputies have rightly said, and perhaps criticised, that countries across the union are investing more in their national security and defence capabilities. Deputy O'Donoghue rightly charged that Ireland needs to do more in this regard, and we are. Even though we will retain a central policy of military neutrality, we can work with European partners to make sure security and defence are there, particularly with the Council's urgent call for efforts to strengthen resilience, enhance preparedness, protect critical infrastructure and prevent, deter and respond to hybrid attacks, bearing in mind this jurisdiction was subject to a hybrid attack on our health system not that long ago.

In respect of migration and following on from the entry into force of the EU migration and asylum pact on 12 June, despite Deputy O'Flynn's charges this is something that was voted on by the democratically elected representatives of the people in Dáil Éireann. Leaders discussed the ongoing challenges presented by irregular and unplanned migration and looked at the progress on the legislative agenda calling for intensification of this work. They will have a strategic discussion on migration at their next meeting in October. Ireland is fully committed to the implementation of the pact, which will provide a consistent, fair, sustainable, humane

and efficient asylum procedure and upgrade the common European asylum system. It will create an asylum service that is transparent, fair and aligned with other member states.

The trade in illicit drugs orchestrated by organised crime groups poses a serious challenge to European security and the well-being, crucially, of our citizens. The June European Council meeting committed to jointly operationalising the EU drugs strategy 2026-2030 and addressed the harms caused by illicit drugs. This EU drugs strategy implementation framework provides an opportunity to address gaps identified in the evaluation of the previous strategy while also optimising the use of existing measures and tools. As chair of the horizontal working group on drugs for the next six months, Ireland is committed to progressing the implementation framework for the EU drugs strategy.

The Taoiseach spoke at length about Ukraine and Deputy Lawless raised what I would classify, quite frankly, as misplaced concerns about enlargement of the European Union, bearing in mind the last time Ireland had the Presidency in 2013 it was the eve of Croatia joining the European Union. More famously, and the Leas-Cheann Comhairle was part of the Government at the time, in 2004 we hosted the day of welcomes when the European Union expanded to ten member states. For many of us that symbolised the real end - in many ways the belated end - of the Cold War when most of those countries who were former Soviet satellite states were able to embrace the European Union and liberal western democracies. Like Ukraine, Moldavia's future is in Europe. The opening of the first cluster in Moldova's accession negotiations on 15 June was warmly welcomed by leaders, as was the first EU-Moldova summit that took place on 22 June. While holding the Presidency, we will work to open all remaining clusters by the end of the Irish Presidency.

Other items addressed in the June European Council conclusions included the western Balkans and Armenia, as well as efforts to help stop the spread of the Ebola virus in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda, as raised by Deputy Ó Laoghaire last week. The conclusions adopted at the June European Council also reaffirmed the EU's support for the institutions upholding international law. They also took note of recent EU strategies for islands and coastal communities and referred to discussions on the integrated country-specific recommendations, enabling the 2026 European semester to be concluded.

We are one week into our Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Over the coming months, we will act impartially serving as an honest broker among our fellow member states to progress many files in areas that were raised here today. Our work will respond to the overall interests and needs of the union, its member states and citizens across Europe. The Government will continue to keep the House informed about progress with our Presidency programme and I really look forward to future discussions with Deputies.

The Taoiseach laid out that he will be addressing COSAC next week. This is a great opportunity and as someone, like Deputy Ó Murchú, who travelled to many COSAC meetings during membership of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on European Union Affairs, I know this is where parliamentarians are given the best ability to contribute to the European Union's legislative agenda. It is crucially important that Oireachtas Members from all parties and none, and from both Houses, engage fully, not just in the Presidency today but in using it to make sure our focus on Europe and European Union affairs is a bedrock of our democratic discussion.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I thank the Minister of State. That concludes statements on the European Council meeting of 18 and 19 June, pursuant to Standing Order 133.

Teachtaireachtaí ón Seanad - Messages from Seanad

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Seanad Éireann has passed the Insurance (Disregard of Certain Medical History and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill) 2025, changed from the Central Bank (Amendment) Bill 2025, without amendment.

Seanad Éireann has passed the National Treasury Management Agency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026 without amendment.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 2.46 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 4.02 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 2.46 p.m. and resumed at 4.02 p.m.

4 o'clock

Postal and Telecommunications Services (Amendment) Bill 2026: Committee and Remaining Stages

An Ceann Comhairle: Does the Minister of State wish to speak to the sections?

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): No.

Sections 1 and 2 agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment, received for final consideration and passed.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Bill, which is certified to be a money Bill in accordance with Article 22.2.1° of the Constitution, will be sent to the Seanad.

Garda Síochána (Recording Devices) (Amendment) Bill 2025: From the Seanad

The Dáil went into Committee to consider amendments from the Seanad.

Seanad amendment No. 1:

Section 8: In page 5, line 31, after "individual", to insert "including".

Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Catherine Ardagh): This is a minor technical amendment to change paragraph (c) of the definition of the "biometric analysis" in section 43A to add the word "including". The definition of biometric analysis is intended to afford An Garda Síochána the ability to utilise automated recognition and categorisation of physical, physiological or behavioural human

features of known and unknown persons for the purposes listed in the Bill. An added functionality of paragraph (c) is its use in locating a missing person. The addition of the word "including" is intended to make it clear that this is an additional purpose rather than the sole purpose of paragraph (c).

Seanad amendment agreed to.

An Ceann Comhairle: Seanad amendments Nos. 2 to 5, inclusive, are related and will be discussed together. Deputy Sheehan will move an amendment to Seanad amendment No. 2 on behalf of Deputy Alan Kelly.

Seanad amendment No. 2:

Section 8: In page 6, line 36, to delete "persons." and substitute the following:

"persons;

(d) without prejudice to section 43B(b), cooperation with one or more other law enforcement agencies in relation to the prevention, investigation, detection or prosecution of criminal offences."

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I move amendment No. 1 to Seanad amendment No. 2:

To delete paragraph (d), and substitute the following:

"(d) without prejudice to section 43B(b), cooperation with one or more other law enforcement agencies in relation to the prevention, investigation, detection or prosecution of criminal offences, being cooperation that is carried out—

(i) pursuant to the Europol Act 2012, or

(ii) pursuant to an international agreement or arrangement designated by the Minister by order for the purposes of this paragraph."

This Bill allows gardaí to use AI technology to compare biometric data, that is, facial images, across pieces of evidence they have already gathered in the course of an investigation. It does not allow for the use of live facial recognition technology or the scanning of data against a database. We are not opposed to the Bill on the basis of this limited scope but we are opposed to further expansion of biometric data usage beyond this identity governance, IG, such as a national database or live facial recognition, which the Minister has previously said will be introduced via further legislation.

The Government introduced amendment No. 2 on Report Stage in the Seanad, which allows gardaí to carry out biometric analysis for the purposes of co-operation with law enforcement agencies abroad in relation to criminal offences. We believe this to be a significant broadening of the original scope of the Bill, introduced at the last minute in the legislative process. It is very broadly drafted, with seemingly no guard-rails on how this will work. Our amendment simply seeks to put some legislative guard-rails on a provision that was introduced at the last possible minute. While we in the Labour Party have been clear that we are not opposed to the Bill, which is to give An Garda Síochána the ability to use emerging technologies to do its job of investigating crime, we have also seen that the use of biometric technology carries real risk

and we must guard against scope creep. We have been clear, for example, in opposing any further moves to legislate for the use of live facial recognition technology or the development of a national facial or biometric database. The Government's amendment No. 2 is an example of that scope creep. The amendment is to address this significant expansion that was never debated in this House. It was introduced at the last minute on Report Stage in the Seanad.

When the Bill passed in the Dáil it confined the permitted purposes of biometric analysis to three, namely, the prevention, investigation, detection or prosecution of arrestable offences; the protection of the security of the State; and the search for missing persons. All three are tightly defined. The use cases in section 43C(6) are keyed to them but the Government's amendment No. 2 adds a fourth principal purpose of "cooperation with one or more other law enforcement agencies in relation to the prevention, investigation, detection or prosecution of criminal offences." This is materially broader in an important respect because it allows for biometric data to be used for the purpose of co-operation with external agencies rather than by reference to any domestic investigative process, which means the trigger for use of the technology is partly outside the control of the Irish law.

The scope is broad, extending to any police force or authority anywhere outside the State responsible for prevention or prosecution of criminal offences.

There seem to be no legislative guardrails on who can make such a request, how it will be assessed and decided on, and for what purpose. That poses obvious risks. Will circumstances arise in which gardaí are expected to perform biometric analysis on behalf of a foreign police force investigating a crime in its country that would not be subject to criminal investigation in Ireland? Will gardaí be expected to handle biometric evidence that has been gathered by live facial recognition abroad? I will elaborate further when the Minister of State responds.

Deputy Matt Carthy: We will be supporting this amendment to the Seanad amendment. As I stated on earlier Stages, Sinn Féin supports the use of biometric recognition technology for serious crime investigations, national security purposes and missing persons cases. However, we have also made it clear at every stage that the use of biometric technology has to be accompanied by strong safeguards to prevent discrimination, excessive surveillance, the misuse of personal data and inadequate oversight. We brought forward amendments in that vein throughout the passage of this legislation.

We made it clear, although I do not think that it has been received clearly, that lessons have to be learned from previous mistakes, in particular, the misuses of the PULSE system that we are aware of. Considering that the implications of biometric surveillance technologies could go much further in terms of scope, it is disappointing that the Minister did not accept amendments during the passage of this legislation. They would have put in place strong authorisation mechanisms, particularly the need for approval at chief superintendent level before the technology can be deployed.

It is also unfortunate that the Minister did not accept amendments that propose prohibiting the use of surveillance technology supplied by states that could be engaged in war crimes, genocide or crimes against humanity. The Minister of State will already be aware that concerns have already been raised regarding the use by An Garda Síochána of surveillance and cyber investigation technologies from Israeli companies. For example, some of these companies have direct links with the Israeli military and intelligence bodies that have been involved in

war crimes and genocide. We wanted to include in the legislation a provision that would ensure alternative suppliers would be sought where equipment originates from states that are involved in war crimes or genocide. What is striking and surprising is that the Minister for justice did not accept a provision that is already in place in the Defence Forces. The Government has already prohibited future purchases of military equipment from states like Israel, so it is hard to understand why a similar approach would not apply to surveillance and investigative technologies used by An Garda Síochána, considering how sensitive this technology could be.

It is also important to note in the context of this amendment that the Bill is being considered against the backdrop of serious recruitment and retention problems in An Garda Síochána. Insufficient action has been taken to increase Garda numbers to the level that we need. The Government has not taken the type of innovative recruitment measures that we have set out and which are desperately needed. We see at all levels of An Garda Síochána that there is a serious dearth of the numbers required. We see it in community policing and we will see it in cyber-policing, other specialist activities and in general. I got a response from the Minister last week in respect of the Garda National Immigration Bureau, which showed that the numbers within that section have dropped over the past couple of years. They are at the same levels as they were in 2016, despite much larger immigration numbers, a significant and substantial number of unenforced deportation orders and rhetoric from the Government that a new framework is in place which will ensure we have an adequately managed migration system.

The Minister needs to give us clear updates. We are passing legislation in this House, but that is only first step. If we do not have gardaí across all the specialist areas, including within community policing and cybercrime, then the legislation counts for very little.

We are also seeing the impact of the additional policing pressures as a result of Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the EU. As a number of colleagues in the House have said, gardaí have been moved from communities and local Garda stations to other locations. This is concerning for communities that often deal with crime and antisocial behaviour. The Minister of State, Deputy Ardagh, will be aware of communities that cannot afford to lose gardaí for any substantial period of time.

I reiterate that we support the legislation in principle and we will support its passage. We will ensure that there is monitoring of its implementation, but the spirit the Minister of State has seen from the Opposition, in terms of facilitating the Government with this legislation, has not been matched by a real engagement in dealing with the amendments that we have put forward. As I said at every stage, we brought forward amendments that were about strengthening authorisation and monitoring, as well as ensuring that we are protected as a State. In all instances, I made it clear to the Minister that if there was an issue with wording, we would be satisfied if he wanted to bring forward amendments of his own. However, as has become the habit of this Minister in this Government, concerns have been dismissed. Unfortunately, I think we will reach a point in time, probably in the not-too-distant future, where either the current cohort of Ministers in the Department or a future cohort will be forced to bring forward amending legislation. That could have been avoided if the spirit and approach of partnership had been taken by the Minister and the Department.

Deputy Catherine Ardagh: I thank Deputy Carthy for his support for this legislation. I also note the other issues he raised in relation to wider criminal justice and Garda issues. However,

I will go back to discussing Deputy Kelly's amendment, tabled by Deputy Sheehan. The amendment made in the Seanad to section 43C(2) is to allow, where necessary and appropriate, An Garda Síochána, in the context of international co-operation, to utilise biometric analysis, subject to a code of practice. The code of practice must be laid before both Houses for positive resolutions to be passed. The relevant EU or domestic measure, international agreement or circumstances for use of biometric analysis will aid gardaí in determining whether its use is necessary and proportionate to the criminal offence for which it is proposed to be carried out. It will not be utilised for every criminal offence, and An Garda Síochána will be best placed to determine whether it is proportionate to utilise in the context of the specific offence they have been asked for assistance with.

The use of biometric analysis will be subject to a code of practice, which is required to be laid before both Houses for positive resolutions to be passed. There will also be annual oversight by an independent member of the Judiciary, who will report to the Taoiseach annually on its operation. That report will be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas. The key point is that it may be used, not that it will be used for all international co-operation that An Garda Síochána engage in.

A lot of investigations into child sexual abuse material may be referred from international partners, and it is imperative that gardaí have all the tools they require at their disposal to co-operate internationally in this field. Missing persons investigations may not always be confined to one state and the same applies to victims of crimes such as trafficking. Cross-border co-operation is imperative in these types of investigations as well.

All requests from Europol and Interpol are channelled through the respective units within An Garda Síochána. There must be a clear justification for any requests from Europol or Interpol, and it must fall within the mandate of those organisations. International partners, such as other member states' police forces, operate within their own national laws and EU laws when sharing information. I, therefore, cannot accept the proposed amendment.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I thank the Minister of State for her response and welcome her to her new job. This is our first exchange on these issues. We are not instinctively opposed in totality to what the Government is trying to do here. We support the spirit of what it is trying to do.

The issue that we have is as follows. The Seanad wording refers to criminal offences generally but it does not refer in a defined and narrower way to "arrestable offences", which is the term used elsewhere in the Bill. When the Minister of State referred in her reply to, for example, child sex offences, I understand the rationale for that and I understand where the Minister of State is coming from. However, we want to make sure there are sufficient guardrails in this legislation to ensure it applies to arrestable serious offences. As drafted, it could permit a Garda biometric analysis to be carried out in aid of co-operation with any domestic or foreign law enforcement body for any criminal offence without that co-operation being tied to a specific or defined treaty, agreement or statutory framework.

What concerns me is the lack of definition in what the Government is proposing. Our amendment would limit the use of this provision to co-operation through Europol, or at least through an international agreement designated by the Minister. We believe these are common-sense guardrails to protect the independence of our policing. It is disappointing that, as Deputy

Carthy noted, we have not had the chance to properly scrutinise this measure in the Oireachtas, because it is a significant expansion of the Bill's original drafting.

I had hoped the Minister of State would accept the amendment. We brought it forward in good faith to make sure the legislation is not left too open to function properly. I am concerned that we have a scenario where a police force, maybe in Europe or further afield, could potentially use live FRT at a protest or civil disturbance, and would then request that gardaí scan those images against their own files. The Minister of State said that a code of practice has to be laid before and agreed by both Houses. I would welcome it if she would clarify whether, under the legislation, as amended, it is possible for a police force to use live FRT at a protest and then request that gardaí scan those images against their files.

Deputy Catherine Ardagh: Live FRT will be dealt with in separate legislation. I believe we have sufficient guardrails in place in this legislation. The amendments from the Seanad pull international co-operation into the purposes for which biometric analysis may be utilised. This means that where gardaí wish to utilise biometric analysis in the context of international co-operation, the safeguards in the Bill will apply, including the use of tests that are necessary and proportionate, and that there must be human oversight. A written list of use must be kept, and there is also oversight by a High Court judge, among others.

It has been stressed repeatedly throughout the passage of this Bill that it is of the utmost importance that there can be effective international co-operation, and the Bill does not impede such co-operation. This is particularly in the case of child sexual abuse material investigations. An Garda Síochána regularly engages with its counterparts in other EU states and with international organisations, such as Interpol and Europol, in the fight against what are absolutely heinous crimes, as I think we can all agree. We can also see how important co-operation among law enforcement agencies is when we look at the recent arrest of a man, who is wanted in Germany for child kidnapping, illegal restraint and hostage taking, as part of an international operation targeting human trafficking.

As I said, there must be a clear justification for any requests coming to An Garda Síochána. Equally, as with the use of biometric analysis, there must be a clear justification for its use in any investigation for any of the purposes listed in section 43C. I do not have anything further to add at this stage.

Amendment No. 1 to Seanad amendment No. 2 put and declared lost.

Seanad amendment No. 2 agreed to.

Seanad amendment No. 3:

Section 8: In page 7, line 12, to delete “person, or” and substitute “person,”.

Seanad amendment agreed to.

Seanad amendment No. 4:

Section 8: In page 7, line 14, to delete “arrestable offence.” and substitute the following:

“arrestable offence, or

(d) in respect of the principal purpose referred to in subsection (2)(d) and without prejudice to the generality of paragraphs (a) to (c)—

(i) an individual who the member has reasonable grounds to suspect—

(I) of the commission of a criminal offence, or

(II) is a threat to the security of the State or another state,

(ii) a missing person, or

(iii) an individual who the member reasonably suspects is or has been a victim of a criminal offence.”.

Seanad amendment agreed to.

Seanad amendment No. 5:

Section 8: In page 7, after line 40, to insert the following:

“ ‘other law enforcement agency’ means a police force or other authority in a place other than the State which is responsible for the prevention, investigation, detection or prosecution of criminal offences;”.

Seanad amendment agreed to.

Seanad amendments reported.

An Ceann Comhairle: The agreement to the Seanad amendments is reported to the House and a message will be sent to Seanad Éireann acquainting it accordingly.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 4.26 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 4.37 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 4.26 p.m. and resumed at 4.37 p.m.

Finance Bill 2026: From the Seanad

An Ceann Comhairle: We welcome Deputy Callaghan's mother-in-law and father-in-law, Edie and Cyril Callaghan, from Churchill in Donegal, who are in the Public Gallery with the Deputy's husband, Dean. Go raibh maith agaibh agus fáilte roimh.

The Dáil went into Committee to consider recommendations from the Seanad.

Seanad recommendation No. 1:

Section 1: In page 4, between lines 12 and 13, to insert the following:

“(2) Section 99A of the Finance Act 1999 is further amended, with effect as on and from 1 July 2026, by the substitution of the following subsection for subsection (3):

“(3) Where—

(a) gas oil has been purchased on or after 1 January 2020 and before 1 January 2026, or on or after 1 October 2026, then, subject to a maximum repayment rate of

€75.00 per 1,000 litres, the amount to be repaid per 1,000 litres of gas oil under subsection (2) is determined—

(i) when P is less than or equal to €1,070, by the formula—

$$A = (P - 1,000) \times 0.3,$$

or

(ii) when P is greater than €1,070, by the formula—

$$A = 21 + [(P - 1,070) \times 0.6],$$

or

(b) gas oil has been purchased on or after 1 January 2026 and before 1 October 2026, then, subject to a maximum repayment rate of €120.00 per 1,000 litres, the amount to be repaid per 1,000 litres of gas oil under subsection (2) is determined—

(i) when P is less than or equal to €1,070, by the formula—

$$A = (P - 1,000) \times 0.3,$$

(ii) when P is greater than €1,070 and less than or equal to €1,150, by the formula—

$$A = 21 + [(P - 1,070) \times 0.675],$$

or

(iii) when P is greater than €1,150, by the formula—

$$A = 75 + [(P - 1,150) \times 4.5],$$

where—

A is the amount to be repaid per 1,000 litres, and

P is an estimate of the average price (exclusive of value-added tax) in euro per 1,000 litres of gas oil purchased by qualifying road transport operators during the repayment period, as determined in accordance with subsection (4).”.”.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I move amendment No. 1 to Recommendation No. 1:

To delete the text of subsection (2) and substitute the following:

“(2) Section 99A of the Finance Act 1999 is further amended, with effect as on and from 1 July 2026, by the substitution of the following subsection for subsection (3):

“(3) Where—

(a) gas oil has been purchased on or after 1 January 2020 and before 1 January 2026, subject to a maximum repayment rate of €75.00 per 1,000 litres, the amount to be repaid per 1,000 litres of gas oil

under subsection (2) is determined—

(i) when P is less than or equal to €1,070, by the formula—

$$A = (P - 1,000) \times 0.3,$$

or

(ii) when P is greater than €1,070, by the formula—

$$A = 21 + [(P - 1,070) \times 0.6],$$

or

(b) gas oil has been purchased on or after 1 January 2026, subject to a maximum repayment rate of €120.00 per 1,000 litres, the amount to be repaid per 1,000 litres of gas oil under subsection (2) is determined—

(i) when P is less than or equal to €1,070, by the formula—

$$A = (P - 1,000) \times 0.3,$$

(ii) when P is greater than €1,070 and less than or equal to €1,150,

by the formula—

$$A = 21 + [(P - 1,070) \times 0.675],$$

or

(iii) when P is greater than €1,150, by the formula—

A is the amount to be repaid per 1,000 litres, and

P is an estimate of the average price (exclusive of value-added tax) in euro per 1,000 litres of gas oil purchased by qualifying road transport operators during the repayment period, as determined in accordance with subsection (4).”.”.

This is tied to the latter amendment and I will speak further at length on that. Recommendation No. 1 deals with the diesel rebate scheme, which operates within a window that closes on 1 October. That is the wrong decision and it should be extended beyond the budget to allow for a proper review of the cost of fuel during budget time in order to identify the appropriate window for the operation of the scheme. To decide to close it on 1 October is the wrong decision. The amendment seeks to remove the date of 1 October which leaves the scheme open ended, with the intention that it would be reviewed at the time of the budget, which is the following week, with a decision taken broadly not just on the diesel rebate scheme but also, as we will see in recommendation No. 2, the excise duty that will be placed on petrol and diesel and whether that would be appropriate, given the pressures the Government's decision would put on ordinary workers and families across the State.

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Robert Troy): Ireland's diesel rebate scheme operates in accordance with the EU's energy tax directive and the general block exemption regulation on state aid. In 2025, almost €40 million was paid out under the diesel rebate scheme. The temporary enhancement to the diesel rebate scheme has been agreed by Government in light of the severe fuel price impacts that have arisen following the outbreak of conflict in the Middle East. It is a short-term and targeted measure that helps to ease the burden

of households and businesses across the State by minimising the inflationary impact of fuel cost spikes for road haulage and bus passenger services during this challenging period.

I recall that Deputy Doherty previously raised the issues with the operation of the diesel rebate scheme. I am advised that Revenue has had ongoing engagement with the representative bodies in relation to the diesel rebate scheme. Revenue highlighted that incomplete and incorrect claims had given rise to the delays, as it had to contact claimants to request that claims be corrected and resubmitted. In order to assist claimants to better understand the types of errors and omissions that gave rise to these earlier delays, Revenue prepared a new list of frequently asked questions, which was published on its website last month at the request of one of the representative bodies.

Deputy Doherty's amendment to section 1 of the Bill proposes to extend the time period for this measure, with a maximum rebate of 12 cent per litre indefinitely. We have always stated that these decisions were made on a temporary support basis and must be responsive to macroeconomic and energy market variables. The extension of the diesel rebate scheme to the end of September is appropriate in light of the severe impacts of the fuel crisis caused by the conflict in the Middle East. However, we cannot ignore that the prices of diesel and petrol have fallen substantially in recent weeks and, as regards global markets, that the price of a barrel of crude oil has fallen from a peak of \$120 in late April to approximately \$80 today.

It is also worth noting that the diesel rebate scheme is a fossil fuel subsidy, the phasing out of which has been called for by the OECD and the European Commission, among others. In the long run, fossil fuel subsidies serve to maintain an over-dependence on fossil fuels and to weaken our climate policy and energy security. The long-term objective should be to phase out these subsidies, not to enhance them on a permanent basis. As per Central Statistics Office, CSO, data, fossil fuel subsidies amounted to €4.67 billion in 2014. Ireland's dependence on fossil fuels leaves households and businesses exposed to prices that are subject to volatility due to international market forces and over which the Government has little, if any, control. The subsidisation of fossil fuels can distort market signals and reduce the incentive to save energy and transition away from fossil fuels.

While understanding that the heavy goods vehicle, HGV, sector is a hard-to-abate sector, new electronically charged trucks and buses are becoming increasingly popular in Europe as a whole and particularly in countries such as Sweden and the Netherlands. In the UK, 32% of new buses registered in quarter 1 of 2026 and 6% of new trucks were electrically chargeable. In Ireland, the corresponding figures are 6% and 1%, respectively. Incentivising the long-term use of diesel runs contrary to Ireland's environmental ambitions and legally binding emissions targets and would extend the reliance on imported fossil fuels.

For the reasons outlined, I do not propose to accept Deputy Doherty's amendment. Furthermore, the proposal creates a charge on the people. As an Opposition amendment cannot create a charge on the taxpayer, I cannot legally accept it.

Amendment No. 1 to Seanad recommendation No. 1 put and declared lost.

Seanad recommendation No. 1 agreed to.

Seanad recommendation No. 2:

Section 2: In page 7, between lines 5 and 6, to insert the following:

"(3) The Finance Act 1999 is further amended, with effect as on and from the date of the passing of this Act, by the substitution of the following schedule for Schedule 2:

"SCHEDULE 2

Rates of Mineral Oil Tax

	Light Oil: Rates per 1,000 litres				Heavy Oil: Rates per 1,000 litres				Liquefied Petroleum Gas: Rates per 1,000 litres		
With effect from :	Petrol	Aviation gasoline	Used as a propellant	Used for air navigation	Used for private pleasure navigation	Kerosene used other than as a propellant	Fuel Oil	Other heavy oil	Used as a propellant	Other liquefied petroleum gas	Vehicle gas: Rate per megawatt hour at gross calorific value

10 March 2022	€474.1 1	€474.1 1	€413.5 1	€413.5 1	€413.5 1	€84.84	€118.0 1	€120.5 5	€118.2 7	€54.68	€9.36
1 April 2022	€465.9 8	€465.9 8	€405.3 8	€405.3 8	€405.3 8	€84.84	€118.0 1	€120.5 5	€118.2 7	€54.68	€9.36
1 May 2022	€465.9 8	€465.9 8	€405.3 8	€405.3 8	€405.3 8	€103.8 3	€141.1 2	€111.1 4	€130.5 2	€66.93	€9.36
12 October 2022	€483.3 4	€483.3 4	€425.4 5	€425.4 5	€425.4 5	€103.8 3	€141.1 2	€111.1 4	€130.5 2	€66.93	€9.36
1 May 2023	€483.3 4	€483.3 4	€425.4 5	€425.4 5	€425.4 5	€122.8 3	€164.2 3	€131.4 7	€142.7 6	€79.17	€9.36
1 June 2023	€532.1 2	€532.1 2	€466.1 0	€466.1 0	€466.1 0	€122.8 3	€164.2 3	€140.2 8	€142.7 6	€79.17	€9.36
1 September 2023	€589.0 3	€589.0 3	€506.7 5	€506.7 5	€506.7 5	€122.8 3	€164.2 3	€149.0 9	€142.7 6	€79.17	€9.36
11 October 2023	€606.3 9	€606.3 9	€526.8 3	€526.8 3	€526.8 3	€122.8 3	€164.2 3	€149.0 9	€142.7 6	€79.17	€9.36
1 April 2024	€638.9 1	€638.9 1	€551.2 2	€551.2 2	€551.2 2	€122.8 3	€164.2 3	€163.9 6	€142.7 6	€79.17	€9.36
1 May 2024	€638.9 1	€638.9 1	€551.2 2	€551.2 2	€551.2 2	€141.8 2	€187.3 4	€184.3 0	€155.0 1	€91.42	€10.1 3

1 August 2024	€671.43	€671.43	€575.61	€575.61	€575.61	€141.82	€187.34	€199.17	€155.01	€91.42	€10.13
9 October 2024	€688.78	€688.78	€595.68	€595.68	€595.68	€141.82	€187.34	€199.17	€155.01	€91.42	€10.13
1 May 2025	€688.78	€688.78	€595.68	€595.68	€595.68	€160.81	€210.45	€219.50	€167.25	€103.66	€11.48
8 October 2025	€706.14	€706.14	€615.76	€615.76	€615.76	€160.81	€210.45	€219.50	€167.25	€103.66	€11.48
25 March 2026	€584.18	€584.18	€453.15	€453.15	€453.15	€160.81	€210.45	€193.06	€167.25	€103.66	€11.48
15 April 2026	€502.88	€502.88	€371.85	€371.85	€371.85	€160.81	€210.45	€172.14	€167.25	€103.66	€11.48
1 September 2026	€559.79	€559.79	€436.89	€436.89	€436.89	€160.81	€210.45	€172.14	€167.25	€103.66	€11.48
1 October 2026	€624.84	€624.84	€501.93	€501.93	€501.93	€160.81	€210.45	€172.14	€167.25	€103.66	€11.48
14 October 2026	€642.19	€642.19	€522.00	€522.00	€522.00	€179.81	€233.57	€192.47	€179.49	€115.90	€12.84
1 November 2026	€682.84	€682.84	€578.91	€578.91	€578.91	€179.81	€233.57	€216.15	€179.49	€115.90	€12.84
1 December 2026	€723.49	€723.49	€635.83	€635.83	€635.83	€179.81	€233.57	€239.83	€179.49	€115.90	€12.84
1 May 2027	€723.49	€723.49	€635.83	€635.83	€635.83	€198.80	€256.68	€260.16	€191.74	€128.15	€14.20
13 October 2027	€740.85	€740.85	€655.90	€655.90	€655.90	€198.80	€256.68	€260.16	€191.74	€128.15	€14.20
1 May 2028	€740.85	€740.85	€655.90	€655.90	€655.90	€217.80	€279.79	€280.49	€203.98	€140.39	€15.56
11 October 2028	€758.21	€758.21	€675.98	€675.98	€675.98	€217.80	€279.79	€280.49	€203.98	€140.39	€15.56
1 May 2029	€758.21	€758.21	€675.98	€675.98	€675.98	€236.79	€302.90	€300.83	€216.23	€152.64	€16.91
10 October 2029	€773.25	€773.25	€693.38	€693.38	€693.38	€236.79	€302.90	€300.83	€216.23	€152.64	€16.91
1 May 2030	€773.25	€773.25	€693.38	€693.38	€693.38	€253.25	€322.93	€318.45	€226.84	€163.25	€18.09

".".

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I move amendment No. 1 to Seanad recommendation No. 2:

To delete from the row dated "1 September 2026" down to and including the row dated "1 May 2030" and substitute the following:

"

15 July 2026	€502.88	€502.88	€371.85	€371.85	€371.85	€0.00	€210.45	€172.14	€167.25	€79.17	€11.48
14 October 2026	€502.88	€502.88	€371.85	€371.85	€371.85	€0.00	€210.45	€172.14	€167.25	€79.17	€11.48

"

If we needed a reminder of just how volatile, fragile and utterly unpredictable the situation in the Gulf remains, we were handed that stark reminder today with the news that Donald Trump has declared the ceasefire deal with Iran over and has launched fresh attacks. Everyone in this Chamber and everyone across the country hopes against hope that some semblance of a ceasefire can be maintained but we must be honest with ourselves. Hope is not a strategy. Hope is what we rely on when we have no control. It is not a substitute for prudent economic planning. There is zero certainty here. There are no guarantees that the Strait of Hormuz will remain open or that global supply lines will not be choked tomorrow morning. That constant looming threat of conflict is a direct risk in terms of energy prices rising again. The price of a barrel of oil has risen sharply only in the past few hours.

That is precisely why Sinn Féin has consistently and repeatedly called for the excise duty on petrol and diesel to be kept exactly where it is. It needs to be held at the current level until it can be properly reviewed as part of the normal budget process in October. That is the only prudent and sensible thing to do. Instead, the Government has taken the reckless decision to lock in price increases that will kick in automatically when the Dáil is not even sitting. I simply do not understand or comprehend how the Government thinks it is appropriate or fair to legislate for a hike in the price of petrol and diesel that will come into effect on 1 September.

The Minister has tried to comfort us in the past by stressing that everything will be kept under review. We need to cut through that spin. The reality is that this legislation, in effect, commits the State to price increases without a single shred of visibility as to where fuel prices will be in the future. Let us look at the timeline because the optics and the reality is damning. Next week, this House will rise, the doors of Leinster House will be locked and Ministers will head off on their summer holidays. Their parting gift to ordinary Irish people across the State will be to have locked in fuel price increases that will hit them in their pockets. By Christmas, they will see the price of diesel increase by 34 cent and the price of petrol increase by a staggering 29 cent. That is what the Government is asking us to vote for today.

We need to think about what it actually means for people in real life, including people in my constituency of Donegal, people in Mayo and people in rural communities right across the State who have no access to public transport and no alternative but to get in their car to go to work, drop their kids to school or visit a neighbour or elderly relative. As if that were not good enough, the Government is not just hitting people with increases on petrol and diesel. On top

of that, it is going to hit them with an increase in the cost of home heating oil, natural gas and a basic bag of coal. That increase will kick in in October, right when the days are getting shorter and the nights colder and right when families are forced to turn back on the heating.

As I have said in the House numerous times, the carbon tax is regressive. In 2022, the Economic and Social Research Institute, ESRI, stated that it is well known that the tax is regressive. Research by the University of Galway found that carbon taxes are "regressive in all countries", with the only question being how regressive they are. I urge the Minister of State, even at this late stage, to talk to his colleagues and reconsider their approach of increasing fuel costs. We cannot control what happens in the Gulf or in the United States but we can control what we do right here and now in this Chamber. We can control the level of taxation we place on petrol and diesel. The Minister of State can do the right thing here. He can use the levers of taxation to release the pressure and burden on ordinary people across the State.

People are stressed out and under serious pressure. Let there be no doubt that under the current prices, and remembering that the barrel is now getting dearer, we will see people being forced to pay well over €2 for a litre of diesel. That is not acceptable and it is why we in Sinn Féin have tabled this amendment to say that these price increases should not be going ahead and that prices should be properly monitored at the appropriate time. We must release the pressure on ordinary families throughout the State, not, as provided for in this legislation, increase the price of diesel on 1 September, 1 October, 14 October, 1 November and again on 1 December. That is a wallop to people right across the State who are asking the Government to lift the pressure and burden on them on so many fronts. What they do not need is increase after increase but that is exactly what is set out in the Bill.

I urge Members to support the Sinn Féin amendment because it represents what ordinary people throughout the country have been telling me they need. I have told them I will bring their voice into the Dáil. If they had the chance to stand here, they would be saying that they have faced serious pressure over the past number of years and they need support at this time. They do not need the Government deciding to put up the price of diesel by 34 cent between now and 1 December. It is scandalous, to tell the God's honest truth, and it should be stopped.

Deputy Robert Troy: As a Government, we stated at the very outset that we would monitor the situation closely and reserve the right to adjust our response, as required. We remain committed to that position.

That is the position we have held from the get-go. Since this conflict broke out in the Middle East, we have remained agile and made a number of interventions. The last time we spoke in this Chamber, Deputy Doherty said that the price was going to go up on 31 July, that we would be on holidays, that there would be a cliff edge and that it was wrong. He was wrong, because I said to him during that debate that no firm decision had been taken. A decision had been made to monitor the ongoing situation and we had an opportunity to make changes, and that is exactly what we are doing. It is not going up on 31 July. We have consistently said that we would avoid cliff edges and the removal of supports and that is what we are doing. A couple of weeks ago, the Deputy said that there would be a cliff edge. He has to acknowledge that in recent weeks there has been an easing in wholesale energy prices, with spot prices for crude oil remaining at around \$80 a barrel today. It was below \$75 yesterday. It has peaked today because of the intervention of President Trump, but there is no knowing what that could be

tomorrow. I think the Deputy will agree with that. Even with the peak today, that is considerably lower than where the wholesale prices were in April of this year, at \$120 a barrel.

I acknowledge that the Deputy is right when he says recent developments mean the situation remains fluid. There will be further ebbs and flows before a new equilibrium is reached. However, we have already seen a tentative easing in the CSO's inflation figures for June, with the headline rate of annual inflation moderating slightly to 3.3% and energy prices falling by 2% in the month. In line with the easing in wholesale commodity prices, retail prices for fuels have fallen in recent weeks. A further easing of retail prices may be anticipated as lower wholesale prices gradually feed through to prices at the forecourt.

More generally, while short-term cyclical pressures tentatively appear to be easing, the longer term structural challenges remain. Put simply, we need to accelerate the transition away from imported fossil fuels. That is the lesson of two fossil fuel shocks in the space of half a decade. Sinn Féin's amendment proposes to end the carbon tax trajectory and pause fuel excise at current rates indefinitely. It also proposes to reduce carbon tax to zero on kerosene used other than as propellant. The Opposition's amendment seems to want to lock Ireland into fossil fuel dependence for decades to come. It has ignored the fact that Government policies on the environment have been effective. This morning's EPA report shows that Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions decreased for the fourth year in a row in 2025, declining by 2.2%, to leave emissions 14.5% below 2018 levels.

In particular, residential emissions reduced by 5% in 2025 and are at their lowest level since 1990, despite an increase in housing stock during this time. Residential usage of coal, oil and gas declined by 13.5%, 4.6% and 5.2%, respectively, on 2024 levels, while energy used by heat pumps increased by 21.9%. However, the EPA also said that annual emissions need to fall four and a half times faster than they did last year if Ireland is to meet its legally binding climate targets of lowering emissions by 51% by 2030.

At a time when the Government continues to do more for Ireland's energy security, Sinn Féin wants us to do less. Abolishing the carbon tax trajectory would mean less funding for climate initiatives that have been effective and are proven to benefit those in lower income deciles. As of budget 2026, the Government has allocated over €4.2 billion in carbon tax revenue for these purposes since 2020. ESRI analysis consistently shows that the lower income deciles are better off as a result of the social protection measures funded by the increased carbon tax.

In budget 2026, over €1.1 billion was allocated to climate action measures and to ensure the most vulnerable are protected from the unintended impacts of the increase. This was an increase on the 2025 allocation and included funding of €566 million for retrofitting programmes, the just transition and the official development assistance, ODA, green climate fund. A further €350 million was allocated for targeted social welfare interventions, such as the fuel allowance, and €173 million for green and sustainable farming measures.

It is clear that people want to decouple from fossil fuels. Applications to the SEAI, so far in 2026, have doubled year on year. Over 55,000 applications were processed between January and the end of May. Schemes like this are funded from carbon tax. Since 2019, SEAI schemes have provided over €1.8 billion in supports to homeowners for over 268,000 home energy improvements. This includes over 36,000 fully funded upgrades for households at risk of

energy poverty. As the House will be aware, those are people in receipt of the fuel allowance. In the most recent budget, 40,000 new households benefited from eligibility for fuel allowance.

The Government wants to continue to help households decarbonise and minimise their overall energy bills, whereas the proposed Sinn Féin amendment would come at great ongoing cost to the Exchequer and jeopardise other areas of investment. The package of Government support measures, which now totals over €1 billion, is helping to reduce the cost burden at the petrol pump. It supports those most at risk of energy poverty and assists key sectors, such as agriculture and haulage, that are critical to keeping our economy moving. These measures are deliberately time-bound and targeted, because our approach must be both responsive and responsible. The Government will continue to act in a way that protects the most vulnerable and sustains our economic stability.

For the reasons outlined, I do not propose to accept Deputy Doherty's amendment.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I will press the amendment. To be clear, because the Minister of State would like us to forget what happened, this is the Bill coming back from the Seanad. In case people do not know what has happened here, this Bill has already passed through the Dáil. It is very unusual when a Bill has to come back into the Dáil after it has been passed. The reason is that the Government has had to change what it was trying to put into law, which was the 34 cent increase in August. It had to change that because of the pressure we in Sinn Féin applied. The Minister of State can shake his head all he wants. There was also a fear among the Government of the risen people and of people taking to the streets again and saying, "We are having none of it, because this is a Government that doesn't understand the pressure we're under." The Government was trying to put into law, in black and white, an increase of 34 cent. The Government actually passed that in this House, with the support, unfortunately, of some of the Opposition parties.

That does not take away, however, from what is in this Bill, because all the Government has done is kick the can down the road. Thirty-four cent is still going to go onto the price of diesel. It will just happen in different stages and it will be fully on the price of diesel by 1 December. I am saying this very clearly because I would not be able to go back to my constituency in Donegal, hold my head up, talk to people who elected me to have their backs, be their voice and stand up for them and say that I voted to increase the price of diesel by 34 cent. It will not happen in Sinn Féin's name. I will press the amendment because there is an alternative and I ask Deputies across the House to support the amendment and, more important, to support hard-working people across the State.

Deputy Robert Troy: May I respond?

An Ceann Comhairle: The amendment has been pressed, but go ahead.

Deputy Robert Troy: The point I am making quite clearly is that there is a mechanism. That is why we have two Chambers in the Oireachtas. There is a mechanism to use the Seanad to amend legislation and to bring it back here. I was abundantly clear that evening with the Deputy in the debate that this situation was being kept under review and that there would be no cliff edge. What we were doing was the prudent thing to do. We were waiting to see how

international oil prices were fluctuating over the last two weeks before we made a final call on how we would phase out the temporary measures. As a Government, we knew exactly what we were doing. It was not because of what the Deputy said here. It was fully planned that we would use the legislative mechanism that is there to introduce it in the Seanad, assess the international prices at the time and take a responsible and prudent decision, reaffirming that there would be no cliff edge and that there would be a phased reintroduction over a period of time. That is the decision the Government has taken. Neither the Deputy nor I can say with any certainty what way oil prices will be on 1 September.

However, what I can say is that based on our track record over the last number of months, we will continue to monitor the situation. We will be back here after the summer recess. I do not know about Deputy Doherty, but I certainly will not be off for eight weeks. He continuously pointed that out. You would swear the only people going on holidays were on this side of the House.

5 o'clock

The Government will continue to meet. Work will continue ongoing, as I am sure Deputy Doherty will also. We will monitor the situation and we can, as we have in the past, use opportunities to make further interventions as necessary. Neither Deputy Doherty or I can tell with any certainty where the prices are or where they are going to be on 1 September or 1 October.

It is worth noting, if we look at the international market today, that Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal all have noticeably higher prices at the petrol pumps than we have today because of the intervention we have taken. It is also worth noting that the interventions this Government has taken, although the Deputy may not agree with all of them, *per capita* have been some of the most generous and largest interventions of any of our European counterparts on a problem that is not unique to Ireland but is across the globe.

Amendment put:

The Committee divided: Tá, 44; Níl, 97; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Bennett, Cathy.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Brady, John.	Aird, William.	
Buckley, Pat.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Byrne, Joanna.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Carthy, Matt.	Boland, Grace.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Collins, Michael.	Brennan, Brian.	
Conway-Walsh, Rose.	Brennan, Shay.	
Coppinger, Ruth.	Brophy, Colm.	
Cronin, Réada.	Browne, James.	
Cullinane, David.	Burke, Colm.	
Daly, Pa.	Burke, Peter.	
Devine, Máire.	Butler, Mary.	
Doherty, Pearse.	Butterly, Paula.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Byrne, Malcolm.	

Farrell, Mairéad.	Cairns, Holly.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Gould, Thomas.	Calleary, Dara.	
Graves, Ann.	Canney, Seán.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Kenny, Martin.	Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Chambers, Jack.	
Lawless, Paul.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Clendennen, John.	
McDonald, Mary Lou.	Collins, Niall.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Connolly, John.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Cooney, Joe.	
Mitchell, Denise.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Murphy, Paul.	Cummins, Jen.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Cummins, John.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Daly, Martin.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Nolan, Carol.	Devlin, Cormac.	
O'Hara, Louis.	Dillon, Alan.	
O'Reilly, Louise.	Dolan, Albert.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	Feighan, Frankie.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	Fleming, Sean.	
Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	Foley, Norma.	
Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Gannon, Gary.	
Quinlivan, Maurice.	Geoghegan, James.	
Stanley, Brian.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Tóibín, Peadar.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Ward, Mark.	Harkin, Marian.	
	Hayes, Eoin.	
	Hearne, Rory.	
	Heneghan, Barry.	
	Heydon, Martin.	
	Higgins, Emer.	
	Keogh, Keira.	
	Kyne, Seán.	
	Lahart, John.	
	Lawless, James.	
	Lawlor, George.	
	Maxwell, David.	
	McAuliffe, Paul.	
	McCarthy, Noel.	
	McConalogue, Charlie.	
	McCormack, Tony.	
	McGrath, Séamus.	
	McGreehan, Erin.	
	Moran, Kevin Boxer.	
	Moynihan, Aindrias.	

	Moynihan, Michael.	
	Moynihan, Shane.	
	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
	Murphy, Michael.	
	Nash, Ged.	
	Naughton, Hildegard.	
	O'Brien, Darragh.	
	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
	O'Connell, Maeve.	
	O'Connor, James.	
	O'Dea, Willie.	
	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
	O'Meara, Ryan.	
	O'Shea, John Paul.	
	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Quaide, Liam.	
	Rice, Pádraig.	
	Richmond, Neale.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Sheehan, Conor.	
	Sherlock, Marie.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Smith, Duncan.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Troy, Robert.	
	Wall, Mark.	
	Whitmore, Jennifer.	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Pearse Doherty; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and John Clendennen.

Amendment declared lost.

Recommendation put:

The Committee divided: Tá, 97; Níl, 46; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Aird, William.	Brady, John.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Buckley, Pat.	
Bacik, Ivana.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Boland, Grace.	Carthy, Matt.	

Brabazon, Tom.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Brennan, Brian.	Collins, Michael.	
Brennan, Shay.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Brophy, Colm.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Browne, James.	Cronin, Réada.	
Burke, Colm.	Cullinane, David.	
Burke, Peter.	Daly, Pa.	
Butler, Mary.	Devine, Máire.	
Butterly, Paula.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Cairns, Holly.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Calleary, Dara.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Canney, Seán.	Gould, Thomas.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Graves, Ann.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Chambers, Jack.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Kenny, Martin.	
Clendennen, John.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Collins, Niall.	Lawless, Paul.	
Connolly, John.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Cooney, Joe.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Crowe, Cathal.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Cummins, Jen.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Cummins, John.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Daly, Martin.	Murphy, Paul.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Dillon, Alan.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Dolan, Albert.	Nolan, Carol.	
Feighan, Frankie.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Fleming, Sean.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
Foley, Norma.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Gannon, Gary.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Geoghegan, James.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Harkin, Marian.	Stanley, Brian.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
Hearne, Rory.	Ward, Mark.	
Heneghan, Barry.		
Heydon, Martin.		
Higgins, Emer.		
Keogh, Keira.		
Kyne, Seán.		
Lahart, John.		
Lawless, James.		

Lawlor, George.		
Maxwell, David.		
McAuliffe, Paul.		
McCarthy, Noel.		
McConalogue, Charlie.		
McCormack, Tony.		
McGrath, Séamus.		
McGreehan, Erin.		
Moran, Kevin Boxer.		
Moynihan, Aindrias.		
Moynihan, Michael.		
Moynihan, Shane.		
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.		
Murphy, Michael.		
Nash, Ged.		
Naughton, Hildegard.		
O'Brien, Darragh.		
O'Callaghan, Cian.		
O'Connell, Maeve.		
O'Connor, James.		
O'Dea, Willie.		
O'Donnell, Kieran.		
O'Donoghue, Robert.		
O'Gorman, Roderic.		
O'Meara, Ryan.		
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Fearghail, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Quaide, Liam.		
Rice, Pádraig.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Sheehan, Conor.		
Sherlock, Marie.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smith, Duncan.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Troy, Robert.		
Wall, Mark.		
Whitmore, Jennifer.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and John Clendennen; Níl, Deputies Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Pearse Doherty.

Recommendation declared carried.

Seanad recommendations reported.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The agreement to the Seanad recommendations is reported to the House and a message will be sent to Seanad Éireann acquainting it accordingly.

Teachtaireacht ón Seanad - Message from Seanad

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Seanad Éireann has passed the Dublin Airport (Passenger Capacity) Bill 2026 without amendment.

Housing and Residential Tenancies (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026: Report and Final Stages

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 1 and 8 to 11, inclusive, are related and will be discussed together.

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy James Browne): I move amendment No. 1:

In page 5, line 10, to delete “Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009” and substitute the following:

“Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009; to provide for additional eligibility criteria for access to certain services provided to homeless persons under section 10 of the Housing Act 1988; to provide for withdrawal of such services in certain cases; to provide for an appeal in respect of such withdrawal; for those purposes to amend the Housing Act 1988”.

On Second Stage of the Housing and Residential Tenancies (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026, I indicated that I would bring forward a number of homelessness-related amendments to the Housing Act 1988. I am now putting these amendments before the House.

The amendments are proposed in the context of the considerable changes in the nature of homelessness that have occurred since the Housing Act 1988 was enacted. In line with amendments to eligibility for social housing support, lawful residency and habitual residency as the eligibility criteria for accessing homeless supports are being put on a statutory footing. This will ensure the State is operating a harmonised and consistent approach to the provision of social entitlements in general.

To guard against rough sleeping, a safety net service is being introduced to allow local authorities to provide emergency accommodation to a person deemed ineligible for homeless supports and services. This service will be provided in strictly limited circumstances on a night-to-night basis. The circumstances in which local authorities can withdraw the provision of emergency accommodation will be expanded to include refusal of a reasonable offer of social housing made by a local authority and circumstances where a person engages in

behaviour causing or intending to cause serious harm or death to another user or staff member of the emergency accommodation.

A further amendment will introduce a mechanism of appeal against decisions made by local authorities in relation to the withdrawal of the provision of emergency accommodation. I am also introducing an obligation on local authorities to have regard to the best interests of children when making decisions on the available accommodation to be provided to a family with children who have been assessed as homeless. As a complement to this measure, a definition of child is being introduced to the Housing Act 1988. As Deputies will already be aware, a Committee Stage amendment to the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 would make the Child and Family Agency a mandatory member of each joint homelessness consultative forum across the country.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Before we started, I should have mentioned that recommittal is necessary in respect of this amendment and the other related amendments as they do not arise from committee proceedings. I ask the Minister to move recommittal and then we will ask that House to agree to that.

Deputy James Browne: I move:

That the Bill be recommitted in respect of amendments Nos. 1 and 8 to 11, inclusive.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Did we not vote on that yesterday?

Deputy Conor Sheehan: Yes.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: We called a vote on that yesterday.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: Yes, there was a motion to instruct yesterday.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Yes, but this is-----

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: The vote was taken yesterday.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The motion was yesterday. The recommittal must be passed today to get agreement. It is also only a technical-----

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: By way of information, what is the difference between a motion for the non-consequential amendments and then the recommittal so that I am clear?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The recommittal must be taken at this stage and it must be agreed. Then we can take the various amendments in committee.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I am only asking this so I know but how is that different from the motion the Dáil voted on yesterday to allow these amendments to be taken?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The motion allowed the amendments to be taken. The agreement for recommittal is necessary to allow the amendments to be debated in committee.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: It is not agreed.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: It is not agreed.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Unless I do not understand what is being proposed.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The question you are asking is about yesterday's motion, which was passed. The Dáil voted on it.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Yes.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We are now dealing with Report Stage. The recommittal of amendment No. 1 and the other amendments I just read out has to be agreed as they do not arise from Committee proceedings. Once we agree that, which is a technicality, we can discuss the amendments in committee.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: That is not agreed.

Question put and declared carried.

Bill recommitted in respect of amendment No. 1.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister has already made his remarks. I call Deputy Ó Broin.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I move amendment No. 1 to amendment No. 1:

In the fourth line, after “in respect of”, to insert “the denial of certain services and”.

This will be discussed with this group.

On a procedural point, these, of course, are not amendments to the Housing and Residential Tenancies (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. This is a new piece of legislation. It was not contained in the general scheme of the Bill our committee did pre-legislative scrutiny on previously. It was not contained in the Bill itself. While the Minister told us he was bringing these amendments forward, the hope was we would at least get them at Committee Stage when we could have had more detailed scrutiny. Even that would have been entirely inadequate because, as the Minister knows, there is very considerable concern both from our homeless services providers and legal organisations which advocate for and represent people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, and indeed, the statutory body that is the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. This should have been brought in as a Bill and undergone pre-legislative scrutiny. It should have gone through proper committee scrutiny. The fact that it has not is really problematic and means the issues we are going to discuss are going to come back in front of this House at some point in the future.

As I said at the start of Second Stage, when the Minister of State was addressing it, from Sinn Féin's point of view, we are not against the principle of what the Minister is trying to do. However, we have considerable concerns with the way in which this has been presented. I will go through them now and then speak in favour of my own amendment.

Putting the legal and habitual residency requirements which currently operate for access to emergency accommodation on a statutory footing is not in and of itself problematic. I have said that consistently throughout. However, given the complexity of those issues and the complex interaction of Irish and European immigration law, as well as human rights law and housing law and policy, this is an area fraught with difficulty where one must get things right.

I thank the Minister's officials for the detailed briefing they gave us on Monday. This highlighted how these legislative passages in front of us are some of the most complex of the entire Bill. In fact, this set of ideas dates back to 2023. A policy briefing note was produced by the Department which was circulated to homeless service providers, statutory and voluntary. There was some engagement and then the proposition, as far as we understood it, was dropped from the Bill that eventually returned. When I asked the Minister's officials on Monday why it has emerged at this very late stage, they said it is because of the complexity involved. I take them at their word: I do not doubt that at all. It is then all the more problematic that these incredibly complex amendments are going to get a very short period of scrutiny. We will probably end up discussing these amendments for about an hour as we vote on them. We will not get to hear from the homeless sector. Focus Ireland has written to us all expressing real concerns that these amendments could lead to an increase in rough sleeping, which is a view that has been echoed by the Dublin Simon Community also in correspondence to us this week. Free Legal Advice Centres, FLAC, is a legal expert in this area and has raised similar concerns, as have others. These concerns may be wrong and may not be borne out, but the best way to do legislation of this kind is through the proper, Oireachtas scrutiny process where these things can be teased out and clarified.

We had some really good engagement with the Minister in the three committee sessions we did on the substance of the Bill. The Minister allayed some of my concerns and confirmed others but at least we had that detailed engagement. We are not going to get that to the same extent now.

What are the problems? The first problem is that the decision to provide an appeals mechanism for somebody who is being removed from emergency accommodation, but not to provide the same mechanism for somebody who is denied access to emergency accommodation, is a fundamental oversight. My primary concern is that given the complexity of the decision making involved, a person who could have a legal entitlement to emergency accommodation, who could be legally or habitually resident, could be in a position where a decision is made to deny him or her access to emergency accommodation, and he or she would have no right to an appeal. Sure, there is talk of an informal review and depending on the decision making of the local authority in question, that person may have access to a safety net on a night-to-night basis. However, given that the Minister is creating an appeal in the main body of the Bill for people who are denied access to social housing support or removed from a council list, and these amendments create an appeal mechanism, rightly, in my view, for people who are to be removed from emergency accommodation on certain grounds, not extending that appeal to people who are refused access to emergency accommodation is fundamentally unjust.

The consequence of this would be that some of these cases would end up in the courts. That is completely contrary to the intention of this legislation to provide clarity, certainty and good-quality decision making.

I want to be very clear that my concern is not with the competence of individual officers in local authorities. We have long experience of the real challenges in taking decisions around entitlements to State services and habitual and legal residence in the social welfare sphere. We know from that that it takes a level of experience and deep knowledge of the legislative frameworks in question. It requires a consistency of decision making. Therefore, I cannot understand why that appeal is not being extended. While we were told the Attorney General did not recommend it, that is not an actual answer to the question. The real question is why the Minister has not decided it is necessary and provided it? That is concern number one.

If we then look at the section of the legislation of these amendments that deals with removing somebody from emergency accommodation, and again, I am not against this in principle, we all live in the real world and understand that if, for example, somebody is behaving dangerously and putting others at risk, whether they be staff or other men, women and children in emergency accommodation, there has to be a provision for those people to be removed. That provision is there in practice but putting it on a statutory footing makes sense. I have a concern that one of the grounds for removal is that a person has refused a single offer within a period of 24 months prior to seeking emergency accommodation. The standard policy elsewhere in social housing supports, as the Minister knows, is that people get two offers before their file is suspended. There are times when there is a dispute between a local authority thinking an offer is reasonable, and it not being reasonable, for example, offering accommodation for a family outside the catchment area of the school the children are attending, when the family is unable to access public transport.

These types of decision happen and they are enormously problematic.

I also have concerns with the way in which the night-to-night safety net is set up. There is nothing wrong with this in principle but it is completely unclear as to why the Minister has times in it and why the emergency accommodation on a statutory basis is from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. What happens in winter? Are we saying people availing of this safety net will be left outside until 8 p.m.? What happens if we have severe weather events, as we often have, and homeless services have to adapt? We are putting this in legislation, as opposed to a circular or guidance. I do not understand why and I think it will create problems. Homeless service providers have expressed that as well.

This is a disappointing case of a Bill that could have been relatively uncontroversial and could have commanded support across the House and across the statutory and voluntary homeless service providers. However, there are concerns and I raise them specifically in relation to the amendments. On that basis, I have tabled a number of amendments, along with my colleague, Deputy Gould, that seek, at a minimum, to ensure people who are denied access to emergency accommodation have the right to an appeal. That will create a more significant safety net. Where people have a legal entitlement to emergency accommodation or where a decision on the provision of the safety net is not favourable to them when it should have been, they should at least have the opportunity to appeal. If nothing else, that is something the Minister should change in the legislation. On that basis, I have moved the amendment to amendment No. 1.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: Theoretically, I have no issue with this Bill or with the basic principle of codifying circulars around access to emergency accommodation and social housing eligibility. I do, however, have a big issue with the Minister using the motion to instruct. This is the second time this has happened in a year. I am only in this House a short time. The Minister has effectively tacked a whole new Bill onto a tenuously related Bill that we discussed already on Second Stage and Committee Stage. Far-reaching and significant amendments to the Housing Act 1988 came to us yesterday and they came with a two-hour guillotine and with very little time to discuss the far-reaching consequences they will have for people trying to access emergency accommodation.

I have a number of questions. One relates to the strict, arbitrary two-night limit. What is the rationale for codifying that, as opposed to the safety net discretion that exists at the moment? I have no issue with the statutory framework for how local authorities assess who qualifies for emergency accommodation and long-term housing support, but this is effectively stripping away a humanitarian safety net. There will be a loss of discretion. Under the previous policy guidelines, which were more flexible, local authorities could use discretion on humanitarian grounds to provide shelter to people. I am concerned by the rigidity of the Minister's amendments. These strict statutory definitions will remove a vital safety net. They will legally force councils to turn away people who are in unique and complicated situations and who do not fit into neat legal boxes. Will the Minister elaborate on what exemptions will be built into the legislation to counteract this?

The local connection test is controversial, in many cases, and can be quite arbitrary. When it is being codified like this, these strict local links will prevent people, in some cases, from accessing emergency placement outside of their home district. I say that because I represent a constituency that is on the edge of another constituency and which has people flying over and back on a bridge between Counties Limerick and Clare. What statutory guarantees or emergency exemptions will be built into the Bill to make sure people in crisis who will not successfully complete these rigid paperwork checks are not legally forced onto the street? For many marginalised and excluded people - I am thinking of Roma people, people from a migrant background and Travellers - it will be impossible for each resident in a family unit, for example, to fulfil the legal and habitual residency test. This Bill and these amendments could justify forcing an individual or family in crisis to navigate a complex, document-heavy bureaucratic housing application to secure a crisis bed for the night.

Why did the Minister not bring forward the amendments as a stand-alone Bill or when the Bill was initiated, so we could hear from the people who work in this sphere - the housing charities, the likes of Focus Ireland and FLAC, and the people who will have to deal with the real-world consequences of this? These are foundational changes to statutory housing rights and we have had no proper, full, transparent parliamentary debate and committee scrutiny. We had that on the Bill as initiated but not on what is in the Bill now.

I feel the way the Bill has been brought in and heavily amended is being done purposefully in order to bring the figures down in terms of emergency accommodation. The knock-on effect of that will be an increase in rough sleeping. This seems a deliberate policy decision when you look at the demographic of people in emergency accommodation, including those coming from State accommodation, particularly from IPAS, into emergency accommodation. The Bill is being done in this way in order to remove what the Government feels is currently a pull factor.

I do not think this is the way to do it. We will see a huge increase in rough sleeping. Going back to the legal and habitual residency condition, this alters the situation and the discretion of the local authority to provide emergency accommodation to anyone meeting the statutory definition of a homeless person.

When I look at the amendment to withdraw emergency accommodation, theoretically I have no issue with it, but in the way the Minister has put it forward, the amendment is far too rigid. There are some cases where you have to withdraw emergency accommodation - I am in no doubt about that - such as when an individual is behaving dangerously or is disruptive to other people in emergency accommodation, but we cannot withdraw emergency accommodation from somebody just for refusing one offer.

I deal with my own local authority, as every Deputy in this House does. I have had situations where a house that is virtually in the middle of nowhere with no public transport links has been offered to somebody living in emergency accommodation with no car. Let us be blunt, somebody from a migrant community or background might not be able to go and live in a certain area because of genuine concerns for their personal safety. That is fact and I have had situations like that. There needs to be a bit of discretion there.

Removing the safety net of emergency accommodation for people most at risk of homelessness and creating these additional administrative barriers might help the Minister's figures, so to speak, at the end of the month but it is going to create a whole host of other problems. It is going to lead to an increase in rough sleeping. I will be supporting Deputy Ó Broin's amendment as well because at the very least, we need to have an appeals process. It cannot be done as rigidly as the Minister is proposing.

Deputy Rory Hearne: It is deeply disappointing that the Minister has rushed through this legislation. I have been working in the area of homelessness for over a decade as an academic and researcher, but also campaigning with people directly in homelessness and working with homeless organisations. The homeless providers have never once asked for this legislation. It was never put forward as a solution to homelessness. The question is why the Minister is doing it. I have not yet been given a rationale that justifies rushing this through. The only conclusion I can draw is that it is part of a trend in this Government of what I would describe as performative cruelty. Let us show that we are being hard on migrants and immigrants and make some minor changes so we can say we are clamping down on access to things like social housing and now emergency accommodation. The circular existed. The Minister did not need to do this.

It is also very surprising to me, as somebody who has worked in this area for a long time, to read statements from the Simon Communities, Focus Ireland and Depaul - the front-line homeless providers - outlining their concern and making very clear that the Minister is not listening to them and has not listened to them. He has not listened in the sense of acting upon what they have put forward. The other aspect of this, along with the dog whistle to anti-immigrant sentiment, is that it is about reducing homeless numbers. I believe that is what this is about. It is very disappointing. We know that rough sleepers are not captured or counted in monthly homeless figures. This feels to me, in my reading, like a cynical move to somehow reduce homeless numbers. I highlight in particular the lack of time given to debate this. It is being rushed through. We got the amendments this week and there has been a failure to

genuinely engage with the homeless organisations. Maybe they will feel a response to their criticism in their funding - I hope not. The homeless organisations have been as critical of any Minister for housing introducing legislation as I have seen.

The Simon Communities set out that there are very real risks associated with this legislation. The Dublin Simon Community stated: "This bill has the potential to see more people turned away with nowhere left to go other than the streets." It says access to emergency accommodation "should always be led by need not entitlement." Of particular concern for it are the amendments which require individuals who do not meet the residency criteria to re-present nightly for emergency accommodation, inserting the 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. window for emergency accommodation placement. Mike Allen of Focus Ireland was very critical of that move. He stated that the Bill "is the first change in homelessness legislation since 1988, but instead of using the opportunity to bring the homeless system up to date [for which I am sure Focus Ireland has had lots of suggestions], the Government is slipping through a range of measures which bring it back to the Victorian past." It is really shocking. With this 8 p.m to 8 a.m. provision, what happens to children? Are they going to be kicked out at eight in the morning? Are they only going to be let in at 8 p.m. in the winter? Has the Minister thought through what this actually means and is going to mean? This winter, on the streets of our towns, villages and cities, we will have families, including children, and probably migrant families who are here, turned away to sleep rough. There is an irony in including a reference to the best interests of the child when it is not the best interests of the child in terms of eligibility and access to emergency accommodation. The most vulnerable people in our society, to a certain extent, are being scapegoated. I do not understand why the Minister has rushed this through and why he did not give us and the organisations working on the front line time to go through it.

Dublin Simon Community states that "inserting an 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. window for emergency accommodation placement into the legislation is particularly unworkable for person-led service providers like Dublin Simon." The Minister is introducing a measure that those who, right now, are providing emergency accommodation to thousands of people who are homeless say is making it unworkable. He is actually going to make the homelessness crisis worse with these measures. Dublin Simon Community states that "the lack of stability this would create would significantly impact these individuals' ability to meaningfully engage with support across housing, health and social care services." It further states:

Additionally, the proposed requirement for all members of a household to meet residency requirements could result in families being refused emergency accommodation. This is especially worrying as we may see more children facing the prospect of sleeping rough.

Focus Ireland has outlined that the habitual residence condition will require people to present detailed paperwork, which they are unlikely to have on them if they are fleeing domestic violence, have just been evicted or are going through a mental health crisis. We are saying this to the most vulnerable people. What is going to happen? Is someone of colour going to present to a local authority, with an accent from a different country, and the local authority is going to ask them to prove they are habitually resident? Are we going to see racism rise and are we going to see discrimination cases? How are local authorities going to judge and what is the time they are going to give? Are they going to ask people to bring back the paperwork? When are they to come back with the paperwork? There are serious issues here.

This will put on local authorities a more complicated system and make their provision of emergency accommodation more complex, which is inevitably going to lead to more destitution and homelessness.

Focus Ireland stated:

What the Government is calling a 'safety net' is really a return to the sort of cruel approach favoured in the Workhouse and the County Home, where people are only provided shelter for a few hours and given no security for the following night. Any Government in the last 40 years would have been ashamed to introduce legislation which is so poorly drafted, unclear and punitive.

Those are not my words; they are the words of Focus Ireland. I do believe that it is nasty, cruel legislation. It is unnecessary. No justification for it has been given. The CEO of Depaul has said that Depaul is alarmed and dismayed at the process, which has been rushed through. There is deep frustration over what he described as "a clear disregard by the Government to the concerns aired by those working at the front line of this homelessness crisis." Clarity and joined-up thinking are what we need, he said.

6 o'clock

He said, "This Bill creates a new range of uncertainties about access to emergency accommodation and how vulnerable people will be treated." It is "regressive" and "will have profound effects on the most vulnerable people in our society". Free Legal Advice Centres, FLAC, similarly outlined some very serious concerns with it. It states that removing "the safety-net of emergency accommodation for communities already most at risk of homelessness" is, in turn, likely to "lead to a rise in the number of people and families rough-sleeping". FLAC also described the meeting the Minister had with it. It said the one-hour briefing between Department officials and the NGOs on 17 June did not constitute meaningful consultation. The Government is in breach of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's policies and ethics in relation to public sector bodies and their equality and human rights obligations. Community Law & Mediation set out that the unavoidable conclusion is that vulnerable people, including children and those with disabilities, will be at direct risk of on-street homelessness.

The Minister never answered the question as to what will happen to victims of trafficking and domestic violence. That he has not made an exception for those groups is disappointing and disgraceful. He could have added in those exceptions to ensure that there were humanitarian grounds on which our most vulnerable people who are coming into this country or who are in this country already could be provided with emergency accommodation. It is deeply disappointing. I really hope what these organisations have outlined does not come to pass. If it does, it is the Minister's decision and his responsibility to take for that.

Deputy James Browne: A lot of issues were raised. I will try to address as many as I can. In relation to the time and the use of the word "night", the definition of night time differs greatly between 21 June and 21 December. That would have created an extraordinary level of uncertainty as to when somebody can go in or not. That is why a time was chosen. The Deputy can argue about the time, but certainly using the word "night" would have given a great level of uncertainty. That is why a time was put in there for that matter. Nobody has ever suggested

that this was a solution to homelessness. It will not affect the numbers. It will not increase the number of rough sleepers, either, in any shape or form.

Regarding the appeal mechanism for those refused emergency accommodation, they can, of course, immediately reapply. That is the nature of emergency accommodation, unlike maybe other decisions the Government, State agencies or local authorities make. It is not the end of the road. They can go immediately back in and make another application. I intend to ensure that where somebody is refused emergency accommodation, a reason for their refusal will be communicated in writing. That person will have the right to have a decision reviewed by a more senior member in their local authority to ensure that there is consistency in the decision-making on it.

On the comments about people sleeping out in the snow, every local authority has a severe weather protocol. I expect those to be put into place. Nobody should be out on the streets in extreme and severe weather. In my experience with local authorities and certainly in my own one, they are very responsive and take a very precautionary approach in those types of situations to ensure that people are not out. Children, of course, are exempt from these rules. That is very important to remember in the context of some of the comments that have been made.

It is important to remind Members what we are discussing here. This is legal and habitual residence. Regarding what local authority a person is entitled to apply for, that is more to do with the local connection. It is not habitual residence. Habitual residence is about your intent to remain in the State and make the State your home. The local connection is a very different matter and is more concerned with the local authority under which you will make your application. Rough sleepers are very much considered here. That is why there is a safety net. Not only can people immediately reapply for emergency accommodation but if there is any risk of them rough sleeping, they will be given accommodation on a night-to-night basis, for two nights initially and then night to night after that. If somebody does need to establish legal and habitual residence in the State and they are looking for long-term supports from the State, it not an onerous requirement that they should be legally here and intending to stay here and that this is their home. That is the current policy. We are ensuring it is put in on a statutory basis. I do not have any particular issue in relation to it.

Regarding human trafficking, if somebody is trafficked, the initial supports are provided by the Department of justice. There are strong protocols in place there. I know that because I was in the Department of justice. That Department will be able to make the decision as to the status of that person and whether to issue that person a visa or what status they should have to remain here.

On domestic violence, again, this is about legal and habitual residence. If somebody who is subject to domestic violence needs emergency accommodation, they will be provided with emergency accommodation. Only last week, I brought in new rules to allow people who are the victims or survivors of domestic violence to bring their time served in one local authority to another local authority to ensure that the supports are put in place.

One of the reasons we are bringing in the legislation is to ensure that there is consistency, because there is a level of inconsistency right across the country among local authorities. I have seen it myself. While local authorities are very much doing their best in often very

difficult situations, putting it in legislation and on a statutory basis brings that level of consistency such that staff in local authorities will know exactly how to apply the law and know what the law is. They will be given support and guidance from my Department. That crucial safety net is there for people who are at risk of rough sleeping.

I have addressed most of the key issues, although maybe not the invective.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I am even less convinced of the logic of prescribing a time in the legislation. "Night to night" has a very clear meaning. It means a person does not get a placement of a month, six months or 18 months. It means accommodation is provided on a night-to-night basis. That is a long-standing policy that currently exists, and some emergency accommodation providers are paid for that. If the Minister had wanted to be helpful to local authorities, he could have provided guidance. The difficulty is that by putting this in legislation, it suggests that where the night-to-night safety net is to be provided, somebody cannot be accommodated before 8 p.m. The Minister has put that in the legislation. Normally when we ask for specific details in legislation, we are told it is not the place for them. That raises very real questions. Does it mean the emergency accommodation provided under this amendment can only open at 8 p.m. and must close at 8 a.m.? That becomes the operational procedure irrespective of, as I said, whether it is in the best interests of the child or is not appropriate for the adults.

Second, the idea that the solution to not providing for an appeal is that somebody can just keep reapplying makes no sense. That just adds administrative burden for the local authorities, if such a thing were the primary concern. It also ignores the fact people who present for emergency accommodation are in crisis. At the point of application, they do not necessarily have all of the documentation to hand. I wish to re-emphasise that my primary, first-instance concern is people who are legally and habitually resident in the State being wrongfully denied emergency accommodation and having no mechanism for appeal. The current situation is that they are assessed as being homeless. They are put in emergency accommodation and then a key worker or a local authority staff member works with them to provide the documentation to get the social housing support application in place or to provide the other forms of evidence that are there.

The Minister has denied an appeal but what he has described with the review is not that dissimilar from the appeal except it is not founded in law. The applicant will get the decision to be reviewed by a superior decision maker. The difficulty is, because they are in crisis, whether they will have access to the necessary legal support, advocacy support or documentation in the time period.

With respect, on the safety net, the Minister rightfully keeps saying he wants to ensure consistency yet when you read the section of the amendment it states that the local authority or housing authority "may" make a decision to provide that safety net. That means we will get inconsistencies in decision-making right across the local authorities, particularly at the early stages of this legislation as people grapple with what is in front of them.

In regard to the "two nights" provision, what about the weekend, a bank holiday or if somebody gets the initial two nights from a Friday and the decision-maker in the local authority is not back to work until the Tuesday after a bank holiday? The Minister is prescribing this in legislation rather than in guidance, with the necessary flexibility.

Since the Minister raised the social housing transfer protocol that was published last week - something for which many of us have campaigned for a long time - it does not apply to about half of the households who will need it, namely, people who are currently in receipt of HAP or RAS but are not on the principal social housing waiting list or on a HAP transfer list will not avail of this. It is something I urged the Minister's colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy John Cummins, to raise with him directly when we discussed it with him last week, to amend the circular to ensure every woman, or every woman and child or children, who desperately needs the social housing transfer protocol can get it, whether they are council list applicants or on the HAP or RAS transfer lists.

Nothing the Minister said has convinced me of the merits of what is in front of us and on that basis, I am pushing the amendment.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I thank the Minister for his response. I am none the wiser from his response either as to why the arbitrary eight to eight time was chosen. It seems sort of strange to have a situation where in winter, you could have empty emergency accommodation beds and people outside in the cold because of this arbitrary eight to eight rule. I do not understand why this is being codified in legislation in the way it has been done. The Minister will store up problems for himself. He made a very bold comment when he said this Bill will not increase the number of rough sleepers. Where is the Minister's regulatory impact assessment for that? Where is the data to show that definitively will not happen when every homeless organisation, NGO, etc., has told us it will? We did not need homeless NGOs or the likes of FLAC to tell us this would lead to an increase in rough sleeping. Common sense will tell you that this will lead to an increase in rough sleeping.

In respect of the lack of an appeals process, the Minister said in one sense that you can apply and apply again but essentially that means that if somebody keeps being refused, the only recourse they have then is to try to seek a judicial review, which is absolute nonsense because anybody who needs emergency accommodation does not have the capacity to do that. I would appreciate if the Minister addressed those questions.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I do not sit on the housing committee, so this has come like a bolt from the blue for anyone who does not because of the suddenness of these changes. I will give some practical examples because this will cause absolute chaos for councillors and TDs who are at the coalface of dealing with the housing crisis. They are the least of my worries, obviously. I am worried about the people who will be affected.

I am really shocked to read just now about all of the bodies that have condemned this legislation and the Minister is simply, yet again, not listening. We stood here during the international protection legislation and raised very similar concerns from human rights organisations about that legislation and this fits very much into that mould. The only thing I can think of is that this is about, as other TDs have suggested, the Minister virtue-signalling to the far right and people who are racist in this country. We have already had the Tánaiste and the Taoiseach linking homelessness with migrants and asylum seekers and now the Minister is sending out a message with this Bill that a lot of the homeless people are actually asylum seekers and that is why we have this crisis. That is the message the Minister is sending out. The Minister is not in any way thinking of the human consequences of this for victims of trafficking and for very vulnerable people. This is also very likely to be contrary to EU law

and human rights law, according to the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, the Mercy Law Centre, etc.

I can think of a couple of cases that have just come my way during the past couple of weeks. I will not identify the person but they were publicised for being a victim of a horrific assault on the street and they are homeless. They came to my office this week with an interpreter and with somebody else. They are working in this country. They had their refugee status granted. They were kicked out of the IPAS accommodation, which is what happens when you get your refugee status. You are left to fend for yourself and to find homeless accommodation. This person refused an offer of accommodation because they were being asked to share with a stranger. The Minister might actually understand that if you are walking up a street and stranger viciously assaults you, you might then actually have a fear of strangers. Under this legislation, what would happen to this person because they turned down what the Minister considers a viable offer of homeless accommodation? Thankfully, I was able to contact the relevant authorities, explain why and ask if another offer could be made.

I can think of the case of another family in terms of this idea that everybody must be a fully fledged person who is entitled to social housing. There is a Palestinian family in my constituency and their elderly parents, with serious health issues, fled the genocide in Gaza. Some of the family were sleeping on the floor so as to be able to take in the parents and look after them. I am sure the Minister would agree that he would do the same for his family and I would do the same for mine. This family then had a fire in their accommodation and had to be moved. Thankfully, they were helped. Where would they stand with the local authority or the housing agency providing that accommodation if they had to get residency status for their parents before they could get help? They could have all been out on the street. The Minister is just not thinking, or maybe he is and he does not care.

The other thing is the lack of discretion. I represent a constituency that has a massive amount of diversity and of homelessness. It has been so for about 12 years, long before any refugees or asylum seekers came in large numbers to this country. When I was elected to this House in 2014 during the by-election, housing was the biggest issue. There is no discretion for local authorities. I am sure the Minister is not suggesting that Dublin City Council is the same as Sligo County Council. They just have different demands and needs in terms of the populations and the problems they face. The Minister is taking away all discretion from the likes of Fingal County Council, Dublin City County Council, the other Dublin councils and other cities councils where there will be more people seeking support for homeless accommodation and refugees as well. This will cause havoc. Maybe the people affected do not go to Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Deputies. From what I hear anecdotally, they do not. It seems that people who desperately need help tend to come to the parties of the left. It just seems to be that way. The Minister is shaking his head but that is what people tell us, that the Government TDs just do not reply to them and do not get their hands dirty. We are the ones who take it on and that has always been the way in my constituency in any case, from what we can see.

They are just not situated in the constituency where they get the votes and where these issues are a problem.

This is shocking and follows very much in the vein of the international protection legislation that the Government brought through, ignoring human rights concerns and ignoring practical

concerns that TDs are making. It is really shameful stuff in order to garner a few brownie points and tell everybody that refugees are to blame for the housing crisis.

Deputy Thomas Gould: Like other speakers, I think the Minister is making a major mistake. I was just talking to my party colleague Deputy Ó Broin. A lady contacted me today. She has been in recovery for eight months and is four months pregnant. She is homeless and on the streets. Tonight she is in the maternity hospital at Cork University Hospital, CUH, because there was nowhere else for her to go. If she goes into emergency accommodation where there is open addiction and open drug taking, her fear is that she may fall back into addiction. She is trying to protect herself and her unborn child. When she comes out of CUH tomorrow, she is going to the streets. What does the Minister's legislation mean for her? Does it mean she has no right to appeal? This is forcing people into unsuitable accommodation - especially people who are in recovery and are trying to keep their lives together. This woman is four months pregnant and she has been in and out of emergency accommodation for the last two years. She is 20 years old. As an adult, all she has experienced is emergency accommodation. Is she going to be denied the right to appeal? What happens to her under this legislation? Will the Minister explain that to me please?

Deputy Rory Hearne: I raised all the issues earlier that I wanted to talk about but I just want to ask the Minister something again. I appeal to him at this late stage to change the 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. closure provision. I think it will lead to unintended, or intended, consequences that will be potentially severe this winter. I urge him to come up with some other form of wording, or just remove the provision. I just do not see why he does not remove it at this point. It is not necessary. I would ask him to do that on a humanitarian basis.

Will the Minister also add an exception for victims of domestic violence and trafficking? I am just asking for those two concessions.

Deputy James Browne: In relation to being able to reapply versus make an appeal, any appeal takes time. These people are in a crisis at that point in time - we agree on that - so the quickest method is to reapply rather than going through a complicated appeals process.

In relation to the two nights for the initial situation, if that person cannot make other arrangements and is at risk of rough sleeping, such as over a bank holiday weekend, the local authority would be expected to give them another night. The whole purpose of this safety net is to ensure that they are given a place.

On the lawfulness, the Attorney General's office is satisfied that all of this is in accordance with all law. We would not be doing it otherwise. This has no impact on people who have international protection and have a right to remain here. If they are lawfully here, they will be habitually resident here as well, so there is no impact on them. There is no impact on refugees either. They are also here as of right. If someone is an asylum seeker, he or she will be in an IPAS centre or other accommodation provided by the Department of justice. Again, therefore, whatever the status of that Palestinian family, there is no reason for them, or anybody, to be without accommodation.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Is the Minister saying the parents should be put in an IPAS centre?

Deputy James Browne: On Deputy Gould's point, the woman in that very traumatic situation has been provided emergency accommodation in the past and there is no reason she would not be provided it again in the future. If there is any way the Deputy wants me to help with that woman, who is in a very difficult situation, he should please provide the details. It is the same for that Palestinian family. We are always happy to intervene. I am not going to comment on Deputy Coppinger's usual self-righteous nonsense suggesting she has a monopoly on compassion-----

Deputy Thomas Gould: There is no need for that comment.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: You are unbelievable. You really need to get a grip on yourselves, the way you talk to the Opposition.

Deputy Thomas Gould: Yes, there was no need for that.

Deputy James Browne: This is too often what we get, unfortunately-----

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: You are so sexist as well. It is only women you ever say that to.

Deputy James Browne: It is very easy to come in here with your personal invective but you have to engage with policy. That is what we need to be doing rather than your usual commentary in relation to it-----

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Sorry, but I am not going to be polite to you when we have a crisis.

Deputy James Browne: I let you speak and as usual-----

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: This is a brutal piece of legislation-----

Deputy James Browne: I let you speak but you will not let me speak.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: -----so do not expect politeness.

Deputy James Browne: It is a democracy. I know you do not really believe in this type of democracy but it is a democracy. What we are doing here is putting in very important legislation to bring consistency to social housing qualification and homelessness in this country. I believe it will help to bring clarity right across the country and will help people, in some cases, who are not getting their rights met by having this level of consistency and guidance that we have provided from the Department.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We now have to put the amendment to the amendment-----

Deputy Thomas Gould: Can I just ask one question of the Minister? That lady refuses to go into the emergency accommodation because she is in recovery and the accommodation presents a risk of her relapsing. This applies not just to that lady but to anyone in a similar position. They have no right to appeal and they then have to reapply to go on the housing list, which in Cork city takes five months on average. Where should they live for the five months?

I do not need to go into the whole lot of it, but if the legislation the Minister is bringing forward is passed, if a person refuses to enter emergency accommodation either because of addiction or because she is a vulnerable woman who does not want to go to a mixed congregated setting with people in the throes of addiction, then that person will end up on the streets.

Deputy James Browne: This refers to reasonable offers of accommodation, so it is not any offer. It is about turning down a reasonable offer of accommodation. It is up to the local authority to ensure that appropriate and safe emergency accommodation is provided, and for people like that woman in particular. I know the Deputy likes to absolve the local authority of any responsibility whatsoever for anything but it is up to the local authority to ensure appropriate emergency accommodation is provided. The local authorities are well funded to do so and they should do so for a woman in that very traumatic type of situation.

Amendment to amendment put:

The Committee divided: Tá, 68; Níl, 81; 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.	
Cairns, Holly.	Brophy, Colm.	
Carthy, Matt.	Browne, James.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Burke, Colm.	
Collins, Michael.	Burke, Peter.	
Conway-Walsh, Rose.	Butler, Mary.	
Coppinger, Ruth.	Butterly, Paula.	
Cronin, Réada.	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.	
Farrell, Mairéad.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Clendennen, John.	
Gannon, Gary.	Collins, Niall.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Connolly, John.	
Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	Cooney, Joe.	

Gould, Thomas.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Graves, Ann.	Cummins, John.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Daly, Martin.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Hearne, Rory.	Dillon, Alan.	
Kenny, Martin.	Dolan, Albert.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Dooley, Timmy.	
Lawless, Paul.	Feighan, Frankie.	
Lawlor, George.	Fleming, Sean.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Foley, Norma.	
McDonald, Mary Lou.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Geoghegan, James.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Harkin, Marian.	
Mitchell, Denise.	Heneghan, Barry.	
Murphy, Paul.	Heydon, Martin.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Higgins, Emer.	
Nash, Ged.	Keogh, Keira.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Kyne, Seán.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Lahart, John.	
Nolan, Carol.	Lawless, James.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	Lowry, Michael.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	Maxwell, David.	
O'Gorman, Roderic.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
O'Hara, Louis.	McCarthy, Noel.	
O'Reilly, Louise.	McCormack, Tony.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	McEntee, Helen.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	McGrath, Séamus.	
Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	McGreehan, Erin.	
Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	Moran, Kevin Boxer.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Moynihan, Michael.	
Quaide, Liam.	Moynihan, Shane.	
Quinlivan, Maurice.	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
Rice, Pádraig.	Murphy, Michael.	
Sheehan, Conor.	Naughton, Hildegard.	
Sherlock, Marie.	O'Brien, Darragh.	
Smith, Duncan.	O'Connell, Maeve.	
Stanley, Brian.	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 Fearghail, Seán.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	

	Richmond, Neale.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Troy, Robert.	
	Ward, Barry.	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Eoin Ó Broin and Thomas Gould; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and John Clendennen.

Amendment to amendment declared lost.

Amendment No. 1 put and declared carried.

Bill reported with amendment.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The amendment is carried and, therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 194(3), it is reported to the Dáil that the Long Title has been amended.

Amendments Nos. 2 to 4, inclusive, 26, 27, 32, 36, 47 and 48 are related and may be discussed together. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy James Browne: I move amendment No. 2:

In page 5, line 11, after “hearings” to insert “, and the determination of disputes,”.

Amendments Nos. 2 to 4, inclusive, are technical drafting amendments to ensure that the Long Title of the Bill more accurately describes the content and purpose of the Bill, taking account of the Government amendments since publication. The Bill provides for procedures for the determination of disputes by the RTB and the enforcement of such determinations, increases the penalties for summary convictions for offences under the residential tenancies Acts 2004 to 2026, and provides for the RTB to serve fixed payment notices in respect of certain offences under the RTA.

Government amendment No. 26 amends section 9 of the Act of 2004 to clarify that its provisions apply to all offences under the Act other than under section 148S(16). Separate provision is made within section 148S for the penalties to apply upon summary conviction and conviction on indictment for an offence under that section.

Government amendment No. 27 provides technical amendments to section 9 to clarify that it provides penalties on summary conviction. At the request of the RTB, the timeframe to institute a prosecution is also proposed to be extended from one year to three years after the date of the offence.

Section 148S of the Act of 2004 is contained in Part 7A, which provides for the investigation and sanction by the RTB of improper conduct by a landlord. It provides that a person who either holds, destroys, conceals or refuses to provide any information or records required for the purposes of an RTB investigation, fails or refuses to comply with any requirement of an

RTB authorised officer or otherwise obstructs or hinders an RTB authorised officer in their work, is guilty of an offence. The penalty that currently applies under section 148S(16) on summary conviction is in line with the penalty that will apply, if the Bill is enacted, on summary conviction for all other offences under the RTA, that is, a class A fine or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months, or both. The penalty that currently applies under section 148S on conviction on indictment will not change under this Bill, that is, a fine not exceeding €50,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years, or both.

An offence under section 148S(16) is the only indictable offence under the RTA. Section 9 of the Act of 2004 provides for penalties on summary conviction. Section 148S(16), subject to subsection (10), states that a person who either holds, destroys, conceals or refuses to provide any information or records required for the purposes of an investigation, fails or refuses to comply with any requirement of an authorised officer under this section or otherwise obstructs or hinders an authorised officer in the performance of functions imposed under this Part, is guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction or on conviction on indictment.

Government amendments Nos. 32, 36, 47 and 48 clarify that it will not be required that a fixed payment notice or a copy be provided to the RTB with the corresponding payment of the fine. The aim is to provide for the payment of fines by landlords to be as streamlined as possible for the sector, including the RTB. The RTB is confident that it will be able to track individual payments to correspond with a specific fixed payment notice and, therefore, there is no need to burden the sector with a requirement to provide a copy of the fixed payment notice itself, as these amendments aim for efficiency.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy James Browne: I move amendment No. 3:

In page 5, line 12, after “Board” to insert “, and the enforcement of such determinations”.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy James Browne: I move amendment No. 4:

In page 5, lines 12 and 13, to delete “to increase the penalties for certain offences under the Residential Tenancies Act 2004” and substitute the following:

“to increase the penalties for summary offences and to provide for the service of fixed payment notices in respect of certain offences under the Residential Tenancies Act 2004”.

Amendment agreed to.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Recommittal is necessary in respect of amendment No. 5 and the other related amendment as they do not arise from committee proceedings. I ask the Minister to move the recommittal.

Deputy James Browne: I move: "That the Bill be recommitted in respect of amendments Nos. 5 and 25."

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 5 and 25 are related and may be discussed together.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Is that with every group of amendments or-----

Deputy Rory Hearne: Are these new ones that were not on Committee Stage?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Yes. It is the same as the last question.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: For every group of the new amendments that yesterday's motion referred to, we still have to agree each one of those groups. I have never come across that before. That is fine.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Yes.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: You are in charge.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Okay.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Just about.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: If I was we can all go home. That is agreed.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill recommitted in respect of amendment No. 5.

Deputy James Browne: I move amendment No. 5:

In page 5, line 13, after “2004;” to insert “to provide that the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 shall not apply to certain dwellings;”.

Amendment No. 5 is a technical drafting amendment to ensure the Long Title of the Bill more accurately describes the content and purpose of the Bill, taking account of amendment No. 25, which proposes to insert a new section into the Bill to disapply the 2024 Act in respect of detached auxiliary dwellings that are developed as exempted development under the forthcoming amendments to the planning and development regulations SI 600/2021. Such detached auxiliary dwellings must be constructed, erected or placed to the rear of a person's principal house, that is, their principal private residence. The 2024 Act shall not apply to a detached auxiliary dwelling in a rear garden that is such an exempted development where the principal house is the owner-occupied principal private residence of the landlord of the auxiliary dwelling.

Section 3(2) of the 2024 Act provides a list of dwellings to which the Act does not apply. Section 13 of the Bill proposes to expand this list to include paragraph (j) to disapply the Residential Tenancies Act in respect of the aforementioned detached auxiliary dwelling, subject to certain conditions, as outlined. The intention is to disapply the 2024 Act from the same day

that the related exempted development provisions under the forthcoming amendments to the planning and development regulations, PDR, come into operation. On and after that date, the 2024 Act will disapply in respect of such detached auxiliary dwellings that might be developed in the future. It is the intention for a detached auxiliary dwelling that is developed having availed of the new exemption from planning permission to remain outside the scope of the 2024 Act, irrespective of any future amendment to the PDR requiring planning permission for such new structures.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle and Minister. We will deal with the substance of the exempted development regulations when they come to committee on Tuesday of next week. Many of us on this side of the House have long argued for some flexibility in our planning code for family members to be able to provide free-standing residential extensions in back gardens for direct family members. That is a matter we will debate next week.

From our party's point of view, we do not under any circumstances support the renting out of free-standing residential extensions in back gardens. What is worse about these amendments is that not only will the Minister permit it, those who will rent such dwellings will have no tenancy rights whatsoever. These amendments will completely strip them of any of the protections under the Residential Tenancies Act in terms of rent setting or capping, notices of termination and all of the other protections that tenants have.

My concern is that not only will the Minister strip a group of renters of their rights into the future, he is also doing something that is contrary to a century of tenancy legislation. The definition of a tenancy for very long period in this State, before and since the passing of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004, is exclusive occupation of a dwelling.

The whole idea of a licensee is that they do not have exclusive occupation of a dwelling. Rather, they are renting a room in somebody else's principal private residence and share their kitchen, bathroom, etc. These are free-standing residential structures and will have bathrooms, kitchens and a front door. They will share some services and road and pedestrian access, but they are dwellings in which the renter will have exclusive occupation. I suspect this will end up being challenged in the courts and the outcome of that will be very interesting. The bottom line is that a person who has exclusive occupation of a property they rent should be considered under law a tenant and have the full protections of the Residential Tenancies Act. Notwithstanding a separate substantive debate on the exempted development regulations will have next week, this is an incredibly retrograde step and one to which we are fundamentally opposed.

Deputy Rory Hearne: We have discussed this. We in the Social Democrats have serious concerns about the change being introduced. We are concerned in particular about the lack of rental rights that will apply to those residing in back garden sheds or structures. Why will the Minister not apply the Residential Tenancies Act to these dwellings? Obviously, I do not agree they should be rented, but what the Minister is doing is even worse in terms of allowing them to be licensees.

Threshold, the renters' charity that does excellent work and which the Minister has engaged with, has expressed severe concern about the failure to protect people who will live in sheds at

the back of people's dwellings. It is another piece of legislation that is being rushed through and the consequences are not being seriously considered. This will create modern day tenements in back gardens. It will be completely unregulated. People will be hidden.

We know this is already happening. You can see on *daft.ie* sheds in back gardens available for rent. There is one in Walkinstown for €1,100 per month. Such dwellings will be completely unmonitored. Of course an exemption in respect of standards will have to be provided when they are built, but who is ensuring that there is hot water and tenants have access to decent facilities? Who will ensure that people who are renting these are living in proper, suitable standards? It will be a recipe for disaster. As the Taoiseach said, it is about incentivising people to provide this rental accommodation.

The Bill will create another layer of accidental so-called landlords who are not professional landlords. Someone in their 50s or 60s may build a modular home in their back garden and have a family living in it. What happens when that person retires and decides they want to sell their home? The family would be evicted and have no protections whatsoever. This will lead to more homelessness and hidden exploitation. As Threshold highlighted, it will be students, elderly people and vulnerable groups who will be most exposed to this exploitation. On that basis, we will oppose the amendment.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: We in the Labour Party support the need for more flexibility when it comes to exempted developments. What I do not support is the whole idea of allowing landlords to rent out "Cummins cabins", effectively, without any protection for tenants. The fact of the matter is renters will have no Part 4 protection or rent controls. They could be subject to summary eviction. Due to the fact these dwellings will not come under the RTB Act and will not require planning, it will be hard to identify where they are and to make sure that they are of a decent standard. I have no issue with more flexibility when it comes to exempted development. In fact, it is necessary.

A couple of months ago, I asked the Minister if he would at the very least conduct a full review of the licensing system to make sure that it is sound. We have had a number of issues with it, in that there are major loopholes and, unfortunately, people have been exploited as a result. There is no safety net or protection against rent hikes, spikes or eviction. I am afraid that this could end up disproportionately targeting vulnerable people.

7 o'clock

I am thinking in particular of students, including international students. We have had loads of issues in recent years with international students being stacked into accommodation. Now they will potentially end up being stacked into what are, in effect, beds in sheds. Local authorities already find it difficult enough to inspect private rentals. Removing the requirement for RTB registration means it will be very hard to know exactly where any of these structures will be. The rent-a-room scheme works reasonably well but this will have the effect of distorting the spirit of the scheme because there will be completely unregulated, stand-alone private rental businesses in residential back gardens. I again call on the Minister, if he is going to do this, to at least look at the licensee system and the loopholes therein.

Deputy Thomas Gould: I will not repeat what my colleagues have said but the fact is we are denying tenants their fundamental protections and rights under the RTB. That is wrong. Tenants who are paying their rent every week, including where there is antisocial behaviour, are entitled to their rights. We are creating a two-tier system, with renters who are covered by the RTB on the one hand and then, on the other, people living in these beds in sheds. We are talking about independent accommodation in people's back gardens. It is not like renting a room in a house. These are stand-alone dwellings and the tenants living there are not sharing the homeowner's bathroom, front room or kitchen. People paying rent on a stand-alone residence should be entitled to the same protection as other renters. I ask the Minister, as others have asked him, to consider that. Why would he not provide people with the protections and rights to which they are entitled?

Deputy James Browne: We are not talking about stand-alone properties. These properties are on the land and the curtilage of the homeowner. The renter shares all the services with the homeowner, including the driveway and the water and electricity facilities coming in. We already do this with the rent-a-room scheme. People can rent a room under licence in a homeowner's property. The residences we are discussing will likewise be on a homeowner's property. Such a building is considered an extension, albeit a detached one. It does not have its own folio, does not count towards housing numbers and cannot be sold separately. It is part of the main homeowner's property.

Where a principal private resident avails of this exemption, constructs a detached auxiliary dwelling within an existing residential curtilage and rents it out, that arrangement will have to be outside of the remit of the Residential Tenancies Act. We cannot have homeowners in that situation, who may be elderly people and so on who cannot sell their home, subject to that type of obligation. I acknowledge it is a difficult situation but when we examine it, the idea that someone renting out a property on the wider property of a homeowner is renting a completely separate dwelling governed by the Residential Tenancies Act is completely unworkable and unmanageable. Homeowners would entirely lose control of their own home, their right to which is protected under the Constitution. That is the reality of the situation. These properties are built and have to be built to the highest standards. Building regulation compliance is not simply about when something is built; it is also about maintenance as well. Licensing is always kept under review but I take Deputy Sheehan's point in that regard.

Amendment put:

The Committee divided: Tá, 80; Níl, 58; 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.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Colm.	Collins, Michael.	
Burke, Peter.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	

Butler, Mary.	Cronin, Réada.	
Butterly, Paula.	Cullinane, David.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cummins, Jen.	
Cahill, Michael.	Daly, Pa.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Devine, Máire.	
Calleary, Dara.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Canney, Seán.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Chambers, Jack.	Gannon, Gary.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Clendennen, John.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Collins, Niall.	Gould, Thomas.	
Connolly, John.	Graves, Ann.	
Cooney, Joe.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Cummins, John.	Hearne, Rory.	
Daly, Martin.	Kenny, Martin.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Lawless, Paul.	
Dillon, Alan.	Lawlor, George.	
Dolan, Albert.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Dooley, Timmy.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Fleming, Sean.	Murphy, Paul.	
Foley, Norma.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Nash, Ged.	
Geoghegan, James.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Harkin, Marian.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
Heneghan, Barry.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
Heydon, Martin.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Higgins, Emer.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
Keogh, Keira.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Kyne, Seán.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Lahart, John.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Lowry, Michael.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Maxwell, David.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
McCarthy, Noel.	Quaide, Liam.	
McCormack, Tony.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
McGrath, Séamus.	Rice, Pádraig.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Sheehan, Conor.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Smith, Duncan.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Stanley, Brian.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Wall, Mark.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Ward, Mark.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	

Murphy, Michael.		
Naughton, Hildegard.		
Nolan, Carol.		
O'Brien, Darragh.		
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 Fearghaíl, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and John Clendennen; Níl, Deputies Eoin Ó Broin and Conor Sheehan.

Amendment declared carried.

Bill reported with amendment.

An Ceann Comhairle: Pursuant to Standing Order 194(3), it is reported to the Dáil that the Long Title has been amended.

Amendments Nos. 6 and 7, by leave, withdrawn.

Bill recommitted in respect of amendments Nos. 8 to 11, inclusive.

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy James Browne): I move amendment No. 8:

In page 6, between lines 3 and 4, to insert the following:

“PART 2

AMENDMENTS TO HOUSING ACT 1988

Interpretation (*Part 2*)

4.In this Part, "Act of 1988" means the Housing Act 1988."

Amendment put and declared carried.

Deputy James Browne: I move amendment No. 9:

In page 6, between lines 3 and 4, to insert the following:

“Amendment of section 1 of Act of 1988

Section 1 of the Act of 1988 is amended by the insertion of the following definition:

“ 'Act of 2009' means the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, ".[]

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy James Browne: I move amendment No. 10:

In page 6, between lines 3 and 4, to insert the following:

“Amendment of section 10 of Act of 1988

6. Section 10 of the Act of 1988 is amended—

(a) in subsection (1), by the substitution of “A housing authority may, subject to section 10A and to such regulations” for “A housing authority may, subject to such regulations”,

(b) in subsection (8)—

(i) in paragraph (a)(ii), by the substitution of “own resources,” for “own resources, or”,

(ii) by the insertion of the following paragraphs after paragraph (b):

“(c) that person (whether as a household within the meaning of section 18A of the Act of 2009 or part of such a household) refuses one reasonable offer of a form of support referred to in paragraph (a), (b) or (d) of section 19(2) of that Act, or

(d) that person intentionally or recklessly engages in conduct which causes death or serious harm to another person in the accommodation or lodgings,”

and

(iii) by the substitution of “the authority may determine that such accommodation or lodgings shall no longer be made available to the person and may require the person to vacate the accommodation or lodgings” for “the authority may cease to have such accommodation or lodgings made so available and may require the person to vacate the accommodation or lodgings”,

(c) in subsection (10), by the substitution of “to determine if a person is homeless or to determine, under section 10A(1), if a person is eligible to access arrangements, assistance or accommodation provided by a housing authority under subsection (1)” for “to determine if a person is homeless”, and

(d) by the insertion of the following subsections after subsection (11):

“(12) Where, by virtue of subsection (1)(c), accommodation is provided or rented, or where lodgings are arranged, for a person and a child who normally resides with the

person, a housing authority shall have regard to the best interests of that child when considering available accommodation or lodgings for that person under subsection (1)(c).

(13) In this section—

‘child’ means a person who has not attained the age of 18 years;

‘serious harm’ means injury which creates a substantial risk of death or which causes serious disfigurement or substantial loss or impairment of the mobility of the body as a whole or of the function of any particular bodily member or organ.”.”.

Amendment put and declared carried.

Deputy James Browne: I move amendment No. 11:

In page 6, between lines 3 and 4, to insert the following:

“Insertion of new sections 10A and 10B in Act of 1988

7.The Act of 1988 is amended by the insertion of the following new sections after section 10:

“Residency requirements

10A.(1) A person shall not be eligible to access arrangements, assistance or accommodation provided by a housing authority by virtue of section 10(1) unless the authority, having carried out an assessment, is satisfied that the person, and any person who normally resides with that person or who might reasonably be expected to reside with that person, meets the requirements referred to in section 20A(1) of the Act of 2009.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1), section 20(7) of the Act of 2009, in so far as it relates to section 20A of that Act, and the said section 20A, shall apply subject to the following modifications:

(a) a reference to a household shall be read as a reference to—

(i) a homeless person who, but for being such a person, would live alone,

(ii) a group of persons comprising a homeless person and one or more other persons who normally reside with that person, or

(iii) a group of persons comprising a homeless person and one or more other persons who might reasonably be expected to reside with that person;

(b) a reference to social housing support shall be read as a reference to arrangements, assistance or accommodation provided under section 10;

(c) a reference to a social housing assessment shall be read as a reference to an assessment for the purposes of subsection (1);

(d) any other necessary modifications.

(3) Subject to subsection (4), where a person does not meet the eligibility requirements referred to in subsection (1) and, in the opinion of the housing authority, that person is seeking alternative arrangements, assistance or accommodation and no such alternative arrangements, assistance or accommodation are available to that person, a housing authority may, on the date on which such opinion is formed, make arrangements for, or provide assistance or accommodation to, that person by virtue of section 10(1) between the hours of 8 p.m. on that date and 8 a.m. on the date immediately following that date.

(4) Where a housing authority has made arrangements for, or provided assistance or accommodation to, a person under subsection (3), the housing authority may make arrangements for, or provide assistance or accommodation to, that person for a further period between the hours of 8 p.m. and 8 a.m. on the date immediately following the date on which the opinion referred to in subsection (3) was formed where, in the opinion of the authority, alternative arrangements, assistance or accommodation continue to be unavailable to that person.

(5) A housing authority may refuse to make arrangements under subsection (3) where alternative arrangements, assistance or accommodation have been refused by the person within a period of 24 months prior to seeking accommodation under section 10(1).

(6) Where, under subsections (3) or (4), arrangements are made, or assistance or accommodation are provided, such arrangements, assistance or accommodation shall not be considered for the purposes of determining, under section 20A of the Act of 2009, as applied by subsection (1), whether the person in respect of whom such arrangements have been made or to whom such assistance or accommodation has been provided, is habitually resident in the State.

(7) Subsection (3) shall not apply to:

- (a) an applicant within the meaning of section 2 of the International Protection Act 2015;
- (b) a person to whom section 60 of the International Protection Act 2015 applies;
- (c) an applicant within the meaning of section 2 of the International Protection Act 2026;
- (d) a person to whom section 237 of the International Protection Act 2026 applies.

Appeal of determination under section 10(8)

10B.(1) Where a housing authority determines, under section 10(8), that accommodation or lodgings shall no longer be made available to a person, that person may appeal that determination.

(2) An appeal under subsection (1) shall be made to the chief executive of the housing authority concerned, or, in the case of Limerick City and County Council, to the director general of Limerick City and County Council, within 14 days of the notification by the housing authority to the person concerned of the determination under section 10(8).

(3) An appeal under subsection (1) shall be in writing and shall state the ground or grounds on which the appeal is made.

(4) An appeal under subsection (1) may, to support a ground of the appeal, be accompanied by any information relevant to the making of the appeal.

(5) On receipt by the chief executive or the director general, as the case may be, of an appeal under subsection (1), the chief executive of the authority, or, in the case of Limerick City and County Council, the director general of Limerick City and County Council, shall appoint an officer or employee of the authority to decide the appeal (in this section referred to as an ‘appeals officer’) and shall furnish that person with the appeal.

(6) An appeals officer shall be a person who—

(a) did not make the determination concerned, and

(b) is in a more senior role in the authority than the person who made the determination or in a role that is equivalent in seniority to a role that is more senior than the role of that person.

(7) An appeals officer shall be independent in the performance of his or her functions under this section.

(8) An appeals officer shall decide an appeal under subsection (1) within 14 days of receipt of the appeal and shall—

(a) confirm the determination concerned,

(b) vary the determination, or

(c) set aside the determination and, where the appeals officer considers it appropriate, make an alternative determination.

(9) In deciding an appeal under subsection (1), an appeals officer shall consider whether the housing authority acted reasonably and in good faith in making the determination, under section 10(8), that accommodation or lodgings shall no longer be made available to the person.

(10) A decision of an appeals officer on an appeal under subsection (1) shall be in writing and shall include reasons for the decision.

(11) An appeals officer shall provide a copy of his or her decision to the person who appealed, under subsection (1), the determination.

(12) A decision of an appeals officer on an appeal under subsection (1) shall be final.”.”.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I move amendment No.1 to amendment No. 11:

In section 10B(1), after “person” where it firstly occurs, to insert the following:

“or under section 10A, that a person shall not be provided with access to arrangements, assistance or accommodation provided by a housing authority by virtue of section 10(1),”.

Amendment No. 1 to amendment No. 11 put and declared lost.

Amendment No. 11 put and declared carried.

Bill reported with amendments.

An Ceann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 12 and 13 are ruled out of order.

Amendments Nos. 12 and 13 not moved.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I move amendment No. 14:

In page 11, after line 38, to insert the following:

“(13) Nothing in this section shall be construed as—

(a) restricting or qualifying any right conferred on a person by the Treaties of the European Union or by the Regulations of 2015, or

(b) requiring a housing authority to act in a manner incompatible with the State’s obligations under the Convention within the meaning of the European Convention on Human Rights Act 2003.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

An Ceann Comhairle: Amendment No. 15 is ruled out of order.

Amendment No. 15 not moved.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I move amendment No. 16:

In page 12, after line 39, to insert the following:

“(i) the determination was otherwise unreasonable having regard to all the circumstances of the household’s application.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

An Ceann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 17 to 20, inclusive, are related and amendments Nos. 19 and 20 are physical alternatives to amendment No. 18. Amendments Nos. 17 to 20, inclusive, may be discussed together.

Deputy Rory Hearne: I move amendment No. 17:

In page 13, to delete lines 12 to 16 and substitute the following:

“(6) A social housing appeal shall be made to an independent appeals office located within the Housing Agency within 28 days of the notification by the housing authority to the household concerned of the making of a determination in respect of the application or reassessment for social housing support concerned under section 20.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I move amendment No. 18:

In page 13, to delete lines 25 to 35 and substitute the following:

“(9) On receipt by a housing authority of a social housing appeal made in accordance with this section, the chief executive of the authority shall request the Minister to nominate a person to decide the appeal (in this section referred to as an ‘appeals officer’).

(10) The Minister shall, for the purposes of subsection (9), establish and maintain a panel of persons eligible for nomination as appeals officers,

being persons—

(a) who are officers or employees of a housing authority other than the housing authority whose determination is the subject of the social housing appeal concerned, and

(b) who, in the opinion of the Minister, have sufficient knowledge and experience of housing law and social housing assessment to discharge the functions of an appeals officer.

(11) The Minister shall nominate a person from the panel referred to in subsection (10) to act as appeals officer in respect of a social housing appeal within 7 days of receiving a request under subsection (9).

(12) A housing authority shall provide such administrative support to an appeals officer nominated under subsection (10A) as the appeals officer may reasonably require for the purposes of deciding a social housing appeal.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Rory Hearne: I move amendment No. 19:

In page 13, line 25, to delete “a housing authority” and substitute “the appeals office”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Rory Hearne: I move amendment No. 20:

In page 13, to delete lines 30 to 35 and substitute the following:

“(10) An appeals officer shall be a qualified and suitable person appointed by the Housing Agency to undertake appeals with an appropriate knowledge, in order to ensure quality and consistency of decisions made over time.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy James Browne: I move amendment No. 21:

In page 14, line 14, to delete “shall” and substitute “shall be in writing and shall”.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I move amendment No. 22:

In page 14, between lines 27 and 28, to insert the following:

“Equality impact assessment

10.(1) The Minister shall, before making an order under *section 1(4)* bringing section 8 into operation, cause to be carried out an equality impact assessment of the residency requirements imposed by section 20A of the Act of 2009 (as inserted by *section 8*).

(2) An equality impact assessment under this section shall assess the likely effect of the residency requirements referred to in subsection (1) on persons sharing a protected characteristic within the meaning of the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2018, having regard in particular to—

(a) race, nationality and ethnic or national origins,

(b) family status, and

(c) membership of the Traveller community.

(3) The Minister shall, as soon as practicable after the completion of an equality impact assessment under this section, cause a copy of the assessment to be laid before each House of the Oireachtas.

(4) Nothing in this section shall be construed as precluding the Minister from commencing section 8 following the completion and laying of an equality impact assessment under this section, notwithstanding any findings contained in that assessment.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I move amendment No. 23:

In page 14, to delete lines 28 to 37, and in page 15, to delete lines 1 to 27.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I move amendment No. 24:

In page 15, between lines 27 and 28, to insert the following:

“Social housing assessment: transfer and recognition

11. The Act of 2009 is amended by the insertion of the following section after section 20B (inserted by *section 8*):

“Social housing passport

20C.(1) Where a housing authority (in this section referred to as the ‘assessing authority’) has determined under section 20 that a household is qualified for social housing support, and a member of that household subsequently establishes a connection with the functional area of another housing authority (in this section

referred to as the ‘receiving authority’), the household may apply to the receiving authority to have the assessment of the assessing authority recognised for the purposes of social housing support in the functional area of the receiving authority.

(2) On receipt of an application under subsection (1), the receiving authority shall—

(a) recognise the assessment of the assessing authority as establishing that the household is qualified for social housing support in its functional area, without requiring the household to submit to a fresh assessment, unless—

(i) the assessment of the assessing authority was made more than 3 years before the date of the application under subsection (1), or

(ii) the receiving authority has reasonable grounds for believing that the circumstances of the household have materially changed since the date of the assessment,

and

(b) where paragraph (a)(i) or (ii) applies, carry out a fresh assessment of the household’s eligibility for social housing support in accordance with section 20, taking into account such information as was provided to the assessing authority as the receiving authority considers relevant.

(3) Where the receiving authority recognises an assessment under subsection (2)(a), the household shall be placed on the housing list of the receiving authority with effect from the date on which the household was placed on the housing list of the assessing authority, subject to the application of any scheme of letting priorities made under section 22 by the receiving authority.

(4) A household may appeal a decision of a receiving authority under subsection (2) in accordance with section 20B.

(5) The Minister may by regulations make further provision for the purposes of this section, including provision for—

(a) the form and manner of an application under subsection (1),

(b) the information to be provided by a household in support of such an application,

(c) the circumstances in which a material change in circumstances under subsection (2)(a)(ii) may be found to exist, and

(d) the procedures to be followed by housing authorities in giving effect to this section.”.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

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 7 July 2026: "That the amendments set down by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage and not

disposed of, including those which in the normal course would have required recommitment are hereby made to the Bill, Fourth Stage is hereby completed and the Bill is hereby passed."

Question put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 80; Níl, 67; 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.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Peter.	Collins, Michael.	
Butler, Mary.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Butterly, Paula.	Cronin, Réada.	
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.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Clendennen, John.	Gannon, Gary.	
Collins, Niall.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Connolly, John.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gould, Thomas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Graves, Ann.	
Cummins, John.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Daly, Martin.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kenny, Martin.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Lawless, Paul.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Lawlor, George.	
Fleming, Sean.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Foley, Norma.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Geoghegan, James.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Harkin, Marian.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Heneghan, Barry.	Murphy, Paul.	
Heydon, Martin.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Higgins, Emer.	Nash, Ged.	

Keogh, Keira.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Kyne, Seán.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Lahart, John.	Nolan, Carol.	
Lawless, James.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
Lowry, Michael.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
Maxwell, David.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McGrath, Séamus.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Quaide, Liam.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Murphy, Michael.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Sheehan, Conor.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Smith, Duncan.	
O'Connor, James.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Dea, Willie.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Shea, John Paul.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Timmings, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and John Clendennen; Níl, Deputies Eoin Ó Broin and Rory Hearne.

Question declared carried.

Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2026: Committee and Remaining Stages

Sections 1 to 3, inclusive, agreed to.

NEW SECTION

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I move amendment No. 1:

In page 10, between lines 11 and 12, to insert the following:

“Report on impact of amendments related to Judicial Reviews

4.The Minister shall lay a report before both Houses of the Oireachtas within 12 months of the commencement of this Act detailing the impact of the amendments to Part 4 of the Principal Act related to Judicial Reviews and detailing whether the procedural changes have resulted in a speeding up of planning related Judicial Reviews or increased the volume of planning litigation resulting in increased delays for residential and infrastructural development.”.

This is a poor way of progressing a complex and technical piece of planning legislation. It is unlike the Bill we have just disposed of, in respect of which we had three dedicated committee sessions and were able to interact with ministerial colleagues and officials. While not successful in changing any of the Bill, we were able to obtain significant clarifications. Essentially, we are being given two hours to do Committee and Remaining Stages of an 83-page Bill. In this format, on the floor of the Dáil, it is incredibly difficult to do the work that many of us would like to do. I am not going to dignify the way in which the Government is rushing this through by attempting to conduct Committee Stage, because this format is not conducive to doing so.

I know the Minister of State, Deputy Cummins, will not accept the amendment, but there are concerns that the proposed alterations to judicial review could result in increased litigation. My primary concern is that, as a consequence of the relevant sections of the Bill, there will be increased litigation and, therefore, increased delays. We are asking for the Minister and his officials to track how this operates over the next 12 to 24 months and report back to our committee in some form or another. I do not want to waste people’s time in having an argument about an amendment that the Minister of State is clearly not going to accept. However, I think he will be able to accept the principle that if the changes the Government is making have the unintended consequence of increasing litigation and causing delay to much-needed critical infrastructure, housing or renewable energy projects, they will be monitored and, if necessary, legislative amendments will be brought forward to rectify those problems into the future.

Deputy Rory Hearne: I support this amendment. Given the nature of the way these changes have being put forward, it is important that there be a process and a clear setting out of an assessment as to the impact the changes will have, particularly in view of the need to have accountability in respect of decisions. That is very important. I support the amendment on that basis.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I also support this amendment. It is important because we need to determine the exact implications of this piece of legislation, which is being rushed through the Houses. When the debate on Second Stage took place last week, the deadline for the submission of amendments preceded that debate. This is a recurring theme with the Government across multiple Departments. It is concerning because we should be able to tease

out the substantive issues relating to Bills. I laid out my concerns on Second Stage. I am not going to go into them again, other than to say that I hope the Minister of State engages sincerely in respect of this amendment and the intention behind it.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy John Cummins): At the outset, I will address the timing piece. I am not saying this to be provocative, but I have to put it on the record that I stood here last Thursday and concluded my contribution to an empty Chamber. We finished 30 minutes ahead of schedule. I have to say that because we made sufficient provision for debate on Second Stage. I am happy to debate the substance of any of the amendments. I am aware also that a couple of the sections are opposed.

The amendment tabled by Deputies Ó Broin and Gould seeks to insert a new section into the Bill. It stages:

The Minister shall lay a report before ... the Oireachtas within 12 months ... detailing the impact of the amendments to Part 4 of the Principal Act related to Judicial Reviews and detailing whether the procedural changes have resulted in a speeding up of planning related Judicial Reviews or increased the volume of planning litigation resulting in increased delays for residential and infrastructural development.

I am not in a position to accept the amendment. First, on a technical matter, judicial review planning procedures are set out in Part 9 of the 2024 Act. However, the proposed amendment makes reference to Part 4 of that Act. I presume the reference in the amendment is in error. That is one of the reasons I cannot accept it.

Second, the monitoring, analysis or reporting of data relating to judicial reviews, including associated timelines and durations of proceedings within the courts, is a matter that falls outside the remit of my Department. The management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in the performance of its functions and under the aegis of the Minister for justice, Deputy O’Callaghan. My understanding is that there is a ten-year modernisation programme already under way within the Courts Service and that significant progress is being made in that regard. Accordingly, it would not be appropriate to provide for a reporting requirement in relation to judicial reviews relating to planning.

The amendment, as proposed, is not considered workable because it would place a statutory requirement on a Minister to report on matters that are subjective in nature. As the Deputies will appreciate, there are a wide range of factors that could give rise to an increase or decrease in the number of planning judicial reviews.

It may not always be possible to determine the exact reason for changes in such levels or in the average duration of proceedings. Judicial reviews against the State, in which my Department may be included as a party, are co-ordinated by the Chief State Solicitor under the guidance of the Office of the Attorney General. An Coimisiún Pleanála can also be challenged by judicial reviews on a range of its functions, including decisions on appeals and planning applications in respect of strategic infrastructure developments. Moreover, it already publishes details with respect to legal cases in its annual report. It is for these reasons I cannot accept the amendment.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I move amendment No. 2:

In page 10, between lines 11 and 12, to insert the following:

“Report on impact of amendments related to alteration of existing planning permissions

4.The Minister shall lay a report before both Houses of the Oireachtas every 6 months from the commencement of this Act detailing the impact of the amendments to Part 4 of the Principal Act related to alterations of existing planning permissions and detailing the location, nature and volume of such alterations by project and local authority area and the resulting commencement of developments that have secured the alterations.”.

The Minister of State has been in this House for long enough to know it is highly irregular for an amending deadline for Committee Stage to be held before the Second Stage debate. The reason we have Second Stage, Committee Stage, and Report and Final Stages is because we come into the Chamber, debate the Bill, and consider the matters in front of us. Having done that, we submit amendments which are ordinarily taken with detailed scrutiny in Committee where we can go through details of the legislation. That is the ordinary procedure. What the Minister of State did in this instance was to publish an 83-page Bill of highly technical changes to planning law on a Friday. I acknowledge we got a very good, detailed briefing from the Minister of State’s officials and we have thanked them for that but we had an amendment deadline at 11 a.m. on a Thursday before Second Stage. The Minister of State gave four hours for Second Stage but the really important part after the speeches is committee scrutiny of the legislation. The idea that somehow the Minister of State speaking to an empty Chamber at the end of four hours in any way negates the argument that giving us just two hours, not having had an adequate opportunity to submit amendments after Second Stage. is the norm is just not true.

From my long experience in this House, when detailed, technical planning legislation entailing changes to our planning codes - including sections of this Bill that I fully support, because there are elements of this Bill in which the intention is absolutely fine – is introduced in a very rushed manner without adequate scrutiny, particularly Committee Stage scrutiny in this House, unintended consequences arise. We have had occasion after occasion of this in the past decade. Officials are put under undue pressure to meet unrealistic deadlines and the technical outworkings of the Bill are challenging. In the real world, the Bill then does not do what the Government said it would. That is a fact. This is a bad way to make legislation and if the Minister of State does not agree, it is something he needs to carefully consider because this will affect his constituents as much as it will mine. There are no votes to be got from technical discussions around planning legislation; I learned that a long time ago, but this stuff is really important and to do it in this way is the wrong way to do it.

With respect to this amendment - and I want to pick up on the response to the last amendment - the Department is introducing a set of changes. This amendment relates to sections 62 and 63, which the Department hopes will result in an acceleration of apartment delivery. It is hoping to have an outcome but saying it is not its job to monitor whether the legislation has those outcomes but that of the Office of the Planning Regulator, the board, or whoever else. All we are saying is it is not unreasonable to ask the Department to track the impact of the legislation it passes to see if it has had the intended consequence or not. This

amendment refers to the relevant sections. I apologise in advance if my technical proficiency is not as good as that of the Minister of State's expert officials.

These sections are meant to be about accelerating delivery of apartments. The Department is creating a facility whereby people who have planning permissions will be able to significantly alter them in line with new apartment design standards, which are not yet law themselves, in terms of the planning policy statement before the courts. All I am asking the Minister of State to do - I accept he cannot accept the amendment - is to take some responsibility for the changes he is proposing and monitor them. If they have the intended impact the Minister of State is saying he wants them to have, he can come into our committee and say "Opposition, you got it wrong. We told you it was a good idea and it was going to work and here is the evidence."

The real reason the Department does not want to track these things is not because they are somebody else's responsibility. It is because if it tracks them and reports them to the committee and if they do not have the intended consequence, we will highlight that the Government got it wrong. That is the real issue. I am not going to labour the point but I think the spirit of this amendment is one the Minister of State should endeavour to embrace, notwithstanding the fact that he opposes the letter of it. If not, we will continue to raise these matters and whether through freedom of information requests or parliamentary questions - which the Ceann Comhairle knows we are very persistent about - we will get the information one way or another. How about just a little bit of transparency, accountability and reporting to the Oireachtas committee, which is part of our function, whether this legislation has good consequences, no consequences or, as many of us fear, negative consequences, particularly for the people who will be affected by the changes in the Bill?

Deputy Rory Hearne: I support this amendment and I add that there is a real issue in terms of us understanding what is getting planning permission, what is the nature of the tenure, and who is developing it. Particularly in the area of apartments, there is concern in my own constituency and in Dublin generally regarding the proliferation of the build-to-rent model, how many apartments are being developed and who is developing them. I have asked the Department through parliamentary questions a number of times whether we gather data on how many build-to-rent developments are being planned or developed and there is no information. That is really important. For good planning we need to understand what is being developed in different areas and whether there is an excessive number of build-to-rent complexes versus, for example, what is for sale. This is a real gap we have in understanding, developing and planning communities.

Deputy John Cummins: I thank the Deputies. As a general point, my priority is to ensure the Planning and Development Act 2024 is enabled and that we have all provisions in force before the end of this year. To do that, I have to pass legislation that will enable the transitional pieces to occur. That is the purpose of the Bill before us. If I cannot progress this to conclusion, it means a further delay in the implementation of the substantive Act, which both the Deputy and I spent a considerable period of our lives in the committee room downstairs debating during the previous parliamentary term.

In relation to the specific amendment tabled by Deputies Ó Broin and Gould, it seeks to lay a report before the Houses of the Oireachtas every six months detailing the impact of the

amendments to Part 4 of the principal Act relating to alterations of existing planning permissions and detailing the location, nature and volume of such alterations by project and local authority area, and the resulting commencement of developments which have secured the alterations. I am not in a position to accept the amendment. I consider a statutory requirement to produce such a report every six months to be entirely excessive. The reason I say that is this is a time-bound measure contained in section 138A. It is a two-year period. It is not something that is going to go on in perpetuity. There may be value in what some of the Deputies are saying were this an in-perpetuity discussion. It is time-bound in nature and as a result, I cannot accept the amendment.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: The amendment is a device to allow us to raise the substantive issue, which is whether the Department going to be tracking this. Is that the Minister of State's intention? He is bringing forward amendments to the Planning and Development Act, a Bill on which we spent considerable time and have very different views, which was meant to end the practice of the constant amending of legislation. The reason that review was initiated, as the Minister of State knows, was that the 2000 Act had been amended so many times, it became unwieldy.

8 o'clock

Here we are and we do not even have the full 2024 Act commenced, yet this is the second amending Bill to it and there will be more. Will the Minister of State at least confirm it is his intention to ensure his officials report back to him over that two-year period? Will he commit to sharing that information with our committee and giving us an opportunity to scrutinise it at whatever interval he thinks appropriate? That is the very least he could do to ensure full transparency with what is a controversial measure in the Bill. Whether one agrees with it is a separate issue we will deal with when we get to section 62, but some monitoring, publishing and accountability would be in everybody's interest.

Deputy John Cummins: It is the statutory element of it, as the Deputy will appreciate.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Sure.

Deputy John Cummins: Of course we will be monitoring this provision, as we do every measure we implement in the Department. We are acutely conscious this is a viability measure. We will get into the substantive debate on it when debating the section. It is in our interest to ensure it is being utilised. If this activates one apartment development, it will be a good measure. That is what I will base this on. I am in the business of ensuring apartment developments get built. If this measure activates even one apartment development providing people with homes to rent or buy, it will be a successful measure.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Sections 4 to 60, inclusive, agreed to.

SECTION 61

Question proposed: "That section 61 stand part of the Bill."

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: In 2018, Eoghan Murphy was the Minister for housing. At that point there was a very strong lobby coming from a section of the development community that apartment building was not viable and the problem was that design standards and building height restrictions introduced by our local authorities were making schemes non-viable. Eoghan Murphy introduced a series of section 28 mandatory ministerial guidelines on apartment design standards and, separately, on building heights. His justification was almost word for word the justification the Minister of State just gave, which was that if this got one apartment development built that would not otherwise have been built, it would be worthwhile.

The problem is what happened after that. The first thing that happened was a series of conflicts between the Minister's statutory section 28 guidelines and our existing city and county development plans. When there are two sets of rules, planning decisions end up being fought out in the courts. Initially, Dublin City Council sought to defend, in relation to a number of highly controversial developments, its planning decisions and statutory plans. In a few years, we went from having virtually no judicial reviews, JRs, of large residential developments to having an explosion of them. When I first came into the House, it was unheard of for people to judicially review residential developments, particularly estate developments. The misuse of the section 28 ministerial guidelines created conditions for a slew of JRs. What was the consequence of those JRs? Stuff did not get built. Some of those JRs are still lodged in the courts because of the failure of Government to get a grip on that.

The lesson is when bad changes are made to planning law, it does not increase the volume of development. The second lesson is that when bad changes are made to planning law, even if stuff gets built, the stuff is of inferior quality. These are people's homes. These are places where places are meant to grow, have children, flourish and feel safe and secure.

So bad a mess of our apartment-planning system did Eoghan Murphy make that Deputy Darragh O'Brien as Minister was forced by the weight of evidence to do what many of us in the Oireachtas housing committee in 2017 and 2018 had urged Simon Coveney and then Eoghan Murphy to do, which was to revert to a situation where there was one set of design standards, not two, and where local authorities continued to be the primary decision-makers of planning applications, with an appeal to the board. As a consequence of him introducing under pressure what many of us had argued for for a long time, the number of JRs of large-scale residential developments plummeted. Now, thankfully, there are very few. The one thing the Minister of State and I agree on in this is we want to see fewer JRs. I want to see more good-quality planning decisions made by our planning authorities for public and private sector developers. They have to get on with the job.

Imagine our surprise when the Minister for housing, Deputy Browne, this week last year announced that he was going to repeat Eoghan Murphy's fatal error of 2018 and was going to use the same failed section 28 procedure to introduce a new set of design standards for apartments.

It beggars belief, albeit that some of the details of the new procedure are different, that he would run the risk of repeating the very same mistakes as his predecessor. As the Minister of State knows, that section 28 guideline has been subject to a legal challenge. I am not involved in the legal challenge and do not have an opinion of it. Others can speak to that. Since the legal challenge clearly has some weight, notwithstanding the fact that the Government's current position is that the section 28 guidelines are the law, the Minister and Minister of State then

decided to gazump their own guidelines with what I think is the first use of the new and highly controversial so-called national planning policy statements that were published a month or so ago and are currently out for public consultation.

My big fear - issue number one - is this. Design standards are there for a reason. They are there to ensure that, within each development, there is an appropriate mix of studios, one-beds and two-beds, an adequate amount of natural light and storage for long-term living, an adequate amount of community amenity, and so on. Those things are there for a reason. To reduce those standards in a manner that runs the risk of seeing increased litigation, not just of the section 28 rules themselves in the first instance but of individual planning applications, is quite reckless. The more substantive point is that the Minister of State is saying that, in order to fix the housing crisis, renters will have to live in smaller, darker, less well designed apartments. If we add into the mix the other policy innovation that the Minister announced this time last year and was enacted earlier this year, those renters will not be subject to any meaningful rent controls at all and will therefore pay the highest possible rents. That is not a credible solution to the housing crisis.

To make matters even worse, it is provided in sections 61 and 62 of the Bill and their related sections that, where a developer had secured planning permission already under the existing rules, they will now be able to go back and, through a relatively simplified procedure, seek to alter that planning permission in line with the new design standards. Keep in mind that those design standards are currently in front of the courts and undergoing a public consultation. Those design standards have a very considerable amount of uncertainty around them right now. In fact, if I was a developer, I would be very reluctant to use those design standards, given their legal uncertainty and because of the risk that the mismanagement of the section 28 guidelines last year and the planning policy statement this year has created. Who has done that? The Minister of State and his lead Minister have. As the Minister of State knows, I am against the section 28 guidelines. They were a terrible mistake. I do not agree with the repackaging of those in the planning policy statement put out for public consultation. I am opposed to these provisions of the Bill.

There was a time in this country - the Minister of State is too young to remember it - where anything could be built because all that mattered was building stuff. We have learned at great cost the legacy of that. If you literally allow anything to be built without adequate attention to standards, in this case design standards, what you get is poor-quality, expensive homes that the Minister of State and I would not live in, so why should we expect hard-working people, contributing to society and taxes, to live in them either?

In the vast majority of cases, renters will tell us that they want a pathway out of the private rental sector. They want more homes to own. They want more social or affordable homes, not smaller, darker, ever more expensive apartments. This entire episode over the last 12 months has been a classic case of the Government repeating the very bad mistakes of the past. It runs the risk of having the same negative impact on planning, development, delivery and, crucially, the standards and quality of the homes the Minister of State is expecting people to live in into the future. On that basis, I am strongly opposing both sections 61 and 62. To save time, I am not going to repeat my speech when we get to the second section. Both sections are bad planning at their very worst and I make no apology for opposing them.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy will be appreciated by his peers. Is he sure it was not me who was too young to remember?

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I could not possibly comment on the Ceann Comhairle's age.

An Ceann Comhairle: I was just checking. Deputy Sheehan is next.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: That was a compliment to the Minister of State, by the way.

Deputy John Cummins: I thank the Deputy for acknowledging my youth.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. You are definitely too young, as am I.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: There was a couple of things I wanted to say on this. I, too, am opposed to sections 61 and 62, for many of the reasons that were outlined by my colleague. When I think about stimulating supply, the type of supply that these new apartment guidelines will stimulate, if any, will be expensive, high-yield, build-to-rent apartments in Dublin and only very specific parts of Cork. It certainly will not build anything in Limerick, the city I represent. We saw last year the debacle when the Minister, Deputy James Browne, tried to use section 28 and the Government failed to undertake an environmental impact assessment, and then had to basically pull the guidelines. It is now coming back with this national planning statement on the revised apartment guidelines, which will result in smaller, darker apartments without dual aspect, studio apartments that are just 32 sq. m. Einstein's definition of madness is doing the same thing and expecting different results. We have a method that has been tried and tested and has failed. We know that, with soaring construction inflation, the mooted cost savings the Minister gave at the time have been all but wiped out in the last year. By going down this road, the Minister of State is creating a system of making apartment living unviable for people as a permanent living solution, as someplace where they can build a home. We will end up with very small, dark, expensive apartments that will be very hot in the summer. That is a point that is not often made. These apartments will mainly be occupied either more permanently by people who are social housing tenants or, if they are occupied by renters, those renters will not be protected by any sort of meaningful protection in respect of the cost of their rent. They will be paying upwards of €3,000 in cities like Dublin. They will barely be able to afford it, or they are not going to want to live there long term. It is going to contribute further towards hollowing out the urban core of places like Dublin, driving people out of inner city communities.

Many previous Ministers have gone down this road, including, truth be told, one of my own party colleagues, going back as far as 2015. It has not worked. Every time we have reduced apartment standards, we have had the same heavy, developer-led lobby coming along every two or three years and claiming the viability measures introduced around design guidelines or size do not work and that we need to go smaller and cheaper. The entire model we are using is not working. The State is in many cases paying way over the top for apartments. With these revised guidelines, we are not going to get the high-quality, decent, permanent, sustainable

homes that people actually want to live in. I think that gets completely lost in this discussion. We will go and do this, and that will be fine, and it may stimulate some expensive build-to-rent residential development, but unless there is a fundamental change in approach, either the Minister of State or somebody else will be back here in two to three years' time looking to go further and smaller again.

Deputy Rory Hearne: I will not comment on my own age.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: The Deputies are all very young. I do not mind saying it.

Deputy Rory Hearne: I am ageing very quickly in here tonight, but-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy's hair is even changing colour.

Deputy Rory Hearne: It is.

There is a key concern that I outlined last week and we have outlined a number of times before. I wish to make a number of points on it. The first point is that this change is a result of intense lobbying by institutional investors and developers about this whole idea of viability. Viability is about profitability. Were the guidelines that existed prior to this good planning or bad planning? Were they guidelines that were about ensuring that people had liveable spaces and apartments were of decent design standard and liveable? Clearly, they were. The reason that the Government is making these changes is not to improve liveability of apartments. As the Minister of State said very clearly, it is actually about viability. What does viability mean? It means reducing cost, increasing the number of units that we can get on a site and reducing the quality of what has been delivered in terms of space, balconies, windows, etc.

Of course, the biggest critique of apartments that were built during the Celtic tiger - and people spoke about them - was that they were shoeboxes. After the Celtic tiger crash, we had the introduction of better guidelines that were about creating improved apartments that people would want to live in. However, what the Government is now doing is going back on that. We will back in the same situation, creating shoebox apartments that people do not want to live in long term and cannot live in long term. We are trying to support people to have families and go through different life stages. What these guidelines are going to do is make that more even difficult. As the Minister of State said, if this builds one more apartment, that is great and he will be happy about that. That is what this is about. However, it is not an apartment that it is building, it is a unit. It is not a home. Regarding who is going to be living in these, they will not be able to afford them. I have also heard that it is about trying to get more social housing units in. It is creating lower quality and standards of social housing. Again, this is adding to stigma. It is not actually building. We can say that we built a unit, but we need to be building affordable homes for people. This will not achieve that. It will build units. It will add to the numbers that are being built. It will give a roof over someone's head but is it building an actual home on a permanent basis? It is not going to be achieving that. It is essentially about incentivising and enabling institutional investors to get more profit. It will also add to land speculation and land prices. It will push that up and lead to further speculation and the use of planning to do that. It is not a measure that will provide decent homes for people. On that basis, I oppose it.

Deputy John Cummins: I propose to discuss these sections together as the amendments are linked. Sections 61 and 62 are connected and operate together. It is important that both stand as part of the Bill. Section 61 is a technical clarifying amendment to the definition of material alteration in section 138 of the Act of 2024 to add a cross-reference to the new section 138A as inserted by section 62 of this Bill. Section 62 inserts a new section 138A into Chapter 5 of Part 4 of the 2024 Act in relation to alterations of existing permissions allowed for the purpose of alleviating the shortage of residential accommodation and to enable construction of a greater number of dwellings in apartment schemes. These sections operate so that, subject to meeting the specific criteria set out in the Bill, a request may be made to a deciding authority under section 140 of the 2024 Act to make alterations to an existing permission for an apartment scheme. Under section 142 of the 2024 Act, where a requested alteration of a permission is non-material, the deciding authority shall alter the permission accordingly. Section 138A will apply to the development of dwellings and apartment buildings in circumstances where the permission was granted before the coming into operation of section 138A where a request for an alteration under section 140 is made before the expiration of two years from the coming into operation of section 138A and where the development has not yet been commenced before the date on which the request is made.

The specific criteria allowing for alterations to apartment schemes that are covered by this measure are already established policy with over 12 months. They relate to apartment mix, apartment floor areas, dual aspect ratios, lift and stair cores, the floor-to-ceiling heights of ground floor apartments and consequential works necessary for the purpose of the above alterations or ensuring access to the development, including works to footpaths, boundaries, gardens and balconies. The Bill also sets out restrictions to the measure, including in the case of residential development in a strategic development zone, SDZ. The alterations cannot cause the number of dwellings situated in that SDZ to exceed the permitted number applicable in the planning scheme. It also ensures that an alteration of permission cannot result in the proposed residential development being designed to accommodate more occupants than would be designed to accommodate where the alteration was not made. This measure is to help support the viability of the development of apartments in the immediate term by allowing the alteration of permissions already granted in certain circumstances. This is targeted at the significant number of apartment developments that have received planning permission but have not yet commenced. Where the specific criteria are not met, depending on the circumstances the option remains open to a developer to either apply for a new planning permission or to apply to make an amendment to the permission, as the case may be. The Government continues to be fully committed to ensuring that housing is delivered as quickly and effectively as possible and ensuring that a key part of that is viability.

I wish to address some of the specific points that Deputies have raised. I do not accept the description here of smaller, darker apartments. I have heard every Deputy who is in here in this House on many occasions lauding the Vienna model. That is true. Every single person in this Chamber on the opposite benches has lauded the Vienna model. It is true to say that the size of studio apartments in Vienna is 30 sq. m to 35 sq. m. That is the-----

Deputy Conor Sheehan: They are not €3,000.

Deputy John Cummins: Excuse me?

Deputy Conor Sheehan: They are not €3,000 a month.

Deputy John Cummins: What the Deputies are talking about here are smaller and darker apartments. I am simply making the comparison to our minimum standards. They are comparable to where the Deputies opposite have lauded the introduction of housing in other jurisdictions.

It is true to say that by virtue of the comments that have been made by Deputy Sheehan here where he has said that cost savings have been eroded as a result of inflation that the Deputy is acknowledging there were savings attached to the revised apartment standards. He will also be aware that, at the Oireachtas committee of which he is a member, some of the biggest developers in the country cited savings on average of €60,000 per scheme in terms of apartments. That is not insignificant. If we had not made those changes and we had significant cost inflation, what we would be talking about here would be a significantly increased cost of development. What we are about here, in terms of the viability measure, is taking apartment developments that already have permission and applying a two-year duration to it where internal configuration changes can be made. It is not to increase the number of beds or the number of persons who are accommodated. It is simply about ensuring that the mix can be altered to ensure there is greater viability within the system. I stand by the point that if this measure has the effect of ensuring that one apartment complex is delivered in this country and has permission that would not otherwise be delivered without an alteration to this, it will have been a successful measure.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: The Minister of State is just provoking me so I will allow myself to be provoked. The real issue is that if one apartment scheme is delivered but ten, 20 or 30 are delayed because they end up being litigated in the court because of these bad measures, that is not a measure of success. That is the problem here.

Let us also talk about studio size. There is a fundamental misunderstanding of the argument from all of us on this side of the House. If a residential development is to be a good development, it has to meet the needs of the community who will live there. That means we need an appropriate distribution of studio, one-bedroom, two-bedroom and three-bedroom homes in each development, in each neighbourhood and beyond that. In order for those to be good quality homes, dual aspect is not a luxury. There has to be the appropriate volume of dual aspect, storage and amenity. What this change facilitates in respect of the section 28 guidelines and the planning policy statement - whichever, if either, of them ultimately becomes law - is that it skews the standards that exist to allow an overconcentration of studio and one-bedroom homes, and it reduces the amount of storage space, dual aspect and other community amenity. That is the problem.

I would like to make another point about apartment design standards. When Irish Institutional Property produced a report on this some years ago, it compared our apartment design standards with those of other countries. It ignored that in many jurisdictions, there is far more public and amenity space which is part of people's living circumstances. Vienna is a good case in point. It is not just about apartments, but community facilities and amenities as

well. That is something we struggle to do here in much of our public or private high-density developments. The argument just does not stand.

Deputy John Cummins: It stands.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: The Minister of State either does not understand the arguments we are putting forward or is wilfully ignoring them.

Deputy Sheehan's point on the erosion of savings is a really important one. The Minister grossly inflated the savings. He alleged that there could be savings of €100,000 per unit. All of the industry, including Paul Mitchell from Mitchell McDermott, quickly came out publicly and said that was nonsense. The maximum saving from the design standards, according to reputable industry figures, is in the region of €30,000. Of course when you add in the VAT reduction, that is where the figure of €60,000 comes from. What has happened with apartments since these changes were announced? They have been in the ether now for a year. We are not seeing a dramatic increase in planning applications or grants for apartments, according to the data on the websites of the Department and the CSO. We are not seeing a significant increase in commencements or completions, particularly in the first quarter of this year. It is really interesting that new apartment inflation is running at almost double the level of new property inflation. It started off at about 6% this time last year, ratcheted up to 9.2% and then 9.4% in March and April, and levelled off in May at 8%. The Minister of State said that these measures would not just bring down the cost of delivery but bring down the cost of purchasing or renting as well. If they have had any effect at all - it is too early to say - all they have done is further inflated the market. That is before gifting developers another €20,000 to €30,000 in a VAT reduction that the apartments that were under construction last year, this year and early next year clearly did not need. They were already viable.

To be clear, what the Minister of State is doing here - the Royal Institute of Architects made this point when the announcement was made last year, and the Irish Planning Institute made similar points - is facilitating bad development and substandard development. If these developments end up getting built - the Minister of State's view is that if one gets built, it is a success - their success will be determined by the quality of the homes and communities we provide for working people. If they are of poor quality and inferior to what we have today, that is definitely not success for these people, about whom I am ultimately concerned. I accept there is a viability problem; I think there are far better ways of addressing it. We should not force renters who will live in smaller, darker, more expensive apartments to pay the cost of that. That is a debate for another day. I really think the Minister of State has got this one badly wrong. I am not even convinced he fully understands how much he has gotten this badly wrong. I make no apology for opposing these sections.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: The Minister of State referenced the size of a studio apartment in Vienna. The average rent of a studio apartment in Vienna is about €600.

Deputy John Cummins: During the debate Deputy Sheehan was talking about the size.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: If the Minister of State will allow me to make my point, the average rent of a studio apartment in Dublin is €1,850. With these revised apartment guidelines, the

Minister of State has allowed developers to build entire developments of tiny studio or one-bedroom apartments. When you go to someplace like Vienna, there is an appropriate mix of one-bedroom, two-bedroom and three-bedroom apartments. In addition, there are community facilities and amenities, which the Minister of State has also removed during the past year. He has removed them from the LDA. There was a big row with Dublin City Council about removing community space from apartment developments. When you leave your apartment in Vienna, you can board a world-class public transport system. We have a situation in this country where we have so-called transport-orientated development with no bloody public transport. People are going at it hammer and tongs over car spaces in suburban parts of Dublin because they never got their train or DART services. They have been delayed and delayed again. The Minister of State cannot compare the two.

Even the LDA, which comes under the auspices of the Minister of State's Department by extension, said the savings would be marginal in most units - it said they would be nowhere near what the Minister trumpeted them to be last year - and that is what they turned out subsequently to be. This is the core point. We are essentially paying way over the top. In many cases, the taxpayer and the approved housing bodies are paying out an absolute fortune for tiny shoebox apartments. The entire model is fundamentally broken.

Deputy Rory Hearne: I will return to the Minister of State's comment on Vienna. There is a very different mix of floor sizes available in Vienna. There are larger units available for families, in particular. This legislation is reducing the number of units within developments that will be available for families of a size. Fundamentally, they will not even be affordable to families. What is happening as a result of this is a reduction in the availability of two-bedroom and three-bedroom apartments. It is shifting, not creating, sustainable communities within the developments and creating soulless places where people cannot live and cannot have families. That is a fundamental issue. The Government is being driven by the investors. They have the Government over a barrel in terms of being completely dependent on them. The Government is just doing what they are asking for and it is deeply disappointing.

One of the examples, which the Minister of State did not come back on, is the issue of windows. It is reducing the number of windows people can have. Is the Minister of State seriously standing over that? There will be fewer windows available to people as a result of these measures. Windows are fundamental in Ireland for two reasons. One, we have major problems with mould and damp. It happens even in new developments because of the wet climate we have. Two, with climate change, as Lorcan Sirr pointed out in *The Irish Times* and as we see today, we will have a problem with heat because our buildings are not designed to deal with it. I guarantee these buildings are not designed to deal with the major issues of heat that are ahead of us. The Minister of State has not addressed that issue.

Deputy Thomas Gould: I will be brief and will not go over points my colleagues have made. The Minister of State used the example of Vienna. I think the minute he said it, he knew he had made a mistake. As has been pointed out, the Minister of State is talking about smaller apartments but they are only a part of it because there is a need for a mix of two-bedroom, three-bedroom and four-bedroom apartments. The Minister of State is proposing apartment after apartment of one-bedroom bedsits. That is what they will nearly end up as. The Minister

of State then spoke about space. We have a situation that is like the Celtic tiger all over again, because houses are being built and there are no parks, playgrounds or open spaces.

A vulture fund bought up a building in the Blackpool, the late-night pharmacy. It was the only business left. They previously got rid of the gym, they got rid of the doctors' surgery and they got rid of the hairdresser. The only reason they did not get rid of late-night pharmacy is it had a ten-year lease. This vulture fund then came in. There are apartments in Blackpool that are empty right at this minute. This Government always seems to play up to the vulture funds, to the speculators and to the big money, but what does it get? I come from Knocknaheeny, and when Knocknaheeny was built 50 years ago the Government at the time made a decision to build housing 20% smaller with substandard material. Does the Minister of State know what is happening now? For the past 20 years Knocknaheeny has been in the middle of a regeneration that is going to cost €100 million. The Government goes away and takes shortcuts, and then years later the consequences come out. We are making very reasonable points about what we are proposing.

We talk about renters. The Minister of State referred to the Vienna model where Deputy Sheehan said the average rent is €600 per month. The average rent in Dublin is over €2,000 per month. The average rent being paid by people in Dublin and in Cork is €2,500 to rent an apartment. Those apartments are only small, with fewer windows and are darker, and the Minister of State thinks that is right. It is a mistake.

Deputy Micheál Carrigy: These incentives that are being put in place are about activating the development of the 30,000 to 40,000 apartment planning permissions that have not been developed. In the housing committee, of which I am Chair, we recently had some of the largest developers in the country before us. "Developers" and "investors" are not bad words. We need them or we would never build. We would never get building the houses and apartments that we need if we did not get the investment either. What is being put in place by the people who are on the ground is the bricks and mortar to develop and build these properties. They said these incentives will work and will bring down the prices of apartments. They have stated that clearly in the committee.

Deputy John Cummins: I would like to respond to some of the comments. This is a sensible proposal to allow the alteration of existing planning permissions for a time-bound period of two years. The alternative being suggested by Deputies is that developers who have schemes that they cannot build for a viable cost should go back through the entire planning process. As the Minister of State, I want to activate apartment development in this country. I do not want to see planning resources within our local authorities wasted. The Deputies opposite raise the issue of planning resources. I will always fight for additional planning resources within local authorities and within An Coimisiún Pleanála, but by virtue of what is being said by the Deputies opposite they want those schemes to go back to the start of the planning process. It will waste planning resources within local authority systems rather than being able to alter the envelope that has been established as a use for residential development. It is a common-sense proposal. It does not go outside the boundary of what is permitted development. It ensures the same existing bed spaces are provided for.

I do not accept that I am wrong to raise the Vienna model because the initial comments from the Deputies opposite were all about size. Not once was the cost referenced - and they can go

and look back. On size, I merely pointed out the minimum size of an apartment in Vienna, which is 30 sq. m to 35 sq. m for a studio apartment. What we have is 32 sq. m. There is no alteration to the size of one-bedroom apartments from what was there previously, which is 45 sq. m. A change in the studio size is provided for.

There was mention that viability is profitability. First, "profitability" is not a bad word. Viability is about deliverability. Deputy Hearne acknowledged that it would put roofs over people's heads. That is what the Government wants to do. We want to put roofs over people's heads. If this measure puts roofs over people's heads I think it will be a positive measure.

Deputy Rory Hearne: We need to build affordable homes and not just roofs, because it is not just about shelter. I want to come back to the issue of profitability. There is an issue in relation to the profits being made. In some ways, the Government is being taken for a fool. I have great respect for Deputy Carrigy as Chair of the housing committee but, seriously, what else are they going to say? They are private developers. They are investor funds. Of course they are going to say that. Michael Stanley who appeared the committee had €8.5 million in remuneration last year, and we are pumping public money into these guys and just taking everything they say as fact. They absolutely have us over a barrel. We are completely and utterly dependent on them and there is no transparency around how much they are making. Of course they are saying it is great and it is working because they are getting all they want and what they are asking for. The Government is giving them everything. There is a real issue here, for me anyway. Housing is about delivering decent homes that people can live in that are affordable. These guys are not interested in that. What they want to deliver is what they can make the most money from. Unfortunately, the Minister of State is reducing the standards that people in my constituency are going to live in, because that is where apartments are being built. They are more expensive and with lower standards. That is what people will have to live in. It is not right.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is Deputy Ó Broin pressing the question?

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Yes.

Question put:

The Committee 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.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Peter.	Collins, Michael.	
Butler, Mary.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Butterly, Paula.	Coppinger, Ruth.	

Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	
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'.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Clendennen, John.	Gannon, Gary.	
Connolly, John.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gould, Thomas.	
Cummins, John.	Graves, Ann.	
Daly, Martin.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kenny, Martin.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Lawlor, George.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Fleming, Sean.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Foley, Norma.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Murphy, Paul.	
Geoghegan, James.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Harkin, Marian.	Nash, Ged.	
Heydon, Martin.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Higgins, Emer.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Keogh, Keira.	Nolan, Carol.	
Kyne, Seán.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
Lahart, John.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
Lawless, James.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
Lowry, Michael.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Martin, Micheál.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
Maxwell, David.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
McCarthy, Noel.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
McCormack, Tony.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
McGrath, Séamus.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Quaide, Liam.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Sheehan, Conor.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Sherlock, Marie.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Smith, Duncan.	
Murphy, Michael.	Stanley, Brian.	

Naughton, Hildegard.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Connor, James.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Dea, Willie.		
O'Donnell, Kieran.		
O'Meara, Ryan.		
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Feargháil, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and John Clendennen; Níl, Deputies Eoin Ó Broin and Rory Hearne.

Question declared carried.

Question put: That section 62 stand part of the Bill.

The Committee divided: Tá, 82; Níl, 65; 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.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Peter.	Collins, Michael.	
Butler, Mary.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Butterly, Paula.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	
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'.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Clendennen, John.	Gannon, Gary.	
Collins, Niall.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Connolly, John.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gould, Thomas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Graves, Ann.	
Cummins, John.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Daly, Martin.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Hearne, Rory.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Kenny, Martin.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Dolan, Albert.	Lawless, Paul.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Lawlor, George.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Fleming, Sean.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Foley, Norma.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Murphy, Paul.	
Geoghegan, James.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Harkin, Marian.	Nash, Ged.	
Heydon, Martin.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Higgins, Emer.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Keogh, Keira.	Nolan, Carol.	
Kyne, Seán.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
Lahart, John.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
Lawless, James.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
Lowry, Michael.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Martin, Micheál.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
Maxwell, David.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
McCarthy, Noel.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
McCormack, Tony.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
McGrath, Séamus.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Quaide, Liam.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Sheehan, Conor.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Sherlock, Marie.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Smith, Duncan.	
Murphy, Michael.	Stanley, Brian.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Connor, James.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Dea, Willie.		

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

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and John Clendennen; Níl, Deputies Eoin Ó Broin and Conor Sheehan.

Question declared carried.

Sections 63 to 114, inclusive, agreed to.

SECTION 115

Question proposed: "That section 115 stand part of the Bill".

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: It is not agreed.

Question put and agreed to.

Sections 116 to 149, inclusive, agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment, received for final consideration and passed.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Bill will now be sent to the Seanad.

Civil Liability (Child Sexual Abuse Proceedings Against Unincorporated Bodies of Persons) Bill 2025: Second Stage (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Ivana Bacik on Thursday, 25 June 2026: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after "That" and substitute the following:

"Dáil Éireann resolves that the Civil Liability (Child Sexual Abuse Proceedings Against Unincorporated Bodies of Persons) Bill 2025 be deemed to be read a second time this day six months, to allow for the consideration of the legal and policy implications of the Bill's provisions to be undertaken."

(Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration)

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to Second Stage of the Civil Liability (Child Sexual Abuse Proceedings Against Unincorporated Bodies of Persons) Bill 2025, which took place on Thursday, 26 June 2025. On the question, "That the amendment to the motion be made", a division was claimed, and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 80; Níl, 65; 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.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Peter.	Collins, Michael.	
Butler, Mary.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Butterly, Paula.	Cronin, Réada.	
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.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Clendennen, John.	Gannon, Gary.	
Collins, Niall.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Connolly, John.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gould, Thomas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Graves, Ann.	
Cummins, John.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Daly, Martin.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kenny, Martin.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Lawless, Paul.	

Feighan, Frankie.	Lawlor, George.	
Fleming, Sean.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Foley, Norma.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Geoghegan, James.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Harkin, Marian.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Heydon, Martin.	Murphy, Paul.	
Higgins, Emer.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Keogh, Keira.	Nash, Ged.	
Kyne, Seán.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Lahart, John.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Lawless, James.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
Lowry, Michael.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
Martin, Micheál.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Maxwell, David.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McCarthy, Noel.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
McCormack, Tony.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
McGrath, Séamus.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Quaide, Liam.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Sheehan, Conor.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Sherlock, Marie.	
Murphy, Michael.	Smith, Duncan.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Stanley, Brian.	
Nolan, Carol.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Connor, James.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Dea, Willie.		
O'Donnell, Kieran.		
O'Meara, Ryan.		
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Feargháil, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and John Clendennen; Níl, Deputies Ivana Bacik and Duncan Smith.

Amendment declared carried.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Bill we be read a Second Time on this day in six months.

Childcare Services: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Claire Kerrane on Wednesday, 30 June 2026:

That Dáil Éireann:

acknowledges:

- the importance of affordable and accessible childcare for children and parents, neither of which are being achieved for many families across the State; and
- that there is no early years or childcare sector without the Early Years Educators and School-Age Childcare practitioners who work in it;

notes that:

- childcare costs remain far too high and are in excess of €800 per month in many parts of the State;
- access to childcare is now a major labour market issue affecting our economy;
- the need to ensure regulations for childminders are fair, and are aimed at growing the number of childminders, not reducing them, while acknowledging that less than 200 of an estimated 16,000 childminders have registered with Tusla;
- there are between 40,000 and 50,000 children on waiting lists for childcare places, many which do not exist due to severe shortages of childcare places, especially for babies under one year;
- there is no published plan, despite being promised, on how to deliver a €200 per month childcare service to parents;
- continued issues are being experienced by childcare providers with the Core Funding support; and
- the current mechanism for pay increases, via an Employment Regulation Order, is not working for professionals in the sector;

further notes the welcome introduction of State-led childcare facilities; and

calls on the Government to:

- immediately publish a roadmap to deliver €200 a month childcare, with a clear timeframe for the implementation;

- extend the Building Blocks Extension Grant Scheme, to allow for the purchase of existing buildings, not just new, to increase childcare capacity quickly;
- increase pay for Early Years Educators and School-Age Childcare Practitioners from September 2026, and begin work on examining the State taking over wages and associated costs in the sector, as a first step to a public model;
- extend Parent's Leave and Benefit, to ensure a baby can spend their first year with at least one parent;
- ensure the widest possible consultation with childminders on the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Childminding Services) Regulations 2024; and
- initiate an immediate and full review of the Core Funding supports, as committed to in the Programme for Government.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

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

"welcomes the significant prioritisation by the Government of measures designed to:

- reduce out-of-pocket costs of early learning and childcare for families;
- better align the supply of State-subsidised early learning and childcare with demand; and
- increase the pay and improve the working conditions of Early Years Educators and School-Age Childcare practitioners, as well as develop career pathways and promote careers in the sector, in line with Nurturing Skills, the Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare 2022-2028;

acknowledges the unprecedented growth in State funding in the sector, which has increased from €707 million in 2022, to €1.52 billion this year, an increase of circa 116 per cent;

further welcomes:

- the publication of Shaping the Future: Early Years Action Plan Phase 1 Report, in December 2025;
- the extensive consultation process that has been designed to inform Phase 2 of Shaping the Future, including an online survey which has received more than 11,000 responses, 56 local consultation events, an art based engagement exercise with children and a national consultation event will also take place later in the year; and
- the commitment to publish Phase 2 of Shaping the Future by the end of 2026, which will deliver a pathway to achieving the Programme for Government commitment to 'Progressively reduce the cost of childcare to €200 per month per child';

acknowledges and welcomes the major achievements of, and new enhancements to, the Together for Better funding model this year, in line with Phase 1 of Shaping the Future, in particular:

— the continued implementation of the National Childcare Scheme (NCS), with approximately 277,000 children set to benefit from subsidies in 2026, including 47,000 children in lower income families who will benefit from increases in the income thresholds of the income-assessed subsidies, and from increases to the multiple child deduction component of the income-assessed subsidy for families with two or more children under the age of 15;

— the continuation of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, that is benefitting more than 105,000 children in 2026, as the ECCE enjoys uptake rates in excess of 96 per cent and has removed barriers to accessing pre-school education, with data from a recent review showing that more than 40 per cent of families would not have been able to send their child to pre-school without this programme;

— the award-winning Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), which is supporting up to 9,000 children with a disability to access the ECCE programme in 2026, and which has now expanded beyond the ECCE programme, where ECCE children are benefitting from AIM support outside the ECCE programme hours, both in term and out of term, and AIM capitation increasing by 10 per cent to bring rates into line with new rates of pay for Early Years Educators under the updated Employment Regulation Orders (EROs), last October;

— the Equal Start funding model, and set of universal and targeted measures to support access to, and participation in, early learning and childcare for children and their families who experience disadvantage, with the number of settings being designated as priority settings, in receipt of targeted supports, reaching 824 in May 2026; and

— the Core Funding scheme, with the allocation of €393 million in year four of the scheme, September 2025-August 2026, set to rise by at least 23 per cent, or €90 million, in year five September 2026-August 2027, to €483 million, to support a range of important priorities, including:

— accessibility for families, through funding for growth in the sector at 4.2 per cent;

— affordability to support services to sustainably maintain fee management conditions, including new maximum fee caps benefiting parents facing the highest fees across the country, under the new maximum fee caps, the highest possible upfront cost for a typical full day place of 45 hours per week will drop from around €198 per week to €183.70 per week, with universal subsidies under the NCS, higher subsidies are available for many parents, depending on their level of income and the age and number of children in their family; and

— quality through support, with the costs of the new EROs that commenced on 13th October, 2025, through which approximately 67 per cent of staff working in the sector saw an increase in pay, and through additional ringfenced funding of up to €45 million, in year five of the scheme, which is contingent on updated EROs by the independent Joint Labour Committee, with these negotiations underway;

further acknowledges that:

— since Core Funding was introduced, its effectiveness has been subject to ongoing review, and the scheme itself has evolved year-on-year, with changes, including targeted measures and a fee increase assessment process informed by data from previous years,

feedback from stakeholders, as well as an independent financial review of sessional services by Frontier Economics; and

— a review of the first year of Core Funding and the development of an evaluation framework for Core Funding is currently underway, and this review, which is being undertaken by the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service policy analysts, will be completed in the coming months;

further again, acknowledges and welcomes that:

— childminders were extensively consulted with and involved in all aspects of the development of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Childminding Services) Regulations 2024, which were designed to be proportionate and appropriate to the home and family setting in which an estimated 13,000 childminders work;

— an independent external review of the draft Childminding Regulations by Dr Bill Maxwell, the former Chief Executive Officer of Education Scotland, former Chief Inspector in both Scotland and Wales, and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development consultant, confirmed that the approach was proportionate for childminding in Ireland; and

— the independent review of the initial implementation of the Childminding Regulations launched on 19th June, with an open call for submissions, the review will include consultation with childminders and other stakeholders and will provide an important opportunity to learn lessons from initial experiences with the regulations, a consultation survey will follow the call for submissions, in addition to focus groups, stakeholder interviews, and case studies, the scope of the review is broader than initially outlined in the National Action Plan for Childminding 2021-2028, and will now also examine the effectiveness of supports made available to assist with the registration of childminders, as well as examining the barriers to registration and regulatory compliance, including financial and information barriers;

also welcomes the transformed Forward Planning and Delivery Unit, with ground-breaking work underway in that unit to develop a forward planning model, and introduce State-led services to provide high-quality, accessible early learning and childcare, to operate alongside private and community providers where there are shortfalls in capacity, supported by €135 million in capital funding over the period 2026-2030;

in addition, acknowledges and welcomes the latest data from a range of sources that shows capacity in the early learning and childcare sector is increasing in terms of the number of places and hours of provision that services are offering, the number of places opening, and the number of staff in the early learning and childcare workforce, with:

— a net increase in registered, centre-based services in 2025 of 255, compared with net increases of 30 in 2022, 129 in 2023, 226 in 2024;

— a year-on-year decline in the number of closures, with 138 closures in 2025, compared with 183 in 2022, 167 in 2023, 131 in 2024;

— a net increase of 40 in registered, centre-based services this year to date, January-April 2026;

— a 25 per cent increase in child enrolments between 2022 and 2025, from 197,186 to 247,011 children, against a backdrop of a 12 per cent decline in the under-five population; and

— a 23 per cent increase in staff working in the sector between 2022 and 2025, from 34,359 to 42,130 staff;

furthermore, welcomes:

— the major progress made on family leaves in recent years under the First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028;

— the combined durations of Maternity, Paternity and Parent's Leave and Benefit now equate to 46 weeks' paid leave for a two-parent family, supplemented by an entitlement to 16 weeks of unpaid Maternity Leave, and 26 weeks of unpaid parental leave per parent; and

— the Programme for Government commits to examining the extension of Parent's Leave and Benefit and additional flexibilities; and

also acknowledges that:

— there continues to be evidence of some families having difficulty finding appropriate places at a cost that is affordable, and that despite progress in recent years, owing to intervention by the State, the workforce in the sector remains a low-paid one; and

— while noting that further developments and investment are required, recognises that there are many positive and progressive elements to the current early learning and childcare sector, and acknowledges the pathway for improving access, affordability and quality is set out in the new Programme for Government."

(Minister for Children, Equality and Disability)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the motion regarding childcare. On Tuesday, 30 June 2026, on the question, "That the amendment to the motion be made", a division was claimed, and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 80; Níl, 67; 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.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Peter.	Collins, Michael.	

Butler, Mary.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Butterly, Paula.	Cronin, Réada.	
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.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Clendennen, John.	Gannon, Gary.	
Collins, Niall.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Connolly, John.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gould, Thomas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Graves, Ann.	
Cummins, John.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Daly, Martin.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kenny, Martin.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Lawless, Paul.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Lawlor, George.	
Fleming, Sean.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Foley, Norma.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Geoghegan, James.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Harkin, Marian.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Heydon, Martin.	Murphy, Paul.	
Higgins, Emer.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Keogh, Keira.	Nash, Ged.	
Kyne, Seán.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Lahart, John.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Lawless, James.	Nolan, Carol.	
Lowry, Michael.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
Martin, Micheál.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
Maxwell, David.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McCormack, Tony.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
McGrath, Séamus.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Quaide, Liam.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	

Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Murphy, Michael.	Sheehan, Conor.	
Naughton, Hildegarde.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Smith, Duncan.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Stanley, Brian.	
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 Feargháil, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Timmings, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and John Clendennen; 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, 66; 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.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Peter.	Collins, Michael.	
Butler, Mary.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Butterly, Paula.	Cronin, Réada.	
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.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Clendennen, John.	Gannon, Gary.	
Collins, Niall.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Connolly, John.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gould, Thomas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Graves, Ann.	
Cummins, John.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Daly, Martin.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dillon, Alan.	Kenny, Martin.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Lawless, Paul.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Fleming, Sean.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Foley, Norma.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Geoghegan, James.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Harkin, Marian.	Murphy, Paul.	
Heydon, Martin.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Higgins, Emer.	Nash, Ged.	
Keogh, Keira.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Kyne, Seán.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Lahart, John.	Nolan, Carol.	
Lawless, James.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
Lowry, Michael.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
Martin, Micheál.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
Maxwell, David.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
McCormack, Tony.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
McGrath, Séamus.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Quaide, Liam.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Sheehan, Conor.	
Murphy, Michael.	Sherlock, Marie.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Smith, Duncan.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Stanley, Brian.	
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 Fearghaíl, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and John Clendennen; Níl, Deputies Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Denise Mitchell.

Question declared carried.

Cost of Living: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Peadar Tóibín on Wednesday, 1 July 2026:

That Dáil Eireann:

notes that:

- Ireland is an outlier regarding the spiralling cost of living, and a Eurostat report this week showed we are the most expensive country for housing, health, energy and alcohol, overall prices are 36 per cent above the European Union average, with health costs in Ireland being 85 per cent higher than the European average;
- a study by Barnardos found that more than one-third of households went into arrears on energy bills in the last 12 months, with the Commission for Regulation of Utilities showing half a million people are behind on gas and electricity payments, and electricity prices are to rise from next week by 8 per cent, while gas goes up by 7.7 per cent;
- rents are also at record levels, as are evictions, in the wake of the Government's rent reforms, and a two-bed accommodation in Dublin is now almost €2,700 a month, while nationwide it is €2,176, which means it costs approximately €30,000 a year to rent here;
- the cost-of-living crisis is now mainstream, and families with two incomes are finding it hard to cope, with very little left over for emergencies;
- in the past five years grocery bills increased by 40 per cent, and that adds up to approximately €3,000 extra a year, for the same goods;

— since 2021, energy costs are up 57 per cent, diesel is up 60 per cent, a pint of stout is up 28 per cent, beef cuts for home-cooked stew are up 50 per cent, butter has risen 42 per cent, chicken breasts that were €5 in 2022 are now €12.98, steak has doubled in that time and eggs have gone up 35 per cent;

— this year, the Nevin Economic Research Institute found that Irish households pay around €360 more per year than the western European average for electricity, and it identified Ireland as a significant "cost growth outlier", as overall consumer prices have risen by 24 per cent over the past four years; and

— families across the country are working hard, yet barely keeping their heads above water;

recognises that:

— the Government has implemented measures that add to inflation and household bills;

— the Government refuses to halt the punitive increases in carbon tax and the M50 tolls;

— the Government collected €1.17 billion in carbon tax last year, the highest ever;

— carbon tax was supposed to be ringfenced for climate projects, but Aontú parliamentary questions found that a quarter of a billion euro of carbon tax revenue, nearly one fifth of it, went back into the State coffers in three years;

— 39 per cent of the carbon tax either was directed to other non-climate projects, or went back to the Exchequer, proving it is not needed for its stated purpose;

— the National Oil Reserves Agency levy for the climate action fund found that €278 million, 70 per cent of it, was left sitting in the Government's bank account from 2020 to 2024;

— the Government took in €4.3 billion in fuel taxes last year alone;

— the Government seeks to increase diesel prices by 32 cents, and petrol by 27 cents, a litre on the 1st August;

— Irene Tinagli, Italian MEP, Economist and Chair of the European Parliament's Special Committee on the Housing Crisis, categorised Ireland's housing crisis as the "most severe and complicated in Europe";

— this year, the Government removed the rent cap for new builds and new tenancies for the objective of making the housing market more lucrative to investors, and the move failed to increase supply, but it resulted in increased rents and record evictions;

— the M50 has paid for itself 30 times over, yet toll fees were still increased this year, as it has taken in over €2.2 billion in revenue since 2008, and is now a tax on work;

— there is no reprieve for burdened customers with the ESB, as despite the semi-State company making supernormal profits of €650 million last year, half a million people are in energy arrears;

— the Deposit Re-turn Scheme was introduced in 2024, adding 25 cent and 15 cent per can and bottle onto consumers' shopping bills upfront at the till, and it is an amount in excess of most other European countries who have the same scheme;

— the scheme has put extra costs on the taxpayer since its inception, such as the half a million-euro cost of cleaning up Dublin from the scavenging it has caused, while the introduction of bottle holders around the bins to try and stop it cost €155,000 before being scrapped;

— the Government's waste is at levels never seen before, including the Iarnród Éireann €50 million Information Technology system failure that was written off, the recent €127,000 Health Service Executive (HSE) Kerry bike shed, following on from the infamous €336,000 Oireachtas bike shed, and another cost overrun is the National Children's Hospital that has seen its original estimate of €650 million increase to €2.24 billion and counting for the hospital, with no opening date;

— there is the €10 million being spent on Dublin City Council's Wood Quay offices, which are planned to be bulldozed in three years' time;

— the Metrolink, that started in the mid-2000s, should have cost €2 billion but is projected to cost €15.8 billion, and Ireland is the world leader when it comes to squandering public money, bad budgeting and bad planning;

— Government spending overruns have averaged €5 billion each year since 2023, and the International Federation of Accountants has strongly criticised the State for year-to-year budgeting, using unrealistic forecasts, and ignoring these overruns; and

— health accounts for more than 40 per cent of total current spending overruns, and capital infrastructure overruns hit €1.6 billion in one year; and

calls on the Government to:

— cancel the planned increase in fuel taxes on diesel of 32 cents, petrol of 27 cents, and green diesel of 2.4 cents per litre;

— remove the Value-Added Tax (VAT) from construction for a three-year period, as removing VAT from construction would reduce the average price of a house by an estimated €50,000 per house, and this is also a market activation initiative, as it would improve viability;

— reduce profits at semi-State ESB to zero, allow it to wash its face, cover its costs and invest, as this would save every household €300;

— reform the Deposit Re-turn Scheme, as the not-for-profit company running it has €103 million in unredeemed deposits in its accounts;

— bring in a solar panel grant scheme that is accessible for all, increase the grants for solar panels to 50 per cent for low-income families, and reduce it on a sliding scale to the current grant level for high income families;

— reintroduce the rent caps for new build and new tenancies, as rent caps should be set at the rate of inflation or 2 per cent;

- scrap the M50 toll;
- end increases in carbon tax;
- publish the profits in the grocery sector, as mandating the biggest supermarkets to publish their profits would not interfere with the market, but would bring transparency to the industry and benefit customer choice;
- introduce a "heads will roll" clause for senior civil servants, if they spend money in an irresponsible fashion, as there has to be a cost to their careers, up to and including losing their job;
- appoint a Minister of State in the Department of the Taoiseach, whose responsibility is to make sure, in real time, that capital projects are not overrunning in cost;
- audit non-governmental organisations that are being funded by the State, to ascertain if they are providing a benefit for citizens, and cut Government funding to those who are not providing a benefit for citizens;
- end the €5 billion of Government budget spending overruns;
- reduce the processing time for International Protection Accommodation Services applications, to reduce accommodation costs;
- introduce a 2-year recruitment moratorium in administration within the HSE, to rebalance staff numbers towards the front line;
- introduce output payments within the HSE, to ensure that the health service gets paid for the consultations, treatments, engagements and operations that are delivered to patients, as this would save money, incentivise hospitals to reduce the length of hospital waiting lists and reorientate staff numbers towards the front line; and
- increase the price of electricity to new data centres, as this would reduce household electricity prices.

The following amendment No. 1 was moved by the Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan:

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

"notes that the Government:

- remains deeply concerned about the conflict in the Middle East and Gulf region;
 - is acutely aware of the impact on households and businesses of the recent increases in the cost of living, and is actively monitoring the current geopolitical situation and its impact on costs;
 - affirms that affordability is a priority for this Government; and
 - has taken action to help households and businesses with the cost of fuel and energy, by introducing one of the most comprehensive support packages in the European Union (EU);
- affirms that:

- the Government is deeply aware of the pressures placed on households and businesses by cost-of-living pressures;
- the National Energy Affordability Taskforce (NEAT) was established in June 2025, to identify, assess and implement measures that will enhance energy affordability for households and businesses, while delivering key renewables commitments and protecting security of supply and economic stability;
- in recent months, the Government introduced a €750 million package of fuel supports, which is among the largest per capita of any EU state;
- these measures have been further extended until 1st September, 2026, at an estimated cost of €270 million;
- the Value-Added Tax (VAT) rate on electricity bills has been reduced to 9 per cent, until 2030;
- enhanced social protection payments have been introduced, including an increase to the fuel allowance rate, and an expansion of the eligibility rules;
- successive budgets have provided targeted support to help households with cost-of-living pressures;
- the NEAT continues to work intensively on an energy affordability action plan to be submitted to the Government in quarter 3 of this year;
- this action plan will be focused on short-, medium- and long-term measures, to support households and businesses to meet energy costs;
- the action plan will be built on four key pillars:
 - addressing the price;
 - sustainable demand and enhancing flexibility;
 - addressing energy poverty and customer protections; and
 - energy affordability for businesses;
- this will be a crucial element of the Government's work to improve competitiveness, complementing the current Action Plan on Competitiveness and Productivity;
- a range of protections are in place for customers experiencing difficulties in paying their bills, including through the Department of Social Protection, who can provide support through the Additional Needs Payment, to help households meet expenses, including those who face difficulties with fuel bills;
- a record capital budget of €640 million, including €558 million from carbon tax receipts, has been allocated to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, supporting 73,000 home energy upgrades to make homes warmer, healthier and more comfortable, with lower emissions and lower bills;

— the allocation also includes a record €340 million for the Warmer Homes Scheme, which provides fully funded upgrades for those in energy poverty and is targeting 11,500 upgrades this year;

— Ireland has legally binding targets for the collection and recycling of polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles, and the Deposit Re-turn Scheme is ensuring we meet those targets;

— the fully refundable deposit amount balances affordability with incentivising consumers to return the empty container, and the return rate of nearly 77 per cent shows that this is working;

— under the EU accounting framework, reporting and disclosure obligations are determined primarily by the size of a company, with different requirements applying to micro-, small-, medium-sized and large undertakings, reflecting the principle that reporting obligations should be proportionate to the scale of the business, and is applied consistently across the EU;

— accordingly, grocery retailers are subject to the same accounting and disclosure requirements as other companies of a comparable size, and companies operating in Ireland, including those connected with other EU member states, are subject to harmonised reporting frameworks under EU law;

— any proposal to introduce additional reporting obligations, for a particular sector, would therefore need to be considered in the context of Ireland's obligations under the EU accounting framework, and the existing size-based system of corporate reporting;

— Budget 2026 reduced the VAT rate for the construction and supply of qualifying apartments and apartment blocks, from 13.5 per cent to 9 per cent, until the end of 2030, as part of a social policy to deliver higher density housing;

— a 0 per cent VAT rate may be applied to a maximum of seven of any of the categories included under Annex III of the EU VAT Directive, however, as Ireland already applies the 0 per cent rate to the maximum number of categories, there is no scope to expand this to the construction of new housing;

— the national housing plan, *Delivering Homes, Building Communities 2025-2030*, contains a suite of measures to support domestic and international investment in the delivery of new rental properties, in particular, the supply of new apartments;

— the recently enacted Residential Tenancies (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2026, provides improved security of tenure for tenants, while also encouraging more private investment in the rental market; and

— the Act, effective from 1st March, 2026, introduced a national system of rent control, with rent increases to be capped by inflation, measured by the Consumer Price Index, and in times of high inflation, rent increases are capped at a maximum of 2 per cent; and

further notes that:

— the latest Eurostat report, comparing electricity prices across the EU, outlines that Ireland had the 5th highest for household electricity prices in the second half of 2025, when adjusted

to take account of the 'Purchasing Power Standard', i.e., practical affordability, taking account of household income and so on;

— the most recent report from the Commission for Regulation of Utilities shows that 319,000 (14 per cent) of domestic electricity customers were in arrears in March, unchanged since December, and that a much lower 8 per cent (184,000) of domestic electricity customers were in arrears for over 90 days, approximately the same level as May 2025;

— the four biggest energy retailers have confirmed that hardship funds and focused measures are in place, for any customers in difficulty;

— switching energy supplier or plan could save the average electricity customer up to €500 annually;

— the Government has also established the NEAT, 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;

— the Government remains committed to ensuring that low-income households benefit from Ireland's renewable energy transition, and will continue to explore how best to integrate solar and other technologies into our energy poverty retrofit programmes;

— carbon tax funds are allocated for expenditure on measures including the continuation of a national retrofitting programme, investment in community energy efficiency measures, and funding for greener farming practices, as part of Ireland's climate policy and our aim to reach net-zero by 2050;

— the temporary deferral of the 1st May carbon tax increase will result in lower carbon tax revenues of €22 million in 2026;

— neither the Government, nor the Minister for Transport, have a direct role in the setting of M50 toll rates, as these are instead governed by statutory byelaws, and are managed by Transport Infrastructure Ireland;

— additionally, toll revenues from the M50 are fully reinvested in the operation, maintenance, protection and renewal of the national road network, and abolishing the M50 toll would cost the €250 million in revenues that would instead have to be raised from general taxation;

— recruitment within the Health Service Executive is complex and has been devolved to regional structures, who are best placed to assess service needs and prioritise posts, and a recruitment pause would directly undermine this approach and could result in increased reliance on agency staff, ultimately driving up costs rather than reducing them, and thereby restricting the funding for hiring more front-line staff;

— the Government is already progressing a significant reform programme, to link healthcare funding more directly to the level of activity delivered to patients through implementation of Activity Based Funding (ABF), which represents a fundamental shift in how hospital budgets are set;

— a structured implementation plan is in place, with shadow ABF processes being rolled out across 2026–2027, allowing funding models to be tested and refined before full implementation from 2028;

— achieving value for money must be sought at all stages of policy formation, and it is the responsibility of every Minister, public and civil servants within all Departments;

— earlier this year, the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation published Circular 21/2026 Expenditure Control and Escalation Processes, this sets out the various phases of an expenditure control escalation process for use across Government, and the corrective steps that may be implemented where expenditure risks and overruns are identified, and this new escalation process will strengthen effective budget oversight through enhanced governance and a focus on value for money, ensuring that expenditure ceilings are credible and deliver effectively on Programme for Government commitments; and

— this builds on Value for Money Circular 18/2025, which highlighted the roles and responsibilities in the delivery of value for money, as well as the robust guidance, codes of practice, and circulars underpinned by legislation, and informed by best practice in the pursuit of value for money, and it is the responsibility of the Accounting Officer for each Department to ensure that they manage expenditure sustainably, and in accordance with this allocation."

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1 to amendment No. 1:

To insert the following after "expenditure sustainably, and in accordance with this allocation":

"; and

calls on the Government to:

— recognise that increasing diesel by 34 cents and petrol by 29 cents a litre before the end of the year will put unjustifiable pressure on workers and families already struggling with the cost-of-living crisis;

— rule out any increase in excise duty prior to budget day and conditional on a review of the market conditions at that time; and

— introduce energy credits of €400 per household in direct response to the record number of households unable to pay their energy bills."

(Deputy Pearse Doherty)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the motion regarding the cost of living. On Wednesday, 1 July 2026, on the question, "That the amendment to the amendment be made", a division was claimed, and in accordance with Standing Order 85(2), that division must be taken now.

Amendment to amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 68; Níl, 80; Staon, 0.
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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.	
Cairns, Holly.	Brophy, Colm.	
Carthy, Matt.	Browne, James.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Burke, Colm.	
Collins, Michael.	Burke, Peter.	
Conway-Walsh, Rose.	Butler, Mary.	
Coppinger, Ruth.	Butterly, Paula.	
Cronin, Réada.	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.	
Farrell, Mairéad.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Clendennen, John.	
Gannon, Gary.	Collins, Niall.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Connolly, John.	
Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	Cooney, Joe.	
Gould, Thomas.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Graves, Ann.	Cummins, John.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Daly, Martin.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Hearne, Rory.	Dillon, Alan.	
Kenny, Martin.	Dolan, Albert.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Dooley, Timmy.	
Lawless, Paul.	Feighan, Frankie.	
Lawlor, George.	Fleming, Sean.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Foley, Norma.	
McDonald, Mary Lou.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Geoghegan, James.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Harkin, Marian.	
Mitchell, Denise.	Heydon, Martin.	
Murphy, Paul.	Higgins, Emer.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Keogh, Keira.	
Nash, Ged.	Kyne, Seán.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Lahart, John.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Lawless, James.	
Nolan, Carol.	Lowry, Michael.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	Martin, Micheál.	

O'Donoghue, Robert.	Maxwell, David.	
O'Gorman, Roderic.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
O'Hara, Louis.	McCarthy, Noel.	
O'Reilly, Louise.	McConalogue, Charlie.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	McCormack, Tony.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	McGrath, Séamus.	
Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	McGreehan, Erin.	
Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	Moran, Kevin Boxer.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Moynihan, Michael.	
Quaide, Liam.	Moynihan, Shane.	
Quinlivan, Maurice.	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
Rice, Pádraig.	Murphy, Michael.	
Sheehan, Conor.	Naughton, Hildegard.	
Sherlock, Marie.	O'Brien, Darragh.	
Smith, Duncan.	O'Connell, Maeve.	
Stanley, Brian.	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 Fearghail, Seán.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Richmond, Neale.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Troy, Robert.	
	Ward, Barry.	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Denise Mitchell; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and John Clendennen.

Amendment to amendment declared lost.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 80; Níl, 68; 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.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Peter.	Collins, Michael.	
Butler, Mary.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Butterly, Paula.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	
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'.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Clendennen, John.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Collins, Niall.	Gannon, Gary.	
Connolly, John.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gould, Thomas.	
Cummins, John.	Graves, Ann.	
Daly, Martin.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Dillon, Alan.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kenny, Martin.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Lawless, Paul.	
Fleming, Sean.	Lawlor, George.	
Foley, Norma.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Geoghegan, James.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Harkin, Marian.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Heydon, Martin.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Higgins, Emer.	Murphy, Paul.	
Keogh, Keira.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Kyne, Seán.	Nash, Ged.	
Lahart, John.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Lawless, James.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Lowry, Michael.	Nolan, Carol.	
Martin, Micheál.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
Maxwell, David.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McGrath, Séamus.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	

Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Quaide, Liam.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Murphy, Michael.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Sheehan, Conor.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Smith, Duncan.	
O'Connor, James.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Dea, Willie.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Shea, John Paul.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and John Clendennen; Níl, Deputies Peadar Tóibín and Paul Lawless.

Amendment declared carried.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 80; Níl, 68; 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.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Burke, Peter.	Collins, Michael.	
Butler, Mary.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Butterly, Paula.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	

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'.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Clendennen, John.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Collins, Niall.	Gannon, Gary.	
Connolly, John.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gould, Thomas.	
Cummins, John.	Graves, Ann.	
Daly, Martin.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
Dillon, Alan.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dolan, Albert.	Kenny, Martin.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Lawless, Paul.	
Fleming, Sean.	Lawlor, George.	
Foley, Norma.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Geoghegan, James.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Harkin, Marian.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Heydon, Martin.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Higgins, Emer.	Murphy, Paul.	
Keogh, Keira.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Kyne, Seán.	Nash, Ged.	
Lahart, John.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Lawless, James.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Lowry, Michael.	Nolan, Carol.	
Martin, Micheál.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
Maxwell, David.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McGrath, Séamus.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Quaide, Liam.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
Murphy, Michael.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Sheehan, Conor.	

O'Brien, Darragh.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Smith, Duncan.	
O'Connor, James.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Dea, Willie.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Shea, John Paul.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Feargháil, Seán.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Richmond, Neale.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and John Clendennen; Níl, Deputies Peadar Tóibín and Paul Lawless.

Question declared carried.

Animal Health and Welfare (Ban on Hare Coursing) Bill 2020: Second Stage (Resumed) [Private Members]

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a deferred division relating to the Second Reading motion on the Animal Health and Welfare (Ban on Hare Coursing) Bill 2020. On Thursday, 2 July 2026, on the question, "That the Bill be now read a Second Time", a division was claimed and that division must be taken now.

Question put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 24; Níl, 125; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Aird, William.	
Bacik, Ivana.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Cairns, Holly.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Coppinger, Ruth.	Boland, Grace.	
Cummins, Jen.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Gannon, Gary.	Brady, John.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Brennan, Brian.	
Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	Brennan, Shay.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Brophy, Colm.	
Hearne, Rory.	Browne, James.	
Lawlor, George.	Buckley, Pat.	

Murphy, Paul.	Burke, Colm.	
Nash, Ged.	Burke, Peter.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	Butler, Mary.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	Butterly, Paula.	
O'Gorman, Roderic.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Quaide, Liam.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Rice, Pádraig.	Cahill, Michael.	
Sheehan, Conor.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Sherlock, Marie.	Calleary, Dara.	
Smith, Duncan.	Canney, Seán.	
Wall, Mark.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Ward, Charles.	Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	
Whitmore, Jennifer.	Carthy, Matt.	
	Chambers, Jack.	
	Clarke, Sorca.	
	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
	Clendennen, John.	
	Collins, Michael.	
	Collins, Niall.	
	Connolly, John.	
	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
	Cooney, Joe.	
	Cronin, Réada.	
	Crowe, Cathal.	
	Cullinane, David.	
	Cummins, John.	
	Daly, Martin.	
	Daly, Pa.	
	Dempsey, Aisling.	
	Devine, Máire.	
	Devlin, Cormac.	
	Dillon, Alan.	
	Doherty, Pearse.	
	Dolan, Albert.	
	Donnelly, Paul.	
	Dooley, Timmy.	
	Ellis, Dessie.	
	Farrell, Mairéad.	
	Feighan, Frankie.	
	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
	Fleming, Sean.	
	Foley, Norma.	
	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
	Geoghegan, James.	
	Gould, Thomas.	
	Graves, Ann.	
	Guirke, Johnny.	
	Harkin, Marian.	

	Healy-Rae, Danny.	
	Heydon, Martin.	
	Higgins, Emer.	
	Kenny, Martin.	
	Keogh, Keira.	
	Kerrane, Claire.	
	Kyne, Seán.	
	Lahart, John.	
	Lawless, James.	
	Lawless, Paul.	
	Lowry, Michael.	
	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
	Martin, Micheál.	
	Maxwell, David.	
	McAuliffe, Paul.	
	McCarthy, Noel.	
	McConalogue, Charlie.	
	McCormack, Tony.	
	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
	McGettigan, Donna.	
	McGrath, Séamus.	
	McGreehan, Erin.	
	McGuinness, Conor D.	
	Mitchell, Denise.	
	Moran, Kevin Boxer.	
	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
	Moynihan, Michael.	
	Moynihan, Shane.	
	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
	Murphy, Michael.	
	Mythen, Johnny.	
	Naughton, Hildegard.	
	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
	Nolan, Carol.	
	O'Brien, Darragh.	
	O'Connell, Maeve.	
	O'Connor, James.	
	O'Dea, Willie.	
	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
	O'Hara, Louis.	
	O'Meara, Ryan.	
	O'Reilly, Louise.	
	O'Rourke, Darren.	
	O'Shea, John Paul.	
	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Broin, Eoin.	

	Ó Fearghail, Seán.	
	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
	Richmond, Neale.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Stanley, Brian.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Tóibín, Peadar.	
	Troy, Robert.	
	Ward, Barry.	
	Ward, Mark.	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Paul Murphy and Ruth Coppinger; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and John Clendennen.

Question declared lost.

10 o'clock

Planning for Constitutional Change Bill 2026: Second Stage (Resumed) [Private Members]

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a deferred division relating to the Second Reading motion on the Planning for Constitutional Change Bill 2026. On Tuesday, 7 July 2026, on the question, "That the Bill be now read a Second Time", a division was claimed and that division must be taken now.

Question put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 69; Níl, 79; 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.	
Cairns, Holly.	Brophy, Colm.	
Carthy, Matt.	Browne, James.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Burke, Colm.	
Collins, Michael.	Burke, Peter.	

Conway-Walsh, Rose.	Butler, Mary.	
Coppinger, Ruth.	Butterly, Paula.	
Cronin, Réada.	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.	
Farrell, Mairéad.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Clendennen, John.	
Gannon, Gary.	Collins, Niall.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Connolly, John.	
Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	Cooney, Joe.	
Gould, Thomas.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Graves, Ann.	Cummins, John.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Daly, Martin.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Healy-Rae, Danny.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Hearne, Rory.	Dillon, Alan.	
Kenny, Martin.	Dolan, Albert.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Dooley, Timmy.	
Lawless, Paul.	Feighan, Frankie.	
Lawlor, George.	Fleming, Sean.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Foley, Norma.	
McDonald, Mary Lou.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Geoghegan, James.	
McGuinness, Conor D.	Harkin, Marian.	
Mitchell, Denise.	Heydon, Martin.	
Murphy, Paul.	Higgins, Emer.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Keogh, Keira.	
Nash, Ged.	Kyne, Seán.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Lahart, John.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Lawless, James.	
Nolan, Carol.	Lowry, Michael.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	Martin, Micheál.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	Maxwell, David.	
O'Gorman, Roderic.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
O'Hara, Louis.	McCarthy, Noel.	
O'Reilly, Louise.	McConalogue, Charlie.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	McCormack, Tony.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	McGrath, Séamus.	
Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	McGreehan, Erin.	
Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	Moran, Kevin Boxer.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Moynihan, Michael.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Moynihan, Shane.	
Quaide, Liam.	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	

Quinlivan, Maurice.	Murphy, Michael.	
Rice, Pádraig.	Naughton, Hildegard.	
Sheehan, Conor.	O'Brien, Darragh.	
Sherlock, Marie.	O'Connell, Maeve.	
Smith, Duncan.	O'Connor, James.	
Stanley, Brian.	O'Dea, Willie.	
Tóibín, Peadar.	O'Donnell, Kieran.	
Wall, Mark.	O'Meara, Ryan.	
Ward, Charles.	O'Shea, John Paul.	
Ward, Mark.	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
Whitmore, Jennifer.	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Richmond, Neale.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Troy, Robert.	
	Ward, Barry.	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Denise Mitchell; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and John Clendennen.

Question declared lost.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar athló ar 10.09 p.m. go dtí 8.47 a.m., Déardaoin, an 9 Iúil 2026.

The Dáil adjourned at 10.09 p.m. until 8.47 a.m. on Thursday, 9 July 2026.