



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—Neamhcheartaithe
(OFFICIAL REPORT—Unrevised)

Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions.....	677
Visit of French Delegation.....	680
Visit of Canadian Delegation.....	680
Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí (Atógáil) - Leaders' Questions (Resumed).....	680
An tOrd Gnó - Order of Business.....	689
Appointment of Ordinary Member of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission: Motion.....	706
Fourteenth Report of the Standing Committee of Selection: Motion.....	706
Special Committee on Preventing and Responding to Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: Motion.....	706
Planning and Development (Exempted Development (Act of 2000)) Regulations 2026 and Planning and Development (Licensing of Outdoor Events) Regulations 2026: Referral to Joint Committee.....	707
Apology following the publication of the Report of the South East Commission of Investigation: Statements.....	707
Teachtaireacht ón Seanad - Message from Seanad.....	732
Domestic Violence Judgments Register Bill 2026 [Seanad]: Second Stage.....	732
Protecting the Copyright of Irish Artists in the era of Artificial Intelligence: Motion [Private Members].....	753
Ceisteanna ar Sonraíodh Uain Dóibh - Priority Questions.....	781
Public Transport.....	781
Community Development Projects.....	783
Social Enterprise Sector.....	785
Cúrsaí Tithíochta.....	788
Údaráis Áitiúla.....	790
Ceisteanna Eile - Other Questions.....	792
Community Development Projects.....	792
Gaeltacht Policy.....	794
Rural Schemes.....	797
Departmental Schemes.....	799
Urban Development.....	801
Gaeltacht Policy.....	803

Departmental Programmes	806
Údarás na Gaeltachta.....	808
Ábhair Shaincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Matters.....	810
Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate.....	811
Third Level Staff.....	811
Vacant Properties.....	814
Wind Energy Guidelines	817
Water Services.....	820
Sports Facilities	822

DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Máirt, 14 Iúil 2026

Tuesday, 14 July 2026

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

Paidir agus Machnamh.

Prayer and Reflection.

Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions

An Ceann Comhairle: Good afternoon and welcome to all our guests in the Gallery. I call Deputy McDonald on Leaders' Questions under Standing Order 38.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Sandra Deans is living a nightmare. Three weeks ago, her 14-year-old son Jayden was knocked down by a speeding scrambler in a hit-and-run incident. Jayden was on his way to the shops and he was hit as he crossed the road at the Five Lamps in the inner city. When his mother Sandra got the call and hurried to the scene, she arrived not knowing whether her son was alive or dead. Jayden has suffered a very serious injury to his leg. He has been left with a broken mangled leg and incredible trauma. He is now confined to his home and needs constant care while he recovers. Sandra is understandably very distraught but she is also very angry.

People in the north inner city of Dublin and beyond, across our suburbs in Finglas and Cabra and all across the country, are sick to the back teeth of gangs on high-speed e-scooters and scramblers literally bringing havoc and real danger to our neighbourhoods. They speed through our communities with absolutely no regard for anybody's safety not to mind the law. These vehicles are being used to deliver drugs. They are also involved in open intimidation and create a real sense of menace and a sense of fear in our neighbourhoods.

When Grace Lynch, who was only 16, died when she was hit by a scrambler in January, the Taoiseach said at the time that everything would be done. He said, and I believe he told Grace's parents, that this death was enough, that Grace was enough, and that we were not going to tolerate this situation any longer. Grace's Law was supposed to mark a real turning point for us. We are months on from its enactment and we see the plague of all of this getting worse and not better. Grace's parents, Siobhán and Martin Lynch, are here with us today in the Public Gallery and I welcome them. Later today they will appear at the justice committee. They say and they know that certainly not enough is being done to face down this scourge. They say correctly that unless the law is enforced, then it essentially means nothing. Martin, her dad,

has told how his blood boils when he sees scramblers and e-scooters moving at high speed across our city with no consequences for the people on them.

Lives have been lost. We know of the loss of lives in Carlow and in Galway. We know there are children on life-support machines in Temple Street hospital and beyond. Real harm and real damage is being done. The question has to be asked today: what is the Government doing about it?

How is it possible that it is so easy for anybody to walk into a toy store and walk out with an e-scooter? In many cases, these e-scooters are being bought and they are moving way beyond 25 km/h. They are moving at 60 km/h and 70 km/h. We know that the scrambler bikes, in reality, in many cases, are motorbikes. We know there is not the requirement to have these vehicles registered and to have those using them licensed and to have tax and insurance - all of the standard things that we expect of anybody else using the roads. I want to know what the Taoiseach is going to do. When is this going to change? When will the Garda be resourced? When will gardaí have the training? When will they have the equipment to get on top of this and to make our communities safe?

Deputies: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: What the Deputy has described is horrific for Sandra - I did not get her surname - and her son Jayden. It is something that we are going to deal with very robustly. The legislation in terms of Grace's law was enacted on 3 April. We are now in the middle of July. I know the Garda Commissioner is speaking to the Oireachtas committee as well.

There has been very proactive seizure of scramblers and, indeed, of e-scooters. About 2,000 e-scooters have been seized since 2024 and about 418 scramblers have been seized since 2024. The impact of these scramblers is horrific, as we know in the context of the appalling killing of Grace Lynch. I met Siobhán and Martin and I know how committed and dedicated they are to ridding society of this scourge. We will use every lever at our disposal to do this.

The Minister for Transport will be working with the Minister for justice to bring in legislation to ensure that gardaí are protected while in pursuit of anyone on a scrambler or e-scooter. The Minister for Health has sought a full and comprehensive report from CHI in respect of injuries to children as a result of e-scooter accidents. The Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Deputy Seán Canney, is looking at all options in respect of e-scooters, including a full ban if necessary. There are options open to the House in terms of regulation or a full ban. The expectation is that the report from CHI will be of profound consequence in terms of what will be detailed in respect of the impact of e-scooters. In respect of scramblers, they are now explicitly banned for any use in any public place.

The Minister for justice and the Garda Commissioner are continuing to examine any further actions they can do to clamp down on the illegal use of scramblers and e-scooters. There has been some progress in terms of Operation Meacán and operations of that kind. The Commissioner will give a presentation today to the committee in this regard. Operation Meacán looks, in particular, at the use of electric vehicles for criminal activity across the Dublin metropolitan area. Significant days of action have been carried out as a result of that, with e-scooters and e-bikes seized during the operation of Operation Meacán.

I refer to the resources, the equipment and the legislation. It is not just about legislation. It is now about enforcement and it is also about ensuring that gardaí are protected as they enforce this law and this regulation. Irrespective of new laws, gardaí obviously have to weigh up and balance their interventions at given times in terms of the pursuit of some of these people, particularly those on scramblers. People are fed up of it, however, and people have had enough of this. We are determined, with An Garda Síochána, to do everything we possibly can to rid scramblers from public places.

If that does not transpire in terms of their continued frequency, we may have to look more at what would ordinarily be seen as extreme action in respect of scramblers more generally and what they are purported to be originally used for. I think we will have to look at every option in respect of this issue.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: It certainly is about enforcement. Scramblers might be banned from public roads in theory but that is far from the reality. I would invite the Taoiseach to come to my neighbourhood of Cabra, Finglas or the north inner city and he will see the reality. They are an absolute scourge and a source of immediate danger to people's lives. So much more has to be done. People on the ground do not see a Government action that is determined to get on top of this. They see a very lacklustre, half-hearted response. The GRA has stated that not one garda has the training in respect of pursuit of people on these vehicles. The policy of non-pursuit is hugely problematic. These gangs on bikes and e-scooters know full well they will not be pursued. They have to be pursued. The training has to be provided for the gardaí.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach to respond now, Deputy.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Taoiseach, riddle me this: how is it these vehicles have no requirement to be registered?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Every single one of them, e-scooters as well as bikes, should be registered, taxed and insured.

An Ceann Comhairle: Taoiseach will respond now, Deputy. Thank you.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Why is that not already the case?

The Taoiseach: As I said, vehicles are being pursued on an ongoing basis. This idea that there is not pursuit-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: They are not.

(Interruptions)

The Taoiseach: I am talking about generally. The idea that gardaí do not pursue criminals or activities is wrong. Yes, there have been cases, unfortunately, taken against gardaí. That is why the Ministers are bringing in additional legislation to protect gardaí while in pursuit. Even with that legislation, we all know judgment has to be applied in given situations because pursuits are dangerous in themselves. It could be potentially dangerous to innocent bystanders or pedestrians. We had similar situations in different times which ultimately we got control of. It was not scramblers then; it was joyriding and all of that. We got control of that through various mechanisms working together. We have to do the same now in pursuing this issue. The Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Deputy Canney, will be back to the House in terms of regulations for e-scooters or a ban on e-scooters, which I must say I am leaning towards myself.

Visit of French Delegation

An Ceann Comhairle: Before our next question, as colleagues can see, we have a number of guests in the Distinguished Visitors Gallery. I hope you will all join with me in giving them a hearty céad míle fáilte. First, I am delighted, especially on Bastille Day, to welcome Mr. Michel Barnier, member of the National Assembly of France, former prime minister, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator and great friend of the Irish.

I also welcome the ambassador to Ireland, H.E. Céline Place. You are most welcome.

Visit of Canadian Delegation

An Ceann Comhairle: Just behind them is a delegation from Canada led by Mr. James Maloney, MP, president of the Canada-Ireland Interparliamentary Group, and accompanied by H.E. Dennis King, the ambassador to Ireland from Canada. You are most welcome.

Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí (Atógáil) - Leaders' Questions (Resumed)

An Ceann Comhairle: In a break from tradition but as we are doing the welcomes - we have a lot of people in the Public Gallery - I wish to especially welcome Siobhán and Martin Lynch whom some have mentioned already. They are the parents of Grace Lynch who was killed in a tragic accident in January. They are in the Gallery today. They will be making an appearance at a meeting of the justice committee. You are most welcome today.

I call Deputy Cairns.

Deputy Holly Cairns: I also welcome Grace's parents, who are in the Public Gallery, and Michel Barnier, the ambassadors and others who are in the Distinguished Visitors Gallery.

On behalf of the Social Democrats, I extend our sincere best wishes to the Minister, Deputy O'Donovan, and his family. Everyone in this House wishes him a full and speedy recovery.

A Deputy: Hear, hear.

Deputy Holly Cairns: The decision by An Coimisiún Pleanála to grant planning permission for apartments at Bessborough is disgusting. This represents yet another failure, a betrayal by the State of the thousands of women and children who were incarcerated and abused there and of the 859 children and 19 women who remain unaccounted for and are presumed dead. I read An Coimisiún Pleanála's decision in detail and I cannot get over it. It states, "from the information available, there is no evidence that there are unrecorded burials" on the development site. Yet, the report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes said it was highly likely that burials took place on the grounds. What happened after that conclusion was reached? Was there a comprehensive survey of the grounds? Was ground-penetrating radar used? Were test excavations conducted? No. Instead, planning permission was granted to build apartments over the unmarked graves of disappeared children.

Unlike those done in Tuam and at Sean Ross Abbey, the so-called archeological assessment carried out by the commission has never been published. It remains sealed, along with the entire archive of documents relating to Bessborough. No one can access those documents, not even An Coimisiún Pleanála. The fact the latter can grant planning permission and simultaneously conclude that the history of burials on the grounds is incomplete is just appalling. The trauma this has caused survivors is immeasurable. One survivor Terry Meyer told the *Irish Examiner* it was like "a stab in my heart and soul" because it showed "the inhumanity, and the callousness".

Two weeks ago when I asked the Taoiseach to purchase the site using a compulsory purchase order, CPO, he told me he was waiting for the outcome of the appeal before deciding how to respond. He has it now, so what is he going to do? Will he unseal all records about burials from the archive of the mother and baby homes commission?

The Taoiseach: Sorry, I-----

Deputy Holly Cairns: Will he ask the Attorney General to order an inquest into the deaths of children and women in Bessborough, as he has the power to do under section 4 of the Coroner's Act 1962? Critically, will the Government CPO the land?

The Taoiseach: The Deputy's presentation as to archives being sealed is somewhat disingenuous and totally inaccurate. My understanding is that the action the State took - well I know, because it was dealt with by means of legislation introduced by the previous Government - was to protect those archives. If we had not introduced that legislation, they would not be extant now. They would have been destroyed by the commission. We need honesty in this debate, and we need to stop name-calling everyone and saying people are doing this and sealing that. We are not. The actions of the previous Government in respect of this issue were comprehensive. For the first time, we overcame certain constitutional issues in order to ensure that everyone who was adopted had access to their full birth records. That was always the most consistent demand made by people. That is what happened then.

During the term of office of the previous Government, there was a huge campaign to try to block the legislation. If that legislation had not been passed by the Houses, the archives would have been destroyed. It was a dishonest and outrageous campaign that was organised by people who should have known better. Thanks be to God the then Minister, Deputy O'Gorman,

brought the legislation through because it has protected the archives. As the Deputy will be aware, we will have a national archive centre for all material relating to all industrial schools, mother and baby homes and other institutions, for its preservation, conservation and, ultimately, to allow people who wish to do so to access it.

In respect of Bessborough, it must be stated that An Coimisiún Pleanála is independent. I hope the Deputy accepts that. It is independent of the Government and the Oireachtas. People may describe its actions as disgusting and so on, but it is independent in its planning functions.

If we ever reached a day when politicians felt they could intervene in various issues on an ongoing basis, that would become problematic for society over time.

In respect of the Bessborough site and the decision, there is no evidence yet that there were any burials on the specific site on which an application has been made to build housing. The Bessborough site was originally 200 acres. It is now 60 acres. An element of the land was bought. I am on record as saying that I would have preferred for the State to have bought that land back in 2018 or 2019 via the local authority. That did not happen. It is my understanding that it was bought in different lots. There have been State buildings, buildings that provide services to the State, on the Bessborough site for quite a long time. There has been lots of activity on that site for a long time, since long before the commission of inquiry.

The commission of inquiry examined the Bessborough site extensively. This included cartographic and archival research, site surveys and public appeals for information. I apologise. I do not have time to go through this. I will come back in on it.

Deputy Holly Cairns: I take it from the Taoiseach's reply and his talk about respecting An Bord Pleanála's decision that the answer is that the Government will not be issuing a CPO for the land. The Taoiseach may correct me if I am wrong because I hope the Government is going to make moves to compulsorily purchase the land. However, I believe this will go down as the most callous decision by this Government. A commission of investigation said that it is highly likely that children whose deaths went uninvestigated are buried in these grounds but the Taoiseach is saying to go ahead and build apartments on the site. He underestimates the strength of feeling on this issue. Crucially, he underestimates the strength of survivors. This is fundamentally wrong. Not only do the survivors know it but the general public do as well. I do not believe this build will go ahead. I know people will chain themselves to the gates before diggers can roll in there to build and to concrete over land where potentially hundreds of children are buried.

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

Deputy Holly Cairns: Will the Taoiseach clarify whether the Government is going to compulsorily purchase the land? He can call it what he wants. The Taoiseach says the records are not sealed but the archives are closed. Even An Bord Pleanála could not access them. Will the Taoiseach open them?

The Taoiseach: The Deputy has now said that a decision of An Bord Pleanála is the most callous decision of this Government.

Deputy Holly Cairns: I said that the Government's decision not to compulsorily purchase--

The Taoiseach: I am sorry; I did not interrupt you.

Deputy Holly Cairns: With respect, you are misrepresenting what I said.

The Taoiseach: I did not interrupt the Deputy. She does not have a monopoly on empathy or anger on this issue.

Deputy Holly Cairns: No one cares about what you think about a monopoly on caring.

The Taoiseach: I did not heckle you.

Deputy Holly Cairns: This is about people who are buried in the ground.

The Taoiseach: Hang on a second----

Deputy Holly Cairns: Save us the spiel about how much you care.

The Taoiseach: Am I not allowed to speak?

Deputy Robert Troy: Why is her microphone on?

The Taoiseach: Are you going to shout me down all of the time? Do you not believe in freedom of expression for everyone in the House?

Deputy Holly Cairns: Answer the question.

The Taoiseach: It is wrong for the Deputy to misrepresent me and to misrepresent the Government's position on this. We were not involved in An Bord Pleanála's decision.

Deputy Holly Cairns: There was a-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, please.

The Taoiseach: By the way, while I have not had the opportunity to go through this, the Deputy knows that because of the planning protections in the laws we have passed, if any human remains are found there, work has to stop immediately. There has to be a forensic archaeological strategy involved. That is mandatory. A forensic archaeologist must be present throughout the entirety of the excavation works. All works must cease immediately if human remains are discovered.

An Ceann Comhairle: Time is up.

The Taoiseach: Having said that, in terms of your basic question on a compulsory purchase-

An Ceann Comhairle: Taoiseach, the time is up.

The Taoiseach: I was heckled again.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am afraid you were-----

The Taoiseach: I am not being given the opportunity-----

An Ceann Comhairle: -----not afforded the opportunity.

The Taoiseach: There has been a lot of misrepresentation. The Ceann Comhairle allowed the Deputy to speak.

An Ceann Comhairle: The problem is that the Deputy-----

Deputy Mary Butler: Deputy Cairns took 30 seconds.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Chief Whip but I am in the Chair. I call on Deputy Ivana Bacik.

The Taoiseach: We need a bit of balance here.

An Ceann Comhairle: Let this be a lesson to other Members to listen to the answer.

Deputy Mary Butler: This is so unfair.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is not unfair. Time is time.

Deputy Mary Butler: It is completely unfair.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: Last Thursday's decision granting permission for development to proceed on the site of the former Bessborough mother and baby home is indeed deeply disappointing. It has caused immense distress and concern to survivors and many other people across the country. I have been listening carefully to what the Taoiseach has said but it is extremely distressing for everyone to hear the conditionality attached to the permission that works must stop if human remains are found on the grounds. That alone should be a cause of immense concern to anyone who has read anything of the history of Bessborough. Ten days ago, I visited the site myself. It is in the Taoiseach's own constituency and I know he has been there himself. I was there with survivor advocate Carmel Cantwell, Labour Senator Laura Harmon and our councillors, Ciara O'Connor and Peter Horgan. We saw at first hand the very

poignant memorial bearing the names of just some of those women and children who lived and died at Bessborough.

Survivors in the local community had to assemble this memorial themselves because there is so little to mark the suffering of the thousands of mothers and babies who passed through that institution over many decades. Of the 923 babies died there, just 64 are accounted for. Over 800 babies are missing.

Standing at the site, the weight of suffering is palpable. We owe those who suffered there - the mothers, the babies and their descendants and families - a proper memorial and a duty of preservation. Bessborough should be a site of conscience. There is huge cross-party agreement on that. Last Thursday's decision has understandably caused this outpouring of distress. The decision was made without access to relevant records. That has already been debated that to and fro, but I think we can all agree that it was made without access to all relevant records and without the benefit of modern technology being used to survey the grounds extensively.

Often when we talk about institutional abuse, it is in circumstances where the Government is trying to make amends for terrible wrongs that have already happened in the past. I am thinking of the Bill Kenneally case, which we are going to be discussing this afternoon. This time, we have an opportunity to prevent a wrong from happening because there are babies unaccounted for and living survivors, like Terry Meyer in today's edition of the *Irish Examiner*, telling us that they witnessed burials on the grounds of Bessborough. This is a live issue, and we still have time to do the right thing. Imagine if we had concreted over the site at Tuam before Catherine Corless had carried out her incredible work there. Imagine what would have been lost. We cannot allow that to happen at Bessborough.

Two weeks ago, the Taoiseach conceded in this House that Cork City Council should have compulsorily purchased the site years ago. Let us approach this debate with honesty. The Taoiseach said that. I agree with him. However, Cork City Council did not acquire the site under CPO, so what now? If the Taoiseach genuinely believes, and I think he does, that the site should have been acquired, then there is a moral imperative on the Government to act now. The State should secure Bessborough through compulsory purchase, if necessary, or by negotiating with the developer. It is not too late to do this. No building work has started yet. Bessborough must be brought into State ownership, properly investigated, preserved as a site of conscience-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach will respond now.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: -----and made home to a fitting memorial for survivors.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy. The Taoiseach, please.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: How can we work with the Taoiseach to facilitate that?

Deputy Conor Sheehan: Hear, hear.

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

The Taoiseach: I appreciate the constructive manner in which the Deputy has raised the questions, particularly in the context of her question as to how she can work with us. I appreciate that response. She has not attempted to name-call anybody or misrepresent people. I appreciate that.

What I was endeavouring to say is that the commission did examine the site extensively, including in the context of cartographic and archival research and site surveys. It concluded that while it is likely that some children are buried on the grounds, that is, somewhere within the 60 acres, it found no physical or documentary evidence locating burial sites. When I spoke to survivors early on - not this year but, certainly, two to three years ago - there were differing perspectives in terms of how we deal with the 60 acres and with the site itself. It is not just on this specific one that An Coimisiún Pleanála has made an adjudication.

One of the difficulties is, I am advised, that excavation without evidence of location is neither feasible nor lawful. That is a problem. Under the Institutional Burials Act 2022, the Government can only appoint a director of authorised intervention where it is satisfied that burials have taken place and there is evidence that those burials are manifestly inappropriate. In the case of Bessborough, I am advised that the legal threshold cannot currently be met because the location of many burials remains unknown. However, there are significant and meaningful planning protections in respect of the specific application at Bessborough, namely: a forensic archaeological monitoring strategy is mandatory; a forensic archaeologist must be present throughout excavation works; and, as the Deputy said, all works must cease immediately if human remains are discovered. That is obviously designed to ensure dignity, protection and accountability.

CPOs just do not happen automatically even if people apply for them. There are huge legal thresholds to be overcome in respect of a CPO of a site like this, particularly given that the council has designated it as appropriate for housing in its city development plan and, in the context of its executive functions, gave planning permission to the development of housing there. That has now been endorsed by An Bord Pleanála. Therefore, a CPO is not a straightforward, simplistic thing the Government can do by just pressing a button. That also needs to be acknowledged.

This matter does need reflection and examination. I fully accept the disquiet that is out there.

We have done everything we possibly can over the last number of years in fulfilling the action plan that was outlined by the last Government in all of the areas that were covered at that time, in relation, as I said, to access to records, in terms of a redress scheme and much more than just that. We passed the Institutional Burials Act, which is now operational in Tuam and yielding an outcome there. Up to now, to be blunt about it, there was no real push or pressure to excavate the entire 60 acres at Bessborough.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: I have listened carefully to the Taoiseach's response and I thank him for his considered engagement. I welcome his saying that there should be a period of reflection and examination. It is not too late to look at other options beyond the CPO option. It is possible now for the Government to engage with the developer, and I ask that it would consider doing that. It would have the support of the public. Nearly 10,000 people have signed the petition

calling for a CPO. However, it does not have to be by CPO that the site comes into State ownership so that it can become and be preserved as a site of conscience.

Last night, Cork City Council unanimously agreed that the site should be acquired by CPO. There is huge support for this. I walked to the site with Carmel Cantwell. I know the issues and the scale of the site. However, we overcame those issues at Tuam through working together constructively. Where there is a will, there is a way on this. With the right political will, the objections can be overcome and the difficulties can be overcome. We can use modern methods of technology to geomap sites to look at identifying potential burial grounds. I think the Taoiseach will agree with me it is deeply chilling to read that the conditions include that the construction will stop if human remains are found. That is not acceptable on a site like this.

The Taoiseach: We can say it is deeply chilling, but it is with a view to protecting human remains. That is important as well. I think that is something that should be in the planning condition.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: We can pre-empt that.

The Taoiseach: If it was not in the planning condition, the developer could do what the developer might want to do if it came upon human remains. That is one of the issues here. We are dealing with a 60-acre site here. I know the site very well. I have known it all my life. Buildings have been put on that site over the years. There are services on that site, funded by the State, in new buildings and so on. I mean social services and so forth. Certainly, I will engage with the Deputy and I will take on board some of the suggestions that she made in her contribution, but we also have to examine the possibility that there are no burials in that site at all. What if there is none?

Deputy Ivana Bacik: So why-----

Deputy Holly Cairns: Establish that. Jesus.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: It is my firm belief now that we are lax on crime and lax on the causes of crime. A year ago this month before the recess, I raised the issue of my constituents being attacked willy-nilly by under-18s with no apparent consequences. I am talking about lads going around on scooters, intimidating people, bottles being thrown, stones being thrown, young lads and girls being beaten up. I raised it again in my Private Members' business in September. Although we had a good debate and the Government did not oppose the motion, we have not seen any meaningful actions or consequences. It is happening again. I have had reports again of teenagers and young children getting beaten up and left bloodied by random attacks from teenagers.

Obviously, we have to take a two-pronged approach. We do not want to criminalise young adults and bring them into that system. Where the juvenile liaison has been funded, it has been shown to work. However, there are no short, sharp, shock consequences to deter people from doing it. As I mentioned last year, people could have 13 or 14 offences before they are eventually caught up with. The interaction of the parents is not being looked at. Even with

quad bikes and scooters, confiscation is the number one option at the moment and then the threat perhaps of a juvenile liaison officer, JLO, caution and maybe Tusla being involved with the family. That does not scare any parents who might have bought these items for their kids. We need to remember that it is parents buying the scooters and quad bikes, not the kids going out and getting them.

I am talking about the wider issue of kids who do not have adequate parental oversight and who are going out and attacking people. There is no law of reasonable defence in this country. A person who is retreating might be able to stop someone, but what if someone is throwing stones at them?

A couple of constituents have reported to me of where three or four people have thrown stones at them, including at a mother with a buggy and a man with her. What is that man supposed to do in that case? If it is two women, how are they supposed to defend themselves in a situation like that? They cannot stop the people throwing stones because it has to be a criminal offence worthy of five years' imprisonment before you can get away with that defence argument. We need more tools to help people defend themselves when they are being attacked.

Equally, going back to what I said last year, we need meaningful consequences. If you do X, Y and Z, it is dealt with locally and there are consequences for the children in terms of curfews and withdrawal of certain privileges and for the parents in terms of fines. That is what we need because, right now, the system is not working; it remains as broken as it was last year.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. The Government is not lax on crime and has allocated significant additional resources this year and last year, and will continue to do so.

Fundamentally, we are recruiting more gardaí which is important. In 2026, we funded the recruitment of a further 1,000 new gardaí and 200 more Garda staff and additional Garda reserve this year. At the end of April, the overall Garda workforce was over 18,000, particularly in the Dublin metropolitan region, where it was close to 4,000 gardaí assigned on the same date. We have equipped gardaí in that three divisions are now the site of proof of concept for body-worn cameras and the trial of deployment of conductive energy devices, CEDs, to train front-line gardaí. We are continuing to work on the resourcing of An Garda Síochána.

We also now have youth diversion programmes in every part of the country. Children must engage with youth diversion programmes or else they will be dealt with through the criminal justice system. We need a wider societal approach to this. Young people throwing stones at a woman with a buggy is shocking and appalling behaviour, and parents, families and communities in society also have to take responsibility here. However, there are many positive things happening across society, with many volunteers doing extraordinary work with young people, in sporting clubs and in a variety of social and youth clubs and cultural organisations. All that must be equally affirmed and acknowledged, and we resource and support that.

It is our view that greater visibility of gardaí on the street will deter actions of the kind the Deputy has outlined. Where extra gardaí have been deployed, that has been the experience. Gardaí are also reporting significant progress in respect of certain crimes and criminal activity which also needs to be acknowledged. In certain communities, we need something on the model, which the Minister, Deputy Calleary has now developed in respect of the Department

of community and rural development with Minister of State, Deputy Buttimer. The whole idea of having particular, co-ordinated resources in certain communities will give a broad-based approach, somewhat like the RAPID programme of a previous era, which can deal on multiple fronts with this phenomenon the Deputy has described.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: I have given credit where it is due before with Government initiatives, and the body-worn cameras is one positive response. However, even with the addition of gardaí, the numbers per head of population are still at 2008 levels. People want an Operation Irene all year round, where they have that visible Garda deterrence but they are not actually seeing it. The juvenile resources work; there are many projects around the country doing fantastic work. However, it is about trying to stop kids getting to that stage in the first place. As I said, 13 or 14 offences before they are brought into the system is too many.

I take the Taoiseach's point on the societal approach; there has to be something that will deter and get the parents involved. If they are working, that might be deducting tax, or if they are on social welfare, it is deducting social welfare. Anything that will hit people will make them think twice about the way their kids are behaving. There is obviously deprivation-related issues and parents need support, so we have to take a holistic approach to this. However, as the Taoiseach said, as a society, we are not dealing with it.

The Taoiseach: I take the Deputy's point in respect of multiple offences. We will discuss that further, as well as the Deputy's issue of monetary penalties in respect of people's incomes.

There has been a general reluctance on that front because you could create unintended consequences for others in the family, including other children in the family who are not breaking the law, but I take the Deputy's point more generally that there have to be consequences for crime, particularly where people are committing multiple offences. I know that the Minister for justice, along with other Ministers, will certainly continue to work on that.

An tOrd Gnó - Order of Business

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

Tuesday's business shall be:

- Motion *re* Appointment of Ordinary Member of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission (*without debate and any division claimed shall be taken immediately*)
- Motion *re* Fourteenth Report of the Standing Committee of Selection (*without debate and any division claimed shall be taken immediately*)
- Motion *re* Report of the Committee on Standing Orders and Dáil Reform Establishing Special Committee on Preventing and Responding to Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (*without debate and any division claimed shall be taken immediately*)
- Motion *re* Referral to Joint Committee of proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Planning and Development (Exempted Development (Act of 2000)) Regulations 2026

and Planning and Development (Licensing of Outdoor Events) Regulations 2026 (*without debate and any division claimed shall be taken immediately*)

- Statement of Apology following the publication of the Report of the South East Commission of Investigation (*not to exceed 2 hours and 20 minutes*)

- Domestic Violence Judgments Register Bill 2026 [Seanad] (Second Stage) (to conclude after the first round, not to exceed 1 hour and 52 minutes and any division claimed to be taken immediately prior to Committee Stage on Wednesday)

Tuesday's private members' business shall be the Motion *re* Protecting the Copyright of Irish Artists in the era of Artificial Intelligence, selected by Sinn Féin.

Wednesday's business shall be:

- Motion *re* Proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2022 (Section 9(2)) (Amount of Financial Contribution) Order 2025 (Revocation) Order 2026 (*to be taken immediately following the SOS and to conclude within 1 hour; and any division claimed shall be taken immediately*)

- Domestic Violence Judgments Register Bill 2026 [Seanad] (Committee and remaining Stages) (*to conclude within 1 hour and 30 minutes*)

- Guardianship of Infants and Child Care (Amendment) Bill 2026 (Amendments from the Seanad) (*to conclude within 1 hour*)

- Criminal Law, Civil Law and Defence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026 (Amendments from the Seanad) (*to conclude within 3 hours*)

- Health (Provision of Contraception Prescribing Service in Retail Pharmacy Businesses) Bill 2026 (Committee and remaining Stages) (*to conclude within 30 minutes*)

- Motion *re* Proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income and on Capital) (the Principality of Liechtenstein) Order 2026 (*without debate and any division claimed to be taken immediately*)

- Motion *re* Proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income and Capital Gains) (Sweden) Order 2026 (*without debate and any division claimed to be taken immediately*)

- Motion *re* Proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Planning and Development (Exempted Development (Act of 2000)) Regulations 2026 (*without debate and any division claimed to be taken immediately*)

- Motion *re* Proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Planning and Development (Licensing of Outdoor Events) Regulations 2026 (*without debate and any division claimed to be taken immediately*)

Wednesday's private members' business shall be the Motion *re* Digital Divide and Back to School Costs, selected by Labour Party.

Thursday's business shall be:

- Statements on the Fiscal Implications of a United Ireland (*to conclude within 3 hours and 32 minutes*)

Thursday evening business shall be the Waste Management (Single Household Waste Collection Service) Bill 2026 (Second Stage), sponsored by Deputy Marie Sherlock.

Proposed Arrangements for this week's business:

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

1. notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders:

(a) the time allocated to Government business shall be extended in accordance with the arrangements for that business and the Dáil may sit later than 10.48 p.m.; and

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

(c) the Order of the Dáil of 7th July 2026 referring the Motion re Referral to Joint Committee of proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Planning and Development (Exempted Development (Act of 2000)) Regulations 2026 and Planning and Development (Licensing of Outdoor Events) Regulations 2026 is hereby discharged

2. the proceedings on the Motion *re* Appointment of Ordinary Member of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission shall be taken without debate and any division claimed to be taken immediately;

3. the proceedings on the Motion *re* Fourteenth Report of the Standing Committee of Selection shall be taken without debate and any division claimed to be taken immediately;

4. the proceedings on the Motion *re* Report of the Committee on Standing Orders and Dáil Reform Establishing Special Committee on Preventing and Responding to Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence shall be taken without debate and any division claimed to be taken immediately;

5. the revised Motion *re* Referral to Joint Committee of proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Planning and Development (Exempted Development (Act of 2000)) Regulations 2026 and Planning and Development (Licensing of Outdoor Events) Regulations 2026 shall be taken without debate and any division claimed thereon shall be taken immediately;

6. the Statements of Apology following the publication of the Report of the South East Commission of Investigation shall not exceed 2 hours and 20 minutes and the following arrangements shall apply:

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

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

(c) members may share time; and

	Gov	SF	SD	Gov	SF
--	-----	----	----	-----	----

Mins	30	15	10	8	3
	Lab	Gov	SF	IPTG	Gov
Mins	10	8	3	9	7
	SF	ITG	Gov	SF	OM
Mins	3	9	7	3	5
Total: 2 hours 10 mins					

7. the proceedings on the Domestic Violence Judgments Register Bill 2026 Second Stage shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at the end of the first speaking round and the following arrangements shall apply:

(a) the first-round speeches, not including the Ministerial response, shall be in accordance with the table below (to be read across);

(b) on conclusion of the first speaking round, or where speeches conclude before the 1 hour and 42 minutes have elapsed and no other member is offering, a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a speech in reply which shall not exceed 10 minutes, whereupon proceedings shall be brought to a conclusion; Provided that any division claimed on the Second Stage proceedings shall be taken immediately prior to Committee Stage on Wednesday, 15 July 2026; and

(c) members may share time;

	Gov	SF	SD	Gov	SF
Mins	10	10	10	6	2
	Lab	Gov	SF	IPTG	Gov
Mins	10	6	2	10	6
	SF	ITG	Gov	SF	OM
Mins	2	10	6	2	10
Total: 1 hour 42 mins					

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

1. notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders:

(a) the time allotted for Government Business shall be extended in accordance with the arrangements for that business and the Dáil may sit later than 9.30 p.m.;

(b) Oral Questions to the Taoiseach pursuant to Standing Order 47(1) which were to be taken on Tuesday, shall be taken after Questions on Policy or Promised Legislation;

(c) the SOS pursuant to Standing Order 25(1) shall be taken immediately following Taoiseach's Oral Parliamentary Questions, which shall be taken at the time when the SOS would normally be taken;

(d) the Motion *re* Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2022 (Section 9(2)) (Amount of Financial Contribution Order 2025 (Revocation) Order 2026, shall be taken immediately following the SOS; and

(e) the weekly division time shall be taken on the conclusion of proceedings on any motions without debate;

2. the proceedings on the Motion *re* Proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2022 (Section 9(2)) (Amount of Financial Contribution) Order 2025 (Revocation) Order 2026 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 60 minutes and the following arrangements shall apply:

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

- opening speech by a Minister or Minister of State – 10 minutes;
- speeches by representatives of Sinn Féin, Social Democrats, the Labour Party, Independent and Parties Technical Group, and Independent Technical Group – 7.5 minutes per party or group;
- speeches by Other Members – 7.5 minutes in total; and
- a speech in response by the Minister – 5 minutes; and

(b) members may share time;

3. the proceedings on Domestic Violence Judgments Register Bill 2026 Committee and remaining Stages shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 90 minutes by one question, which shall be put from the Chair, and which shall, in relation to amendments, include only those set down or accepted by the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration;

4. the proceedings on the Guardianship of Infants and Child Care (Amendment) Bill 2026 amendments from the Seanad shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 1 hour, and any amendments from the Seanad not disposed of shall be decided by one question which shall be put from the Chair, and which shall, in relation to amendments to the Seanad amendments, include only those set down or accepted by the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration;

5. the proceedings on the Criminal Law, Civil Law and Defence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026 amendments from the Seanad shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 3 hours, and any amendments from the Seanad not disposed of shall be decided by one question which shall be put from the Chair, and which shall, in relation to amendments to the Seanad amendments, include only those set down or accepted by the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration;

6. the proceedings on Health (Provision of Contraception Prescribing Service in Retail Pharmacy Businesses) Bill 2026 Committee and remaining Stages shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 30 minutes by one question which shall be put from the Chair, and which shall, in relation to amendments, include only those set down or accepted by the Minister for Health;

7. the proceedings on the Motion *re* Proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income and on Capital) (the Principality of Liechtenstein) Order 2026 shall be taken without debate and any division claimed thereon shall be taken immediately;

8. the proceedings on the Motion *re* Proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income and Capital Gains) (Sweden) Order 2026 shall be taken without debate and any division claimed thereon shall be taken immediately;

9. the proceedings on the Motion *re* Proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Planning and Development (Exempted Development (Act of 2000)) Regulations 2026 shall be taken without debate and any division claimed thereon shall be taken immediately; and

10. the proceedings on the Motion *re* Proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Planning and Development (Licensing of Outdoor Events) Regulations 2026 shall be taken without debate and any division claimed thereon shall be taken immediately.

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

1. notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders:

(a) topical issues may be taken earlier than 7.24 p.m. with consequential effect on the commencement time for Second Stage of the Waste Management (Single Household Waste Collection Service) Bill 2026, and on the time for the adjournment of the Dáil; and

(b) the Dáil on its rising shall adjourn until 2 p.m. on Wednesday, 16th September, 2026; and

2. the Statements on the Fiscal Implications of a United Ireland shall not exceed 3 hours and 32 minutes and the following arrangements shall apply:

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

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

(c) members may share time.

	Gov	SF	SD	Gov	SF
Mins	35	25	15	15	5
	Lab	Gov	SF	IPTG	Gov
Mins	15	15	5	12	15
	SF	ITG	Gov	SF	OM
Mins	5	12	15	5	8
Total: 3 hours 22 mins					

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Not agreed. I was horrified by the decision of An Coimisiún Pleanála on Thursday, but if I was horrified, I can only imagine the level of distress, trauma and anger that survivors and their relatives felt. There is an enormous appetite to debate this. It is important that we have a debate. The Taoiseach has talked about and defended the independence of An Coimisiún Pleanála. That is not disputed. The reality is that the State still retains the ability to acquire the site voluntarily or through compulsory purchase order. It is

important that we have a debate. I am asking for statements and questions and answers on Bessborough.

Deputy Rory Hearne: The Government is ramming through planning legislation this week that will exempt sheds out the back without proper scrutiny. It is satisfied with handing our young people to vulture landlords. The Government is now offering a future of renting a shed out the back with no rights whatsoever. Threshold has requested that the legislation be paused. It is seriously concerned that the Government will create a new class of renters, insecure without proper regulations. Will the Government pause this legislation, not bring it forward, and give time for proper scrutiny, or is it afraid of real scrutiny and captured by lobbyists?

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Sheehan. Thirty seconds.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: Do not worry. We need to have a debate this week before the House rises about the imminent report on Aughinish Alumina. There are up to 2,000 direct and indirect jobs at stake in Limerick. We cannot have a situation where the State is inadvertently complicit in the export of alumina to Russia. Where there is a will, there is a way.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: As somebody who was born in a mother and baby home, I find it pretty despicable that the Government has not stated its intention to stop a private, profit-driven developer from building on a site where the mother and baby home commission has said there are likely burials and where 19 mothers and 859 infants remain missing. The Government can overcome the obstacles if it wants to. It must demand that the site be taken into public ownership.

Deputy Michael Collins: Emma O'Shea and others living with Friedreich's ataxia are in the Public Gallery and outside the gates of Leinster House for a peaceful protest. Can we have a debate on the current status of Skyclarys reimbursement and will these sufferers have positive news?

Deputy Mary Butler: As Deputies know, at the Business Committee last Thursday morning at 11 a.m., which the Ceann Comhairle chaired, two requests were made. One related to statements on the fiscal implications of a united Ireland. A request was made for additional time, and that was facilitated. Requests were also made for statements on Bessborough. I checked with the Minister. She is away on Government duty and it is not possible to have those statements this week. We have a huge amount of legislation to get through this week before the recess. It is really important, so the Order of Business stands.

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

The Dáil divided: Tá, 79; Níl, 71; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Aird, William.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Boland, Grace.	Bennett, Cathy.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Shay.	Brady, John.	

Brophy, Colm.	Buckley, Pat.	
Browne, James.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Burke, Colm.	Cairns, Holly.	
Burke, Peter.	Carthy, Matt.	
Butler, Mary.	Collins, Michael.	
Butterly, Paula.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	
Cahill, Michael.	Crowe, Seán.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Cullinane, David.	
Calleary, Dara.	Cummins, Jen.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Daly, Pa.	
Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.	Devine, Máire.	
Chambers, Jack.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Clendennen, John.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Collins, Niall.	Ennis, Daniel.	
Connolly, John.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Cooney, Joe.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gannon, Gary.	
Cummins, John.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Currie, Emer.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Daly, Martin.	Gould, Thomas.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Graves, Ann.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dillon, Alan.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Dolan, Albert.	Healy, Seamus.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Hearne, Rory.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kelly, Alan.	
Fleming, Sean.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Geoghegan, James.	Kenny, Martin.	
Harkin, Marian.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	Lawless, Paul.	
Higgins, Emer.	Lawlor, George.	
Keogh, Keira.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Kyne, Seán.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Lahart, John.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Lawless, James.	McGuinness, Conor D.	
Lowry, Michael.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Martin, Micheál.	Murphy, Paul.	
Maxwell, David.	Mythen, Johnny.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	Nash, Ged.	
McCarthy, Noel.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
McCormack, Tony.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McGreehan, Erin.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McGuinness, John.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	

Moynihan, Aindrias.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Moynihan, Michael.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
Moynihan, Shane.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Murphy, Michael.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Ó Murchú, Ruairí.	
Neville, Joe.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Quaide, Liam.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Quinlivan, Maurice.	
O'Connor, James.	Rice, Pádraig.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Sheehan, Conor.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Sherlock, Marie.	
O'Shea, John Paul.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Sullivan, Christopher.	Tóibín, Peadar.	
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	Wall, Mark.	
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	Ward, Charles.	
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.	Ward, Mark.	
Ó Muirí, Naoise.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Richard Boyd Barrett.

Question declared carried.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: People living with Friedreich's ataxia are once again outside the gates of the Dáil. They are, as the Taoiseach knows, waiting and waiting for confirmation that they will have access to Skylarys, a drug that has the potential to be life-transforming for them. In the absence of it, however, far too many of them see disimprovement in their physical experience, and their symptoms and conditions are accelerating. We have a number of them in the Public Gallery. I acknowledge David, Oisín, Emma, Cherie, Joe, Erica and Isabella. Emily Felix, whose specific case I raised with the Taoiseach a couple of weeks ago, is outside, at the gates.

3 o'clock

We need a decision from the HSE on access to this drug. I raised it with the Taoiseach last month. It was not on the HSE committee agenda. We need it to be on the agenda-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: -----and we need a positive decision for these people before we rise for the summer.

An Ceann Comhairle: We stick to our time, Deputy, and that is that.

The Taoiseach: I think all of us have met with families and young people who have Friedreich's ataxia as a condition and who are eagerly awaiting the outcome of the drug approval process, and there is a process. It is science led, primarily. It is not politically led, primarily. We had an outcome at the last meeting in respect of another drug. All of us want a positive outcome in terms of the deliberations that are ongoing but I think we need to be mindful of the fact, and I mean this is in the best of ways, that we have to allow the meetings to happen and people to take decisions, and then-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: They are waiting two years.

The Taoiseach: They are not waiting two years specifically. I am not going into the details. It then has to move on-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: It is 700 days.

An Ceann Comhairle: Taoiseach, time is up.

The Taoiseach: It then has to move on to the senior clinical team in the HSE-----

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

The Taoiseach: -----and we want the right outcome here. I just make that point.

Deputy Daniel Ennis: On Saturday night I witnessed a pack of eight scramblers and motorbikes taking over Dublin city centre. I went to Store Street police station because I saw the lack of Garda presence. This was going on for hours. The garda on the desk told me they had not got the resources to deal with this on a Saturday night in Dublin city centre, the capital of our country. One of those scramblers narrowly missed crashing into me. I do not know how he did not. He lost control after going up on a wheely. I thought that would be the end of it but they continued for hours after that, moving from street to street from O'Connell Street, Parnell Street, Portland Row, Sean McDermott Street and the North Strand road. I raised this with the Taoiseach two weeks ago, after a kid with additional needs, Jayden Deans, was knocked down at the Five Lamps, a stone's throw from O'Connell Street. When are we going to see emergency and immediate action on this? When are we going to give the gardaí the resources and protections they need to address this? How many people are going to be seriously injured or killed like poor Grace?

The Taoiseach: The Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Daniel Ennis: We need action, and we need action now.

The Taoiseach: Many Deputies in the House have raised this issue long before two weeks ago. Deputy McAuliffe and others have been active on this front. Laws have been passed, additional gardaí have been recruited and enormous resources are being allocated to An Garda Síochána.

Deputy Daniel Ennis: It is not enough.

The Taoiseach: I do not think it is a good enough response.

Deputy Daniel Ennis: It does not happen in his community.

The Taoiseach: Will the Deputy let me answer the question? I will make a point. It is not a good enough response. If someone goes to a Garda station and is told they are not going anything about it because they do not have resources, I do not think that is an adequate response. It just should not be thrown out-----

Deputy Daniel Ennis: Are they nearly crashing into him in his private car? I do not think so.

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

The Taoiseach: I am simply saying that it is not an adequate response.

Deputy Daniel Ennis: It is not good enough.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, please. The direction of the Chair is final.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: A deepening crisis is developing in the criminal justice system. More cases face delays due to the absence of solicitors. More solicitors are resigning from the criminal legal aid panel. This is a mess of the Government's own making. The justice Minister needs to intervene to end the crisis arising from the way in which he has introduced criminal legal aid fees' reforms. He should release the data on the reasons for adjournments, and he should engage urgently in dialogue with the Law Society to resolve this. The Minister said yesterday that he reserves the right to make, in his words, tweaks to his reforms. In one obvious tweak, he could look at section 32 of his SI 303 of 2026, which specifies that the fee will be payable upon the issuing of the final order by the court concerned. It might be possible to negotiate to change it to put in an interim payment method. There must be a sensible way to resolve this. The Taoiseach needs to get the justice Minister to engage to resolve this dispute before any more criminal cases are impacted-----

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

The Taoiseach: I am sure the Deputy will agree that for a long time we have been seeking to reform the criminal justice system. There have been many calls for the elimination of inefficiencies. The objective of these reforms is to make the system more effective and efficient. The Minister has introduced a fee of €520 for District Court criminal cases under the criminal legal aid scheme. This figure represents the current fee paid for five appearances in the District Court, plus an 8% increase. The Deputy has said there should be a sensible resolution of this but there has to be reform. We cannot just keep doing the same old thing. In some cases, you can have up to 15 appearances where people are being paid for every separate appearance. That is not on either.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: I am not disputing that.

The Taoiseach: I note the Opposition keeps saying they are for reforming but there comes a time when the Opposition seems to only respond and be reactive in support of every campaign group that develops on any particular issue.

Governments will ruffle feathers from time to time as they bid to bring in reform. The Minister has engaged with the Law Society and will continue to engage with it.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: St. Joseph's Centre in Shankill is the largest care home dedicated solely to dementia care in the country. SIPTU members feel compelled to take industrial action tomorrow because of the failure of St. John of God's to recognise the work and duties that they do. They are employed at a domestic grade, but, in reality, they do jobs way beyond that. They feed people, drive people around and do care duties, but St. John of God's is refusing to acknowledge that in terms of their grading and their pay structure. Nothing was offered when the case went to the Workplace Relations Commission, so the workers feel compelled to take industrial action tomorrow. Many of them have been working there for ten, 15 or 20 years. One person has been there for 37 years. These workers deserve to be recognised for the duties they do. Will the Taoiseach intervene with St. John of God's so they do not have to continue with their justified industrial action?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising an important issue. Those around me are saying it is an excellent centre that provides great care. The industrial relations machinery should be used.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It is not working. It has been done.

The Taoiseach: St. John of God's should engage with the industrial relations machinery to resolve this issue. That is the most effective way of doing it.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It has been done.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: It has rained for 77 days across Ireland so far this year. At the start of the year, there were 54 consecutive days of rain. We have been blessed with a couple of weeks of fine weather, but already we have a six-week hosepipe ban in a number of counties. There are towns and villages in my county that have not had a proper water supply for weeks.

Uisce Éireann is spending €250,000 a year to tanker water to Ballivor. The local school had to close as a result of not having a supply of water. Uisce Éireann was fined €20 million for not reaching its targets in terms of fixing the 36% of water supplies that are leaking from the pipes. It has admitted that it will take until 2050 to fill the gaps that are blocking the building of homes in this country. Even in developing countries, it is government's responsibility to keep water in the taps. The Government here is failing in that regard. Will it commit to fixing Uisce Éireann?

The Taoiseach: On the hosepipe ban, there are certain precautions the State and Irish Water should take in light of the unprecedented heat that we have experienced this summer, particularly in the past number of weeks. That would make sense. The hot weather could continue. We have seen what has happened across Europe and the horrific consequences for communities in Spain, France and elsewhere. We have also seen the excess deaths that have occurred on the Continent because of excessive heat. We do need to be cautious in respect of water. That said, I do think we can do far more to conserve water when it is raining. All of us can. I would argue that the amount of rainfall amounts are increasing in volume. We need to capture that water, and conserve and preserve it-----

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Uisce Éireann-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Malcolm Byrne.

The Taoiseach: We have worked very hard to improve and enhance Uisce Éireann.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach. The time is up.

The Taoiseach: We have allocated huge resources to it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Time is time.

Deputy Malcolm Byrne: While we have a very strong economy and, in overall terms, full employment, I am concerned about the fact that youth unemployment has now hit a rate of 10.8%. That is in the region of 37,000 young people. We are also seeing a situation now where graduate unemployment is higher than the national unemployment rate. Some of this is obviously because there is reduced hiring in consumer-facing sectors. There is a concern about ensuring that work pays, but we are living in a time where we are seeing more access to education and training than before. It is a concern that if young people feel they are alienated from society because they do not have employment opportunities, it could have long-term repercussions. What approach is the Government taking to tackling this issue? I know it is not just confined to Ireland, but it is something that the Government needs to address.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. Youth unemployment is a seasonal and volatile issue.

One of the areas we need to examine more closely is the cost involved for SMEs generally and whether young people are being taken on, even on a part-time. There has been a cumulative increase in costs over quite a while. We will do everything we can to support young people's progression into employment. In June, the youth unemployment rate was 10.8%, up from 9.8% in May and down from 11.6% in June of last year. It is always traditionally higher than the overall unemployment rate. We have to keep an eye on the graduate unemployment issue as well. There are changes occurring. It was interesting yesterday to hear about the additional €5 billion investment by Intel. The company is putting that down to AI having a huge impact on the semiconductor sector. There will be gains and potential reductions as well in various sectors of the economy.

Deputy Joe Neville: With the pyrite mediation scheme closing in just four months' time, on 30 November, some people in my constituency have real concerns. Yesterday, I met two constituents who highlighted the fact that their neighbours had been impacted by pyrite in the past and they are concerned about how it might impact them in future. With the deadline looming, they feel the screw is being turned and that they might at risk in future. The scope of the scheme has been widened, which is a real positive. At the same time, however, what supports or transparency can the Government provide to ensure that these constituents will not be left in limbo when the scheme closes in November?

The Taoiseach: That scheme has been running for a long time. I will revert to the Minister for housing on the matter and come back to the Deputy with a more detailed reply. Schemes cannot go on forever, and there are limits to what the State can do on an ongoing basis. I will come back to Deputy Neville on the matter.

Deputy Martin Kenny: As the Taoiseach is aware, for many years people with mental health issues have been attending emergency departments in our hospitals. Many of them get very poor outcomes. They experience long delays and end up on trolleys. Sometimes they are referred for short-term stays or to community services, which offer little or no service. Recently, the Government has decided to put special mental health nursing teams in place in a number of hospitals. That is very welcome. However, a lot of the hospitals have been left out, including Sligo hospital in the north west, where large numbers of people with mental health issues attend the emergency department on a regular basis. These individuals can be in a very distressed state and do not get an adequate service. When will this be rectified? When will this service be extended to all hospitals, including Sligo University Hospital?

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): As part of budget 2026, €15 million in additional funding was provided for a crisis response. We are starting with ten hospitals, namely nine model 4 hospitals and one model 3 hospital. The model 3 hospital is the Mercy hospital in Cork, which had 1,200 presentations last year. Teams of nurses will be put in place to help non-consultant hospital doctors during out-of-hours periods. What I hope to do, with the help of the Minister, in budget 2027 is expand it to the model 3 hospitals. Sligo is very lucky because it has one of the six crisis resolution teams in the country. It also has the crisis cafe. I visited the hospital recently. It has a state-of-the-art department of psychiatry. My intention is to roll this out to model 3 hospitals next year.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Budget preparations will be intensifying over the summer period. With that in mind, I want to take this opportunity to raise the issue of stamp duty and first-time buyers. As the Taoiseach knows, first-time buyers have to pay 1% in stamp duty when they are purchasing a new or second-hand home. This is unfair and unjustifiable, and I ask that it be reviewed. There was waiver in place previously. At a time when house prices are so high and when it is such a challenge for first-time buyers to secure home ownership, we should not be charging them extra in the form of stamp duty. I ask the Taoiseach to please take up this matter in preparation for budget 2027.

The Taoiseach: I thank Deputy McGrath for raising this matter. In fairness, he has raised it on a consistent basis. I understand the motivation behind it. Obviously, we undertook tax measures last year in respect of housing. We are anxious that the market has a certain solidity and certainty about it and that we maintain momentum in terms of housebuilding. I have taken note of the Deputy's advocacy.

Deputy Colm Burke: There has been a substantial delay in issuing Irish residency permit, IRP, cards. Quite a number of my constituents have been let go from employment because they did not get their cards within the 12-week period. I know substantial changes have been made in the past few days, but the word is still not getting out to employers about their being able to take back employees who were let go two or three weeks ago and who now have no income. One person with whom I am familiar started the process in January and has still not got his IRP card. I ask that a clear message be sent to employers that they can take these people back until 31 August. Hopefully, the IRP card issue will have been resolved by then.

The Taoiseach: The Minister is aware of the issue. There are moves afoot to accelerate the process as quickly as possible. Deputy Burke's general point that employers may still employ people is worth making. I will contact the Minister for enterprise in terms of a communication campaign.

Deputy Colm Burke: There needs to be clarification to employers.

The Taoiseach: I thought the Deputy said communication.

Deputy James Geoghegan: In 21 of the 27 EU member states, there are cities that charge a visitor accommodation levy. Dublin is an outlier because we do not do that. In Dublin right now, we have the highest performing hotel market in Europe, which is a good thing and which demonstrates the strength of our tourism industry. The Dublin city task force is already making great progress and has acquired the Carlton site. The long-term funding of Dublin city could be supported by the introduction of a modest tourist accommodation levy. The Dublin city task force sits in the Taoiseach's Department, and there is an oversight committee. What can he tell us about the progress that has been made in looking at this issue and with regard to the prospect of local authorities such as Dublin City Council being given the capacity to raise a tourist accommodation levy?

The Taoiseach: This is a hot topic at the moment. Deputy McAuliffe of my party presented a paper on it recently. My understanding is that one route is that it will be a matter for local authorities in the first instance. In other words, we would enable local authorities to raise this tax if they wish or if they feel it is something they want to do. There is a lot of merit in it. In major cities like Dublin, it would provide significant revenue to the city council to allow it to deal with a lot of issues in its jurisdiction. Dublin and other cities may wish to avail of raising this levy and may need to do so.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: I am sure the Taoiseach will join me in welcoming Christy Hussey and Conor Burke to the Public Gallery. Since this morning, a 15-year-old child has been sitting in protest outside the gates of Leinster House. Cara Darmody is highlighting the fact that the State breaking its own law. I refer to the law which states children's needs must be assessed within six months. The law has been broken for 20 years. On the Taoiseach's watch, the number of children involved has gone from 15,000 to 22,000 children. How can people who write the laws of this country in this House break them outside the gates? The Taoiseach has accused the recent fuel protesters, the Irish men and Irish women fighting for their livelihoods, of committing national sabotage. Surely it is sabotage to have 22,000 children waiting for assessments of need. Their education, their future and their rights are being sabotaged. How can the lawmakers in the House be lawbreakers?

The Taoiseach: The Government is taking very strong action on disability generally. Some €600 million extra was allocated in the most recent budget and there have been major increases in expenditure on education. The general scheme of the disability (amendment) Bill 2026 will be published shortly. That deals with the assessment of need process. The proposed amendments will make that process more child-centred, enabling proportionate assessments with more intensive clinical input only where required. Alongside those legislative changes, a programme of operational and non-legislative reforms is being implemented, including: a new single point of access; a dedicated autism diagnostic assessment panel; the launch of a new autism assessment intervention protocol in May; the removal of the requirement for a professional report to access special classes and school placements; the introduction of 11 new in-reach clinical teams to provide additional clinical guidance and support to assessment staff; and the roll-out of the education therapy service across 45 special schools, with plans to roll out to all schools. The focus is on early identification of need and making sure that children get access to therapy services in the first instance. That is the direction of travel.

Deputy Claire Kerrane: For carers and the loved ones they care for, respite is really important. It should not be beyond us to ensure that respite is guaranteed and consistent rather than having a situation where service providers go year to year looking at lists of people in terms of who they can and cannot give respite to due to funding implications. In County Roscommon alone, we have 120 people on waiting list for day and overnight respite. Ahead of the budget, I request that respite be looked at.

It is not only about the break for the loved one and the carer but should avoid the need for long-term residential care sooner than perhaps would otherwise be the case. I ask, therefore, that respite would be looked at and perhaps also on a more multi-annual basis in terms of funding.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising the issue and I agree that respite needs to be enhanced. In the last budget, an extra €600 million was given to disability services, which has at least helped to consolidate a lot of the section 38 providers and providers more generally. The Minister for housing has met with the Minister for disability. They have agreed a protocol that local authorities now have to prioritise people with disabilities for housing, that a quota of all social housing would be reserved for people with disabilities and that they would have a priority on housing lists so that from respite to residential, we will see a far more proactive approach. I agree with the Deputy on that.

Deputy John Lahart: I thought we had left these days behind us because we have made huge strides in the provision of affordable childcare under this Government. In my constituency, however, this progress is being seriously jeopardised by the fact that some providers are being forced to withdraw from the scheme because of the unviability of their businesses. If no alternative providers are available locally and when a provider withdraws from core funding, parents are then left with the equivalent of a second mortgage cost for their childcare when a provider withdraws from the core funding system. Providers are saying they are withdrawing and maintaining they cannot cope with the increased costs in food, energy and wages. I know the Taoiseach will agree with me that when it comes to the cost of childcare and its affordability, equality must mean equality. What steps can the Government commit to taking in addressing this issue?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising the issue. There has been an increase in funding and so forth, as well as new funding to help services meet the fee management conditions attached to core funding. Most services will see their core funding rise to help to maintain the fee freeze. However, about 10% will be required to reduce their fees. I do not know whether this is the case in the specific experience the Deputy has spoken of but I will raise this issue with the Minister for children and disability. We are anxious to fulfil the Government programme in terms of reducing the costs of childcare very significantly, and we are going to take action in the forthcoming budget to further reduce the cost of childcare for families. The Deputy's issue is more one of maintaining people within the core funding system and what happens if certain providers pull out.

Deputy Pa Daly: In the aftermath of the violent death of Jamey Carney in Kerry last week, and while I wish to express my sympathy to her family, especially to her daughter, and compliment the community in Killarney that rallied around her and the services there too, we have to acknowledge that violence against women is a crisis and mostly perpetuated by men from all races, cultures and ethnicities and all religions and none. I saw this when I worked in the courts for many years. However, I was disgusted last week to see practically unregulated and unmonitored social media content and abuse directed towards her, even on her own social media platforms.

The Taoiseach: Who was this directed at?

Deputy Pa Daly: It was at her, even on her own social media platforms. Has the Taoiseach any comment to make on this being allowed to happen?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising the appalling and horrific murder of Jamey Carney. It does speak to a very significant crisis in our modern-day society where such violence against women is excessive. I think the Minister for Health, Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill, articulated this in plain language last week. This is something we will again be considering in Government, notwithstanding all the measures that have been taken, legislative and so on, and the establishment of Cuan.

This has been compounded and exacerbated by the filthy and horrific material that the Deputy has described on social media. The social media platforms have obligations here and should act very quickly to withdraw such material. It is unacceptable and there has to be a zero-tolerance approach to that type of social media content. One can only imagine the suffering that family is going through, and then they have had to experience this afterwards. I thank the Deputy for raising this issue.

**Appointment of Ordinary Member of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission:
Motion**

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

That Dáil Éireann, in accordance with section 8(3)(a) of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Act 2003, as amended, appoints Deputy Ged Nash to be an ordinary member of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission in place of Deputy Jennifer Whitmore who has resigned her office in accordance with the aforementioned section 8.

Question put and agreed to.

Fourteenth Report of the Standing Committee of Selection: Motion

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

That Dáil Éireann, pursuant to Standing Order 33, and with effect from 15th July, 2026, approves the Fourteenth Report of the Standing Committee of Selection, copies of which were laid before Dáil Éireann on 9th July, 2026.

Question put and agreed to.

Special Committee on Preventing and Responding to Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: Motion

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

That, in accordance with the recommendation of the Committee on Standing Orders and Dáil Reform pursuant to Standing Order 128(2)(b), a Special Committee on Preventing and Responding to Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence is hereby established, with Orders of Reference as contained in the report of the Committee on Standing Orders and Dáil Reform entitled "*Establishing Special Committee on Preventing and Responding to*

Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence", a copy of which was laid before Dáil Éireann on 9th July, 2026.

Question put and agreed to.

**Planning and Development (Exempted Development (Act of 2000)) Regulations 2026
and Planning and Development (Licensing of Outdoor Events) Regulations 2026:
Referral to Joint Committee**

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

(i) That, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders, the Order of the Dáil of 7th July is hereby discharged.

(ii) That the proposal that Dáil Éireann approves the following Orders in draft:

(I) Planning and Development (Exempted Development (Act of 2000)) Regulations 2026,

Planning and Development (Exempted Development (Act of 2000)) (No. 2) Regulations 2026,

Planning and Development (Exempted Development (Act of 2000)) (No. 3) Regulations 2026,

Planning and Development (Exempted Development (Act of 2000)) (No. 4) Regulations 2026,

Planning and Development (Exempted Development (Act of 2000)) (No. 5) Regulations 2026,

Planning and Development (Exempted Development (Act of 2000)) (No. 6) Regulations 2026, and

Planning and Development (Exempted Development (Act of 2000)) (No. 7) Regulations 2026, and

(II) Planning and Development (Licensing of Outdoor Events) Regulations 2026,

copies of which have been laid in draft form before Dáil Éireann on 2nd July and 14th July, 2026, be referred to the Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage, in accordance with Standing Order 103(5), which, not later than 15th July, 2026, shall send a message to the Dáil in the manner prescribed in Standing Order 110, and Standing Order 109(2) shall accordingly apply.

Question put and agreed to.

**Apology following the publication of the Report of the South East Commission of
Investigation: Statements**

An Ceann Comhairle: I wish to welcome the survivors to the Distinguished Visitors Gallery. Their family and friends and legal representatives are in the Gallery. I thank them all for being here today.

Members applauded.

An Ceann Comhairle: The statement of apology following the publication of the Report of the South East Commission of Investigation now begins. I call the Taoiseach to make a statement under Standing Order 56. The Taoiseach is sharing time with the Tánaiste. They have 15 minutes each.

The Taoiseach: The terrible crimes of Bill Kenneally were those of a predator who, for decades, abused young boys in Waterford city and its surrounding areas. Kenneally was ultimately convicted of some of these appalling sexual crimes. He received total sentences of nearly 19 years and died in prison last month, just over half-way through his term. The report of Mr. Justice Michael White arising from the south east commission of investigation has been presented to the Government and the Oireachtas, and published in full. It makes for harrowing reading. It tells a story of betrayal, manipulation, abuse, failure and pain.

Kenneally's criminal trial concerned the period 1979 to 1990. However, others made statements to the Garda and gave evidence to the commission about allegations of abuse that did not go to trial and that covered the period from 1970 to 1993. As Mr. Justice White records, due to this time span of nearly 25 years, generations of boys were abused and traumatised. During the period of his criminal activity, any young boy who came under his influence was at risk. It has been shown that in late 1987 details of some of his activities became known in Waterford to two senior Garda officers, and some other gardaí, the principal of a secondary school, a retired politician, a senior clergyman, a psychiatrist and to some parents of victims. The contact with the Garda in 1987 did not stop the sexual abuse. Bill Kenneally was not brought to justice until a formal complaint was made by one of his victims, Jason Clancy, in December 2012.

The crimes of Bill Kenneally were cruel and exploitative. As Mr. Justice White records, he was intelligent, manipulative and an expert at grooming children by developing trust and affection but also by using fear. He photographed many of the boys with a Polaroid camera which could instantly develop photographs of them in compromising positions - using these to blackmail the boys into keeping silent. He regularly used restraints on children, and employed alcohol, money and gifts to assist in grooming and in the commission of his awful offences.

One of the tasks that Mr. Justice White was asked to complete was to report on the adequacy or appropriateness of the response from the Garda when the force was first informed in the mid-1980s of Bill Kenneally's activities. The commission heard evidence from retired members of the Garda who were active in 1987 and from those who commenced the successful Garda investigation in 2012.

The commission examined the quality of the Garda investigation in 1987 by applying the standards and guidelines applicable at that time. It is vital to emphasise that the behaviour of Bill Kenneally was common knowledge among many young people in the area. When the parents of one of the victims contacted the Garda in 1987, the likelihood that these allegations

were "only the tip of an iceberg", as Mr. Justice White put it, should have been acknowledged and should have prompted a much more active and committed response. As the judge recounts, when senior gardaí left the victim's home on St. Stephen's Day in 1987, "... they could have been in no doubt that a 14 year old boy ... had been sexually assaulted, that restraint had been used and there was a probability that one other boy had been sexually assaulted ... " and it was possible there was a third young victim. The report makes clear that Bill Kenneally could have been arrested on suspicion of false imprisonment and indecent assault. This would have enabled a search of his residence and his car and it is highly likely that the compromising photos he had taken would have been uncovered but this did not happen. Instead, the victims had to deal with the grim reality of an investigation that was, in the words of this report, "unprofessional, rushed and inappropriate".

It took another 25 years for Bill Kenneally's behaviour to come under serious scrutiny when a Garda investigation commenced in 2012. It was totally improper for senior gardaí to contact relatives of Bill Kenneally, namely his uncles Billy, a former TD, and Monsignor Shine. The commission makes clear that exposure of Bill Kenneally was not an "attractive prospect to them" and they sought to downplay the gravity of his offences through the "smokescreen" of a referral to a psychiatrist. Based on the very clear evidence, Mr. Justice White states that the failure of acting chief superintendent Cashman and to a lesser extent acting superintendent P.J. Hayes after December 1987 to conduct a proper investigation into the activities of Bill Kenneally was a clear and serious dereliction of duty even by the standards of the time in 1987. This has been a major failing by an organ of the State that cannot be downplayed.

No words from Government can make up for the theft of childhood from so many young boys, for the appalling abuse they suffered and the enormous trauma they have experienced in their lives as a result. We must, however, acknowledge the failings that led to these awful outcomes in recognition of the horrific experiences, the bravery of his victims and also to ensure it can never happen again.

As Taoiseach, I apologise unreservedly on behalf of the State to the victims of Bill Kenneally for what was a clear and serious dereliction of duty. Many of those victims whom I have had the honour of meeting on a number of occasions are here today with their families. You waived your anonymity in order to ensure that the heinous crimes of Bill Kenneally were exposed and that other young boys were protected. I want to apologise to those men - Jason Clancy, Paul Walsh, Kevin Keating, Colin Power, Barry Murphy, Simon O'Toole and Gerard Mullane. There were also many other victims of Bill Kenneally who were witnesses before the commission of investigation and wished to remain anonymous. Mr. Justice White records that there were 22 such witnesses. I want to say that we fully understand and respect their wishes and to emphasise that we apologise to each of them. I also regret to say that there are no doubt victims who decided silently and understandably that they did not wish to give evidence about how they were abused. To those unknown men, I also extend a deep and sincere apology. I want to acknowledge all of these victims.

I want to recognise that we would not have this report, we would not have the truth and there would not be this State apology without the remarkable bravery and strength of Kenneally's victims. Their fight to ensure that there was a public inquiry has been fully vindicated. There is a very real public benefit in recording what happened in Waterford. This

report is a warning to all of what can happen when people in positions of authority do not do their job.

Mr. Justice White has also made a serious finding against former Members of this House. The commission addresses the knowledge of Billy Kenneally Snr., who was a former TD when he was informed of the activities of his nephew in 1987. Mr. Justice White also concludes that the subsequent actions of his son, Brendan Kenneally TD, in 2001 at the very least fell substantially below the standards the commission would expect from a TD of Mr. Kenneally's experience. He notes that Brendan Kenneally had one obvious option - to report this matter to the child protection services of the South Eastern Health Board in Waterford and to ask that service to carry out a risk assessment. The actions of three influential relatives - former TD Billy Kenneally Snr., Monsignor Shine and then TD Brendan Kenneally - constituted a failure to bring the matter into the public domain or to report the matter to the relevant statutory agencies; a failure, in short, to protect children.

There is no question about the duty public representatives have to put the safety of others first. I repeat the fact that two TDs, Billy Kenneally Snr. and Brendan Kenneally, failed in that duty to the victims of Bill Kenneally. They failed the victims by putting their own relative first. I am profoundly sorry that two former public representatives from my party so comprehensively failed to defend and protect young children from their nephew and cousin.

If there is any solace to be taken from this harrowing report, it is that Mr. Justice White acknowledges that the change in legislation and services and understanding of child sexual exploitation since 1987 has been profound and the approach of the statutory services has changed beyond recognition. An Garda Síochána now has a more modern and professional approach to dealing with complaints of sexual exploitation of children, including investigation of historical child abuse.

Bitter experience has taught Irish society that sexual exploitation of children can come from all sources. Mr. Justice White's report reminds us of the importance of listening, empathy and engagement when victims of sexual abuse do come forward. Victims may have tried to raise their plight in the past and not been dealt with in a sensitive manner. This burden can weigh heavily upon them and lead to suspicion and mistrust if contact is not sustained once allegations are received. I urge all public officials to be aware of this and strive to keep victims fully informed on an ongoing basis.

Another issue Mr. Justice White asked to be addressed is the absence of a criminal offence of misconduct in public office. He finds that there is no such offence of serious dereliction of duty by a public official which falls short of deliberate perversion of the course of justice. He recommended that this issue be referred to the Law Reform Commission for urgent consideration and this has already been done. Last week, at the request of the Minister for justice, the Attorney General formally referred this issue to the Law Reform Commission. It is entirely proper that public officials are held to the very highest standards and are seen to uphold them. If we fall short, as public officials did so clearly in this case, then we must be held to account and dealt with by exacting laws. Otherwise, trust in the institutions and basic functioning of our State will be undermined. I am also aware that some of the victims of Bill Kenneally have instituted proceedings against An Garda Síochána for its dereliction of duty. I would like to see those and any future proceedings resolved as quickly and as fairly as possible. For those victims who spoke to the commission, including those who wish to remain

anonymous, officials in the Department of justice are considering a means of providing redress outside of the legal process and will engage with victims directly in relation to this process.

Finally, I want to thank Mr. Justice White for producing this thorough and accessible report. The best that an inquiry can do is produce a report that hopefully provides answers. I believe this report does provide answers for the victims of Bill Kenneally and is a testament to their bravery and resilience.

To each of those victims here today or listening from home, I hope that the apology I have issued on behalf of the State reassures you that the State acknowledges the harm that was done to you, the dereliction of duty that contributed to that harm, and our determination to do everything we can to ensure that no other child has to go through what you went through.

Ar deireadh, is drochscéal ar fad é seo. D'fhulaing íospartaigh Bill Kenneally go mór. Rinne sé dochar uafásach. Déanaim mar Thaoiseach comhbhrón gan choinníoll ar son an Stáit le híospartaigh Bill Kenneally. Gan aon dabht, is léir go ndearna an Stát faillí shoiléir agus thromchúiseach ina dhualgas

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Simon Harris): I join the Taoiseach in the State apology to the survivors of the abuser Bill Kenneally. This moment has come about because of their bravery, their tenacity, their motivation to protect others from the horrors they endured, and their willingness to relive the trauma of the horrendous abuse inflicted upon them to ensure that justice was finally done.

I acknowledge the work of Mr. Justice Michael White in bringing this arduous process to a conclusion and the way he went about his work. The commission report is a detailed and thorough assessment of the justified and serious public concern raised by the grievous crimes that were committed. Whether named or unnamed, the extraordinary testimony of witnesses to the commission of investigation was an act of great courage. In their young lives, they were the victims of monstrous evil and their vulnerability was increased by the impunity with which Kenneally perpetrated his atrocities. Too many warning signs were missed. Too many opportunities to intervene were lost. Too many people who should have been protected were instead left vulnerable. The systems of church, State and society that should have safeguarded children failed in their most basic and profound duty and the consequence of that failure was that abuse continued, victims suffered and justice was delayed for far too long. Regardless of any standards of the time, they were children who should have been protected, not abandoned to depravity and despair.

In 1985, a 14-year-old boy walked all alone into Waterford Garda station and reported he had been abused by Kenneally. The garda spoke to him at the counter and told him he needed to have a parent present, as he was too young. The garda did not speak to him in private, did not attempt to contact his parents, did not even offer to bring him home. Despite Kenneally being named as an abuser in a Garda station, no effort was made to investigate.

The commission's report tells us that 11 of the 25 adult complainants were being abused in 1985. I recognise that includes survivors who are with us in Dáil Éireann today. This underlines the grave significance of this missed opportunity, which was, most regrettably, a repeated pattern. The report tells us that the pattern of activity by Kenneally was becoming much more noticeable from 1985 on, yet he was not brought to justice prior to a formal

complaint by Jason Clancy in November 2012, who was the first incredibly brave victim to come forward. I have heard Jason tell a story about a photograph of his under-11 soccer team. In this picture are 13 boys from all over Waterford who are only connected by playing soccer for Bohemians Football Club. Six of them were abused by Kenneally. That simple innocent photograph demonstrates just how prolific the activities of this abuser were, while multiple systems failed to protect children and bring him to justice.

Even after Kenneally made admissions of his terrible crimes, he was not brought to justice. He was allowed to continue to abuse children. The truth emerged, not because systems worked as they should have, but because survivors refused to give up. Faced with disbelief, silence, intimidation and enormous personal trauma, they persisted. They carried a burden that never should have been theirs to carry and the apology today is simply a testament to their courage, resilience and determination. They forced institutions to confront uncomfortable truths and ensured that future generations would know what happened. This led to the report the Minister for justice published last month, which has shone a light on the clear and serious dereliction of duty that allowed the prolonged grooming and abuse of many boys, on many occasions, in many locations with unimaginable levels of depravity. The commission's words are stark. It said:

During the period of his activity any young boy who came under his influence was at risk.

As reflected in the sentence of 18 years and eight months imposed, and upheld on appeal, these were serious offences which have had a lifelong impact on the victims and their families.

His crimes were cruel and exploitative. He was intelligent and manipulative and an expert at grooming children by developing trust and affection but also using fear.... He used alcohol, money and gifts to assist in grooming and in the commission of the offences. Many of these boys had never consumed alcohol before being introduced to it by Bill Kenneally.

The harrowing victim impact statements republished in the commission report clearly communicate the pain and suffering of the abuse as it happened and its lasting effects throughout the later lives of the survivors. The words of Judge Eugene O'Kelly at the sentencing hearing in 2016 are striking.

The abuse has had a profound and long-lasting effect on all of you. Some of you have suffered and some continue to suffer from alcohol dependency and other addictions. Many of you have disclosed depression and one has contemplated suicide. Family life and relationships have suffered, education and consequently advancement in life has been hampered.... All of you have been made to suffer from feelings of fear, shame and guilt, emotions that none of you should have had to endure. You have all been robbed of the innocence of a carefree adolescence for no better reason than to satisfy a paedophile predator's actions.

I know through those victim impact statements, and some of your public comments, the support of loved ones through all the consequences of the abuse you suffered has been of enormous importance to you and were acts of great love. This is their day, too.

The commission report illustrates that the Irish State, through its laws, services for children, sex education and awareness, and the operation and insight of its front-line services, such as

An Garda Síochána and health boards, were historically blind to sexual abuse operating beneath the surface. While there may not have been outright collusion, this at the very least institutional blind eye, combined with those who shielded and covered up for paedophiles, allowed abuse to persist in the shadows. The report tells us that children were silenced by the shame of it, but also by their inability to articulate the horrible things that were happening to them. On occasions when it was articulated, people refused to listen.

From an analysis of the complaints made to An Garda Síochána from 2012 on, Kenneally's targeting of young boys for abuse was intense during the period from 1978 to 1987. This involved activity that was observable. By late 1987, many people, including those in responsible positions, were aware that he had sexually abused children, but nothing appropriate was done in all of that time. When a complaint was made by the father of a victim in 1987, the most serious of information was now in the possession of the Garda, but a decision was made that Kenneally would be given a warning and referred for psychiatric treatment or counselling. Many survivors feel this was a moment of further empowerment and led to a sense of invincibility. The commission report identifies a litany of deficiencies that arose from this approach, and this is the clear and serious dereliction of duty that occurred and cannot be explained away by the passage of time or the standards of the time.

How much pain and suffering might have been avoided had justice been served when it should have been? The commission report observes that Irish society, from bitter experience, now knows that sexual exploitation of children can come from all sources. We owe it to children to maintain our vigilance and these words must ring in our ears always. I know that for all the survivors of Kenneally, in all that they have endured in their long fight for justice, this would be among their greatest wishes.

There is a powerful symbolism in the fact that those who were once vulnerable young boys in Waterford, failed by the State and its institutions, are here today to hear the State acknowledge its failures.

Children who were abandoned by systems that should have protected them now stand with dignity and strength at the heart of our national Parliament. Your presence is a reminder not only of the wrongs that were done, but of the extraordinary resilience of those who endured them. Today, it is certainly not the institutions that command our respect; it is the survivors. Their courage has brought us to this moment. Their voices have ensured that the truth can no longer be ignored or hidden. For all that you suffered at the hands of your brutal abuser, for all the years he was not brought to justice and for all that was done to impede and delay that justice, we are truly sorry. Like the commission, we hope this apology can bring some peace of mind. Today, I join with others in saluting your courage and resilience.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: "It has impacted every part of our lives. Personal lives, work, relationships, mental health, every single part of our lives. It's always there". Those are the words of Colin Power, one of the survivors of Bill Kenneally. I will begin by paying tribute to those sitting in the Distinguished Visitors Gallery, who suffered so much as young boys, and to all of their families, who join them in being here with us today. No words spoken in this Chamber will erase the profound hurt done to you by this man or make up for the failures of the State to protect you. You fought so hard for so long to force the authorities just to listen, to investigate and to finally bring Bill Kenneally to justice. It is a testament to each one of you

that you never gave up or gave in and that you gave everything to see this day. It was a long road that you should not have had to walk and a fight you should never have had to fight, but you did so with courage, dignity and compassion, supporting one another along the way, leaning on one another in very tough times, and sticking together no matter what. You were up against it all, including the terrible pain and injustice when State authorities that should have done everything to protect you from this monster let you down catastrophically, leaving you in harm's way. Those with the power to stop Kenneally had countless opportunities to do just that, but they failed again and again.

To understand the gravity of that failure, we must understand the gravity of Kenneally's evil crimes. He was a predatory sexual abuser of young boys in Waterford during the seventies and eighties, targeting boys between the ages of 11 and 17. For years, this was an open secret in Waterford. Local sporting clubs were his stalking ground, using his position in basketball, tennis and soccer clubs to lure young boys. He was an incredibly dangerous man, a predator who perfected an ability to groom, exploit and blackmail his young victims. Not only did he sexually abuse these boys, but he also tortured them psychologically. The level of depravity, perverse calculation, and heartless and soulless evil that this man perpetrated is beyond words. It was repulsive sexual abuse. He manipulated, intoxicated, isolated and blackmailed innocent boys. Kenneally was insidious. He exploited the pure innocence of these boys.

Jason Clancy and Colin Power tell how Kenneally gifted them brand new Liverpool and Manchester United jerseys. To Kevin Keating, it was American football magazines. To Paul Walsh, it was Nike runners. To other boys, it was chipper food, cans of beer or lifts in his car. He repeated this *modus operandi* again and again. It was all cynically and demonically calculated to get close to young boys. That was the depth of Kenneally's depravity.

He was allowed to run rampant throughout Waterford for years. The scale of failure documented in the report of the commission is breathtaking. The report outlines in harrowing and shocking detail how gardaí, senior church figures, school leaders, members of Kenneally's wider and very powerful family, and the South-Eastern Health Board all had opportunities to stop him but failed to take them. Each and every time, Kenneally was set free and allowed to continue abusing young boys. While the commission found no evidence of collusion or cover-up, Jason Clancy hit the nail on the head when he said, "They enabled him to run rampant through this city for four decades ... the worst paedophile in the history of the state."

The repeated failures to stop Kenneally happened in an era in which failure to protect children was hardwired into how this State operated. In recent times, we have heard the trauma of the Dunderrow women and the Creagh Lane men recited again as they continue to campaign for justice. We have witnessed survivors of abuse in industrial and reformatory schools stage a 51-day hunger strike outside Leinster House just to get the Government to listen, never mind act.

It was not until 2012 that Kenneally would face any form of accountability, when Jason Clancy, then a grown man, made a formal complaint against Kenneally, bravely waiving his anonymity in order to pursue full justice. He was followed by others. A brave step broke decades of State inaction but it was only the start of a long and gruelling fight for the survivors. They endured another four years of an investigation before Kenneally was finally convicted in a court of law in 2016. He was convicted of further crimes in 2023. Of course, it took many years for the commission of investigation to be established in 2018. It was another eight years

before the landmark investigative report of the commission was published last month. It has been 14 years from the time Jason Clancy made his complaint to this day.

Of course, the State apology today is welcome but the Government's response cannot end there. The Government must act on all of the recommendations of the commission. Crucially, it must now deliver on its promise to provide survivors with redress and compensation. It is very wrong that no steps have been taken yet to fulfil that commitment. The lip service must stop from today. Urgent steps must now be taken with survivors to appoint a mediator without any further delay. This process must be expedited to ensure full justice and redress.

Baineadh amach an leithscéal seo ón Stát de bharr neart na marthanóirí fíorchróa a d'fhulaing mí-úsáid uafásach ó Bill Kenneally agus iad ina mbuachaillí óga. Ba mhí-úsáid ghnéis leanúnach é agus theip ar na húdaráis é a stopadh. Ba iad na marthanóirí a thóg é chun ceartais. Níor cheart dearmad a dhéanamh air sin riamh.

On 18 June, Bill Kenneally died where he belonged - behind bars. Today, we name his evil crimes and the lifelong pain he inflicted on his victims. However, we cannot allow that horror to fully dominate the entirety of this story. The bravery, courage, resilience and refusal to give up of the men in the Distinguished Visitors Gallery today and of every victim of Bill Kenneally, including those who broke anonymity and those who did not and those who came forward and those who have not, have brought us here today. You exposed the truth. You brought Kenneally to justice. You stopped him. The State apology was not offered; it was hard-won by you for every victim of Bill Kenneally. Today, your strength, dignity and compassion shine brightly and powerfully above this darkness.

To the young people in each of your lives - your sons, your daughters and your grandchildren - let me say this: I hope that, when you look at your dad's face, you see a hero, a man who faced unspeakable trauma and still found it within himself to seek truth and justice and to overcome.

4 o'clock

He did all of this not just for himself but for you too, so that you would know the lengths to which he would go to protect you - to protect any child - and to comfort and heal the young boy that still lives within him and to right a terrible wrong. That is the measure of your father. Every time he laughs or smiles, every time he holds you in his gaze, I hope you see this incredible courage, this honour and this unbreakable character. Know this too - Bill Kenneally did not win. The horror of his abuse did not win. Love won. The young boys of Waterford won. Your dad won. The past will always be there but the rest of this life belongs to him, to you and to your families because that is the future your father has made possible.

Deputy David Cullinane: Today must belong first and foremost to the survivors of the horrific abuse perpetrated by Bill Kenneally. To Jason Clancy, Paul Walsh, Colin Power, Kevin Keating, Barry Murphy and every survivor, those who have spoken publicly and those who have carried their pain privately, I want to say this: our hearts are with you every day, but today especially. I recognise the enormous courage you have shown and the terrible wrongs that were done to you, not only by the man who abused you but by the institutions and individuals who should have protected you and failed to do so, those who knew young boys were being abused by a monster and who did worse than nothing by preventing justice for decades and allowing the conditions for horrific abuse to happen and to continue. I want to acknowledge all of you

- those of you who have waived your anonymity and spoken publicly, those of you who have spoken privately, those of you who have carried this silently with you and those of you who have never spoken and are no doubt still unknown. You have had to carry the consequences of that abuse through your lives ever since.

The damage did not end when the abuse ended. It has followed survivors into their relationships, their family lives, their working lives and their mental and, no doubt, physical health. It affected confidence, trust and the ability to feel safe. It also affected parents, partners, children, brothers, sisters and friends. Entire families have lived with the consequences of what happened. It was extremely difficult, yet you persisted. You told your stories again and again to gardaí, lawyers, journalists, politicians and the commission. Every retelling came at a personal cost. Every interview made you revisit some of the darkest and most painful experiences of your lives.

Today's apology would not be happening without your courage and determination, and it is important to acknowledge that survivors did not travel this long and difficult road entirely alone. Their families and friends stood beside them through extraordinarily difficult times. They listened when others did not. They believed when institutions failed. They supported survivors through investigations, court cases, media coverage, setbacks and years of delay. Without the love, strength and support of those families and friends, many of whom are in the Public Gallery, this apology would never have happened.

We must also acknowledge the support of the wider public in Waterford and, indeed, across the country. People heard the survivors' testimony, understood the injustice that had taken place and stood behind the demand for truth and accountability. I want to recognise the exceptional work of Phoenix Law and, in particular, Darragh Mackin. Darragh and his colleagues have represented the survivors with determination, professionalism and compassion. They understood that this was about far more than a legal case; it was about human dignity. It was about ensuring that survivors were heard and the power of the State was finally confronted with the truth. I want to acknowledge two journalists, namely, Damien Tiernan and Saoirse McGarrigle. For years, they supported the survivors and shone a spotlight on the failures of State organisations and others in positions of authority. They kept asking difficult questions when some would have preferred silence. Their journalism helped ensure that this story could not be ignored, minimised or allowed to disappear.

The commission's report found a serious dereliction of duty in the Garda response. It documented failures by institutions and individuals who had responsibilities to protect children but did not act as they should have. A 14-year-old boy walked alone into Waterford Garda station in 1985 and reported that he had been abused. His complaint should have been investigated. Had that happened, other children might not have been harmed. This fact must weigh heavily on the State today.

An apology cannot give survivors back their livelihoods and it cannot remove the trauma they have carried, but an apology matters. It matters because the State is finally acknowledging that survivors were failed. It matters because responsibility is being accepted. To these survivors, I hope today brings some recognition of the truth you fought so hard to establish. I hope it brings some measure of peace to you and your families. Nothing said in this Chamber today can ever adequately reflect what you endured but, today, on behalf of the people I

represent in Waterford, I want to say your courage forced the truth into light, your determination made this State apology unavoidable and your courage will never be forgotten.

Deputy Holly Cairns: I welcome the survivors in the Gallery today. Today is a momentous day for you all, for everyone who suffered at the hands of Bill Kenneally and who fought bravely for decades to be believed and to be supported. This apology should have happened years ago because the horrific abuse inflicted on young boys was not solely the work of one predatory monster. It was the consequence of institutional failure by the State. Bill Kenneally's abuse was cruel beyond belief. He was calculated. He used alcohol, gifts and money to groom boys. He used intimidation, restraint and degrading photographs to control them. His crimes were among the most serious imaginable and their effects have lasted a lifetime, and State failure allowed him to keep doing it. Senior gardaí were aware of allegations against him. The principal of De La Salle secondary school knew. The South-Eastern Health Board knew. Billy Kenneally senior knew. Brendan Kenneally knew. Monsignor John Shine knew. Parents had raised concerns. Boys themselves tried. They reached out to figures of authority who should have helped them. They gave statements and handed in photographic evidence, but the people who were supposed to protect them did not.

The handling of the case by An Garda Síochána and the South-Eastern Health Board was a horrific dereliction of duty. The commission of investigation was very clear in that. It found that Bill Kenneally could have been arrested. His home could have been searched. Evidence could have been secured. Other victims could have been identified. Child protection measures could have been put in place. Instead, the local institutions of the State in Waterford circled the wagons. They protected a powerful man who came from a powerful family, with no regard to the safety of the children who were suffering at his hands. Those are failures that changed lives irreparably because after gardaí interviewed Bill Kenneally in December 1987, he walked out of Waterford Garda station and continued to abuse children up until 1993 - children who could and should have been protected.

The extraordinary courage shown by survivors is what brought us here today. They forced the truth into the open and fought against institutions that did not want to listen. They relived unimaginable trauma in the pursuit of justice so that future generations of children might be safer. That should never have been necessary to receive justice, but it is a path this State forces survivors down time and time again. Ireland has become far too comfortable with empty apologies. The survivors of the mother and baby homes received an apology yet, today, families are still pleading with the Government not to permit apartments to be built on the grounds of Bessborough, where hundreds of children remain unaccounted for. Survivors of child sexual abuse in our schools received apologies yet women abused in Dunderrow National School are still being denied redress and forced through the courts.

The remaining thalidomide survivors are still waiting for a State apology - still waiting for justice.

The point of a State apology is not whether it is moving; it is whether it results in change, whether every recommendation of the commission is implemented, whether survivors receive justice without having to spend another decade fighting for it, whether this Government will finally get its head around the fact that accountability does not end with saying "Sorry" but,

rather, begins there. These men deserve more than words. I sincerely hope the Government delivers action.

Deputy Gary Gannon: Today belongs to the survivors, to those remarkable people sitting in the Distinguished Visitors Gallery and to those who simply could not or chose not to be here today. This apology belongs to all of you. It is impossible not to reflect on the enormity of what you had to endure, not just as children but also as adults. The abuse stole your childhood but the pursuit of justice took decades of your adult lives. You should never have had to become investigators of the crimes that were committed against you in the past. You should never have had to become campaigners for the dignity that should have been afforded to you from the moment you stepped forward. You should never have had to persuade the State to investigate the crimes that were committed against you by the evil paedophile, Bill Kenneally. That was the State's responsibility; it was not yours.

I have sat through and watched many State apologies from this Chamber and afar. Every commission of inquiry and every report into institutional failure begin with the same uncomfortable truth: someone, oftentimes many people, in the architecture of this State knew enough to act and chose not to. The failures in this case were not inevitable. The courage of children brought the opportunity to intervene, the opportunity to investigate and the opportunity to protect other children. Those opportunities were purposely discarded and the wrongs you suffered at the hands of an evil man were compounded by the complicity of this State in the indifference to his crimes.

The greatest failure revealed by this report is that too often institutions appeared more concerned with protecting the authority of this vile person than with protecting children. I have often spoken in this House about restorative justice, but the absolute antithesis of restorative justice is the re-traumatisation of victims. Every time survivors had to tell their story again, every delay you have experienced, every door that was closed upon you and every year spent fighting for an investigation that should have happened decades earlier was not justice; it was the opposite of it. It was another injury inflicted upon you. Today's apology is the State's acknowledgement that when you needed it most, it failed you.

I note some survivors have said today's apology should not be the only one. Their voices deserve to be heard because if today teaches us anything, it is that when survivors tell us what justice looks like, our first instinct must be to listen and act. The measure of today will not be in the words spoken in this Chamber; it will be in whether another child, another family or another survivor receives a different response from the institutions of this State when they come forward to tell their story.

To every survivor I say, "Thank you". You carried the burden of truth while institutions and individuals within this State chose to burden themselves with protecting the reputation of a vile paedophile instead. History will remember which burden required the greater courage. Thank you to all of you.

Deputy Daniel Ennis: I acknowledge the survivors of Bill Kenneally's abuse, who were then boys and are now men, who carried this alone for decades and found the courage and strength to force this State to look honestly at how it failed them. This is not an isolated failure. It is our country's oldest and most shameful pattern - the industrial schools, the Magdalen laundries,

the mother and baby homes. Through case after case, cover-up after cover-up, decade after decade, elements of this State have known that children were being harmed and abused but have chosen to protect the abuser over the abused because the men doing the harming were trusted, connected or useful to someone more powerful than the poor children themselves.

This report shows that pattern again in living memory - not in some distant past that we can console ourselves is behind us. Senior gardaí knew about this in the late 1980s. They knew a boy had been abused but they did not act. A health board received complaints and did not follow through. A political and community network allowed access to children for years after the first warning signs were known. This was not ignorance. It was a choice repeated by people who had the power to stop it but just gave a vile creature like Bill Kenneally continued and protected access to innocent children. I see the same instinct at work today, not the same crime but the same reflex to manage a problem quietly rather than confront it. I have raised concerns about Tusla's use of unregulated emergency arrangements for children in State care. The mechanism changes; the instinct to look away does not.

An apology means nothing if this is the State's way of closing the file. The referral to the Law Reform Commission on misconduct in public office is a step forward but we need a timeline because survivors have already waited since 2017. I want the State to say plainly what structurally will stop this from happening again, not what apology we will give when it is already too late.

To the survivors I say, you have forced this reckoning against a system built to protect itself and the abusers first, a State that values position and power over people and the protection of the innocence of children. This State owes every child, past and future, a promise that we have finally stopped looking away.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy John Cummins): I acknowledge the survivors and their families who are with us today in both Galleries and those who may be watching from home. This day belongs to you. Your courage in coming forward, your determination to pursue the truth and your perseverance in seeking justice deserve our deepest respect and admiration. For many years you fought for what should never have been so difficult to obtain. You fought to be heard, you fought to be believed and you fought for accountability. Above all, you fought for justice. That burden should never have rested on your shoulders. The authorities responsible for protecting you should have acted long before you were forced to carry that responsibility yourselves. What you suffered was abhorrent. It was a profound betrayal of trust and a devastating violation of your childhood. It is impossible to fully comprehend the pain and trauma that you have endured or the lifelong impact it has had on you and your families. While none of us can truly understand your experiences, we can acknowledge the enormity of what you have lived through and the extraordinary resilience you have shown in the aftermath.

The findings of the south-east commission of investigation make for deeply disturbing reading. They remind us that not only were there countless instances of horrific forms of abuse, there were also multiple examples of profound institutional failure. Time and again, opportunities to intervene were missed. Time and again, systems that existed to protect these men failed in that most fundamental responsibility. The commission found that there were clear failings in the manner in which allegations were handled, failings that fell below the

standards expected even of the time. That is a sobering conclusion. These failures cannot simply be explained away as a product of a bygone era. They represented serious shortcomings that allowed abuse to continue and denied the survivors the protection to which they were entitled.

It is difficult to comprehend how something so horrific could occur within the Waterford community that I know and love, and that it could continue for so long without Bill Kenneally being brought to justice. It is equally difficult to accept that he was able to evade accountability for so many years while more young men suffered. The survivors were failed by those who should have stood beside them. Institutions that should have listened did not. Authorities that should have acted failed to do so. The hurt caused by the abuse itself was compounded by the failures that followed and that is why today's apology is both warranted and long overdue.

While no apology can undo the harm that was inflicted or restore what was taken from you, I hope it affirms what you have known all along: that you were wronged, that your voices matter and that the failures identified by the commission are now recognised by the State. To every survivor I want to say, "Thank you". I thank you for your courage, I thank you for your resilience and I thank you for refusing to allow the truth to remain hidden despite the immense personal cost.

I particularly thank those men who sat in the living room of my house and shared their horrendous experiences with me back when I was mayor of Waterford. Those private conversations made me absolutely determined to support your request for the establishment of this commission with former justice Ministers Frances Fitzgerald and Charlie Flanagan. It is my genuine and sincere hope that today's State apology provides some measure of acknowledgement and, in time, some degree of closure.

It cannot erase the past, but it can recognise the profound wrong that was done to you and the failures that allowed it to happen. We owe it to you not only to remember these failures but also to learn from them. Ultimately, that is a responsibility each of us in this House shares.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor): Today is a profoundly important and solemn day. I want to add my voice to the full and formal State apology and to acknowledge the courage, dignity and perseverance of those survivors who fought for truth and accountability for so many years.

The Report of the South East Commission of Investigation, which was published last month, lays bare not only the horrific crimes committed by the paedophile Bill Kenneally but also the failures of individuals and institutions to act when children should have been protected. As the commission's report spells out, there were opportunities to stop his most horrible abuse years earlier. The failures to investigate and respond appropriately had devastating consequences for victims and survivors. There is nothing any of us in this House can say that can undo the pain, harm and loss experienced by those young boys, their families and the communities in which they lived, played basketball and worked. They have had to endure a lifetime of harm, many of them carrying their suffering in silence. They bravely persisted in pursuing justice, and now the truth has been fully exposed. As a TD for Carlow and as Minister of State with responsibility for public health, well-being and the national drugs strategy, I am acutely aware that childhood harm can have lifelong impacts on physical and mental health, relationships,

education and well-being. We must never lose sight of the human consequences of these failures.

I want to say to the victims and survivors that this is more than an apology. We are listening to you, we are learning and we are acting. All of us in this House have a responsibility to ensure that our child safeguarding systems are robust. We must ensure that if concerns are raised today, they are acted on without delay. We must continue to strengthen our child protection structures and ensure accountability wherever failure occurs. We must ensure that survivors have access to the supports and services they need while acknowledging the State's failure to adequately provide them to these boys and young men.

May today serve as an acknowledgement of the past and as a renewed commitment that children will always come first, that safeguarding will never be compromised and that such failures will never be allowed to happen again.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Today is a very important day because the State has finally and formally apologised to the survivors of Bill Kenneally's abuse. Those who should have been protected were instead failed in the most profound and devastating way. No apology can undo the harm that was done. I pay tribute to the extraordinary courage of the survivors and their families, whose determination made this day possible. You do not need me to tell you, but today is a day of vindication for those abused by this vile, calculating, predatory paedophile who was protected by people who knew better and by institutions whose duty it was to protect children. Instead, they acted to shield a predator and a political dynasty.

This full and formal State apology to the survivors of Bill Kenneally has been a long time coming. It is a recognition of the persistence and bravery of you men who are here in the Distinguished Visitors Gallery and those who are not here today. Those of you who refused to give up in your pursuit of truth and justice, I thank you for what you have done. I thank you for your courage and for your power. I also want to acknowledge your families and those who have supported you on this journey.

We must ensure, as legislators in this place and as a society more broadly, that no individual or institution is ever regarded as untouchable again and that no child or vulnerable person will ever be failed in this way again. I particularly welcome the acknowledgement in the State apology that the response in terms of the investigation by An Garda Síochána was wholly inadequate.

It has been a long and difficult road for the men who fought for justice. Their bravery and determination deserves to be recognised by this House today. Their families and friends also deserve enormous credit for standing beside them throughout this search for justice. Bill Kenneally died in prison, where he belonged, last month, serving a 19-year sentence for his crimes against children in Waterford. However, he lived a long life free from the consequences of his crimes before the walls finally closed in on him. I encourage anyone who has suffered abuse to come forward. You deserve to be heard; you deserve justice.

No longer can this State or our society allow perpetrators to hide in the shadows. The days of deference to the powerful and well-connected must be over. The days of impunity, silence and cover-up must never be allowed to return. I really hope that today's apology and this recognition and acknowledgement bring some measure of light after decades of trauma and

anguish. I hope it brings vindication, and that you can begin to leave this long fight behind and look forward to the future

Deputy Ivana Bacik: I am glad to speak for the Labour Party in today's important debate. I welcome our guests in the Distinguished Visitors Gallery. I pay tribute to all of the survivors whose courage has made this report and the State apology happen. I pay tribute to Jason Clancy, Paul Walsh, Kevin Keating, Colin Power, Barry Murphy, Simon O'Toole, Gerard Mullane and all those who were abused by Bill Kenneally. My thoughts are with those watching at home, as well as those here in the Gallery. For decades, you and they have had to carry a deep trauma. While there is nothing that can make amends for the terrible abuse inflicted upon you as children, I hope that the State apology will be of some solace.

I welcome the Taoiseach's apology. I also welcome the report. The South East Commission of Investigation submitted its final 419-page report to the Minister on 8 June. I commend Mr. Justice Michael White and his team on this significant piece of important work. It is a report that documents the depraved and systematic sexual abuse of children by the paedophile, Bill Kenneally. It also sets out the chronology and detail of the subsequent mishandling of allegations against Kenneally. The details are nothing short of horrendous. So many young lives were destroyed by Kenneally's heinous crimes. It was such an abuse of power. The report states, "Bill Kenneally held a trusted voluntary position as a basketball coach and also a privileged place in society as part of an extended highly regarded family in Waterford." This chilling phrase reminds us of just how Kenneally was able to get away with this abuse of power, how he tortured young boys over many years in horrific ways, how he exploited his position of authority and his privilege to abuse boys and how he silenced boys and young men by means of blackmail and intimidation.

The report also reminds us that when some of his young victims found the courage to report him, their bravery was met with inertia or worse by gardaí. The report is unequivocal in that regard. I welcome its clear finding that for far too long there was a clear dereliction of duty on the part of senior gardaí in dealing with Kenneally's despicable crimes. The consequences were grave. Had proper procedures been followed in the 1980s, we know many children could have been protected from suffering at Kenneally's hands. Contact was made with gardaí in 1987, and the commission has found that clearly that gardaí at that point had the power to arrest Kenneally, search his dwelling and car and detain him pursuant to section 4 of the Criminal Justice Act 1984. That Act, which had been commenced, permitted arrest and, crucially, detention for interrogation. However, that did not transpire. Instead, Sean Cashman, the acting chief superintendent in Waterford, contacted Bill Kenneally's uncles who were, in the words of the report, "prominent public figures". Mr. Justice White is highly critical of the decision to contact retired TD Billy Kenneally and Monsignor John Shine. Mr. Justice White notes that a scandal involving their nephew being made public was not "an attractive prospect" to them. A chilling phrase again. As a result, this sadistic perpetrator was left to circulate in the community and given continued access to other children. Cashman deviated from humane or proper procedure, giving Bill Kenneally a mere warning and referring him for psychiatric treatment.

The report documents how in 2001, some 14 years later, contact was again made, this time with then TD Brendan Kenneally. The former Deputy did not formally report this to the relevant agencies. Instead, he too sought counsel from Billy Kenneally and Monsignor John Shine. Again, the only substantive step taken was to arrange further psychiatric treatment. At

that point, three influential members of the Kenneally family were on notice of Bill Kenneally's crimes, namely a serving public representative, a former public representative and a senior member of the clergy. This was a microcosm of the church-State collusion we now know caused and delivered some deep hurt and trauma to women and children in particular in Ireland's recent past.

A full Garda investigation into Bill Kenneally began in 2012. I pay tribute to all those journalists, gardaí, and legal teams who took this on and ensured in the end, along with courageous survivors, that this investigation would commence and that Bill Kenneally would be convicted and jailed in 2016. As we know, he died last month.

With this report, we finally have a fuller picture not just of his crimes but of the failures of the State. No institution comes out of the report well, not the gardaí, not the health authorities, not the sporting bodies, and certainly not representatives of Fianna Fáil or the Catholic Church. I welcome this State apology and the Taoiseach's words on behalf of his party. That was very meaningful. What comes next? The State's response and all of our responses as legislators must be to ensure that survivors' interests are at the fore of all considerations and that responses are survivor-led.

The report makes several very important recommendations. It recommends an urgent review of the need to introduce a criminal offence of misconduct in public office. We are told that the Law Reform Commission is now considering that measure, which is very welcome. We must proceed with this. Placing such an offence on the Statute Book would help to undo what we now know is a dangerous say nothing culture that prevailed through much of the 20th century. Putting such an offence into law would show that no one is above reproach, whatever their position of privilege, and that where anyone puts others in harm's way or fails to take steps to remove them from harm's way, they will be responsible.

I reiterate Labour's strong support for the introduction of that crucial new offence and for the implementation of other recommendations of the report. I welcome the Taoiseach's commitment to see legal proceedings that are still in being against the gardaí resolved swiftly, and indeed the commitment that alternative means of redress outside the legal process will be examined by the State. This is very important. Clearly, the State cannot turn back the clock to undo failings or even complicity but the State can and must do better now. We have learned over recent decades about failings in previous redress schemes. We learned from those.

The State must also look at taking measures that are being proposed, for example, to ensure that redress will be forthcoming from religious orders because there has been that aspect, in that it has been very difficult for survivors to recover redress where religious orders have been involved. Just last week, the Government voted to delay the Labour redress Bill by six months, a redress Bill which would ensure that survivors could pursue religious orders or other unincorporated bodies for redress where they have acted to enable or facilitate sexual abuse of children. I reiterate my call on the Government to ensure that work can be done quickly to pass that Bill into law.

In conclusion, Taoiseach, Tánaiste, members of Government, and, in particular, survivors, today is a very important day. We mark the wrong that was done to you as survivors and to the other survivors who continue to suffer in silence and who have not or who have not yet come forward. It is for survivors to be the arbiter of whether the State gets its response today and

over the coming weeks and months right. We know the report points us in the direction that we must go but we also need to hear and learn from you what we can do better as we go forward. I thank survivors again. I pay tribute to you and acknowledge all of you who are not here today who have not yet come forward publicly. Today is for you. It is for all survivors of abuse. We are thinking of you and we stand with you.

Deputy Ged Nash: As my colleague, Deputy Bacik, said, today is for you and about you. I hope that today marks an important milestone for you and a step on the road to a form of healing that has been denied to you all for far too long. If survivors in the Gallery will indulge me for a moment, it is serendipitous that on the day on which an apology is formally made to you in the Dáil for the wrongs the State has done to you, a report has gone to Cabinet in respect of a scoping exercise into the conduct of Michael Shine. It is important that today is about the process we are dealing with but I acknowledge the intensive work the Taoiseach and the Minister for Health have done in supporting the survivors and victims of Michael Shine, and that we will see progress, as I expect we will, at some point in the future.

It is a good thing that we are finally coming to terms with the challenges of our past in this country. Nothing will change the experience of the survivors of Kenneally or indeed anybody else but it is crucially important the State institutes processes that acknowledge wrong, that ensure, insofar as we can, that the State acknowledges that and works towards a better future, and that we learn from how the State and institutions that were involved in the form of abuse that was experienced in Waterford and elsewhere. We all need to acknowledge that and do better on behalf of all the citizens in this country. It is important that we do that and move on from that. I pay tribute on behalf of the Labour Party to all of you for your engagement in this process. I hope, as I said earlier, that some form of healing can emerge from this.

Minister for Health (Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill): I acknowledge the survivors here, both in the Distinguished Visitors Gallery and those who have joined us as a community in other ways. The apology offered today by the Taoiseach is an important acknowledgement by the State of the wrong done to young boys and young men within this State and not acknowledged or handled correctly in any way by the institutions of this State. For the survivors gathered here and those potentially listening beyond these walls, of course this moment is about something much more important than words. It is about taking this time to recognise that lives were forever changed. It is about acknowledging that childhoods that should have been marked by safety and possibility were instead scarred by the worst form of abuse possible. It is about sitting with those who were children, now grown, and understanding the shock of abuse that occurred to them, the confusion and difficulty in articulating it, and nevertheless finding space for some people to be able to articulate it who were not heard and not respected by the State. It is about honouring today the extraordinary courage of those who have carried these burdens, often in silence, for many decades.

To the survivors of the predator, Bill Kenneally, I want to say that we recognise the pain that you have endured. We recognise and say loudly the profound impact this abuse has had on you throughout your lives and your families. It has cast a long shadow across years that should have been filled with other things.

As Minister for Health, I am particularly conscious of the ongoing impact that childhood trauma can have. We know that harm caused by sexual abuse does not end when the abuse

ends. It can travel through a lifetime, leaving wounds that are deeply felt. Today, we acknowledge not only the terrible crimes committed by Bill Kenneally but also the failures of institutions that should have protected children when warning signs emerged.

The South East Independent Commission - and I thank Michael White in particular for his excellent work on this - found that when all of the evidence, expert opinion, guidelines and protocols at the time were considered, the South Eastern Health Board should have acted on the report prepared by Dr. Geraldine Nolan on 6 March 1989. That should have happened. That finding weighs heavily on me. It will weigh heavily on my predecessors and all those in the health system because that failure involved real people and real lives. The failure of the South Eastern Health Board to act on child protection concerns was not simply a procedural failure. It was a lost opportunity to stop the continuing criminal abuse of children. It was a lost opportunity to intervene, to protect, and to bring accountability many years earlier than it eventually occurred. As Deputy Bacik said, the legal environment already existed. For survivors, that failure came at a human cost and today, we must confront that truth, as the commission has done.

No words can return those stolen childhoods or change or ease the suffering that was endured but we can do better and we can learn. The report illustrates clearly that the Irish State, through its laws, its services for children and its sex education and awareness but, more than anything else, its combined culture of protecting the powerful, was blind to child sexual abuse operating under the surface in far too many places. Children were silenced by shame and by their natural inability to articulate what was happening to them as children, and by the shock and confusion of abuse. I note that the report also recognises that changes in legislation, services, and understanding of child exploitation have been profound.

The approach of statutory services has changed beyond recognition. I also want to say that those changes came many decades later and did not come easily. I recall when I came into this House as an adviser first and being presented with the Cloyne report, which detailed abuse in the diocese of Cloyne up to 2007. It was published in 2011. That was a report where the bishops, the church leaders, exploited what had been voluntary child protection guidelines to choose not to report abusers to gardaí. With some difficulty, Frances Fitzgerald and Alan Shatter at the time introduced significant legislative change to require mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse, which was challenged by the church at the time as being potentially in breach of the seal of the confession, if you recall. It was an astonishing response to a fundamentally important change, taking the child protection guidelines, which were then voluntary, and putting them on a statutory basis. It took some four years for the Children First Act to be enacted by this House. That Act is important because it has changed the landscape and legal obligation of mandated people, including teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers and childcare staff, who are now legally obliged to notify and assist Tusla where there is a risk of significant harm to the child. That is not offered by any measure of defence of any kind but simply to acknowledge how fundamentally the child protection landscape has changed and needed to change, and yet how difficult it was to ultimately make those changes in the face of a strong interest in continuing to protect the powerful from the accountability that was necessary.

Child protection is never somebody else's responsibility. Concerns must be acted upon, not deferred. Information must be shared. Professional warnings must be heeded. Children must

always come first. This report has clearly shown the health system's failure as part of that. Where a child is at risk, inaction has serious consequences. The legacy of this report is more than remembrance and recognition. It is another imperative for all of us as legislators to be vigilant and continually vigilant about our commitment across health and social care and all other services where children are in contact, to place the safety and well-being of children at the very centre of everything that we do.

To the survivors, your courage told truths that other people chose to ignore and sought to ignore, the abuse that you suffered, the opportunities to protect you that were missed, the bravery it took to articulate those things at a time when you would not heard, the failure of the State, both in its health services and An Garda Síochána, to act when it should have acted, and the hurt that flowed for so many people from all of those failures. I hope that today will stand as a recognition of your truth and a tribute to your courage. I hope that it will stand for us as legislators and for those who will follow us here as a promise that the lessons of the past will never be forgotten.

Minister of State at the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (Deputy Emer Higgins): I join the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste, the Minister for justice and many other Ministers in offering a sincere apology to the survivors of Bill Kenneally's abuse. Today, above all else, my thoughts are with the victims and survivors. Many of them are with us in the Gallery today. Thank you for being here. I can only imagine the strength it must take to sit in this Chamber and to hear one of the darkest chapters of your lives spoken about publicly. Your presence matters. It is because of the courage, resilience and determination of people that we are at this moment. I also acknowledge the survivors who are not with us today. This apology is every bit as much for them. The truth came to light because survivors refused to let it remain hidden. They came forward, often at enormous personal cost, and continued to seek answers and accountability when the very systems that should have protected them had failed.

For many survivors of child sexual abuse, the abuse does not end when it stops. Its impact can last a lifetime and can affect every aspect of a person's life - their mental health, their relationships, their sense of safety, their confidence and their ability to trust others. It can shape childhood, adulthood and family life in ways that are difficult to put into words. Many survivors have carried that burden in silence. We know they have felt isolated, disbelieved in some instances and forgotten in others because they have told us that. Some have spent decades searching not only for justice but simply for an acknowledgement of what happened to them. No apology can undo that harm or give back what was taken from anyone who has suffered. It cannot erase the years of pain, nor can it change the failures that allowed abuse to continue. However, it can acknowledge those failures. It can recognise the profound wrong that was done. It can say clearly and without reservation that those children were let down by the very people and institutions meant to protect them. That is why today's apology matters. It is about recognising the truth, taking responsibility and making it clear that children must always come first.

I welcome the publication of the final report of the south east independent commission of investigation and acknowledge the significant work involved in bringing this difficult process to a conclusion. I thank Judge Barry Hickson and Mr. Justice Michael White for their significant work and acknowledge how deeply distressing the findings are. They reveal repeated missed opportunities, ignored warning signs and systemic failures that allowed abuse

to occur over many years. Children who should have been protected were instead left vulnerable. The institutions entrusted with keeping children safe failed in that duty. Concerns were not acted upon, children were not listened to and opportunities to intervene were missed. The consequences of those failures have been profound.

Reading the report, it is impossible not to think about what could have been different if action was taken sooner - how much suffering may have been prevented and how many lives might have been spared years of trauma. Ireland has learned painful lessons from its past. We now have a much greater understanding of child sexual abuse, of the lasting harm it causes and the importance of systems that listen to children, that support survivors and that act quickly when concerns arise. Significant progress has been made in child protection, safeguarding and public awareness. Those changes matter. They cannot undo what has happened, nor can they lessen our responsibility to ensure that every child is safe and heard and every concern is taken seriously.

Today is not about institutions, however. It is about people and the people who were failed by them. To every survivor, for the abuse that you suffered and the failures that left you without the protection that you deserved, and for the years it took for your voices to be heard, we are deeply sorry.

Deputy Michael Collins: Today is not a day for politics. It is not a day for point scoring or trying to win an argument; it is a day for listening, humility and acknowledging the profound suffering endured by those who were failed by the people and institutions that should have protected them. To every survivor who found the courage to come forward, we believe you, we hear you and we are deeply sorry for the vile crimes you endured at the hands of the paedophile Bill Kenneally and for the length of time it took us all entrusted with public office to see your truth vindicated. Nothing said in this Chamber today can undo what happened. No speech can restore a stolen childhood. No apology can erase decades of pain, fear, shame or silence but we still owe that apology because for far too long, the voices of victims were ignored while the reputation of the institutions mattered more than the protection of the children.

The south east independent commission of investigation paints a deeply disturbing picture. It describes a predatory offender who abused children over many years. It tells us that warning signs, suspicions and opportunities existed to stop that abuse much earlier. It also shows us that while the standards and understanding of child protection in the 1970s and 1980s were very different from today, they were still serious failures of judgment and failures to act, even by the standards of that time. For many years, children carried burdens that adults should have carried for them. Children were expected to speak when they were frightened. They were expected to overcome shame that has been deliberately forced upon them. Children were expected to carry secrets that no child should ever have to carry.

When some did try to speak, too often they found adults who were unwilling or unable to hear them. That is one of the hardest truths contained in this report. As parents and grandparents, as public representatives and simply as decent human beings, we cannot read these accounts without asking ourselves one question: what if it had been our own son, our own brother, our own grandson? That is the measure by which we should judge every child's protection system.

The report also reminds us of something uncomfortable - evil rarely succeeds on its own. It succeeds where there is silence and hesitation, where difficult questions are avoided, and where institutions become more concerned with protecting themselves than protecting vulnerable people. That lesson extends far beyond Waterford. It belongs to the whole country.

Ireland has learned painful lessons through commission after commission. We have apologised before. We have promised reform before. Some important changes have undoubtedly been made - child protection laws are stronger, Garda procedures have improved and awareness is far greater than it once was - but today's report reminds us that reform is never finished. The challenge for every generation is to make sure that children are never expected to carry the consequences of adult failures. That means ensuring that agencies work together, concerns are acted upon quickly and a child is never dismissed because the evidence is difficult or uncomfortable, and understanding that every delay, missed opportunity and failure to communicate can have lifelong consequences for an innocent child.

I also want to acknowledge the extraordinary courage shown by the survivors throughout this process. Some are here in the Gallery. Many carried these experiences for decades. Many built lives while carrying wounds that nobody else could see. Many came forward not because it was easy but because they wanted to make sure that no other child would suffer what they suffered. That courage deserves not only our respect but our gratitude. To the families who stood beside them through years of trauma, uncertainty and legal proceedings, we acknowledge your strengths, too.

I have to say this, though – an apology only has meaning if it is accompanied by action. The greatest tribute we can pay to those who suffered is not another headline or another report gathering dust on a shelf. It is ensuring that every recommendation is examined carefully, implemented where appropriate and followed through in practice.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: I, too, want to commend many of the victims and survivors of Bill Kenneally, some of whom are joining us in the Gallery today. In any situation, it takes incredible bravery and courage to be able to come forward and tell your story, and more so when many of the organs of the State ignore you, do not listen to you and in some cases undermine you as well. These victims and survivors have not only taken on an evil predictor, but they have also taken on many of the powers of the State. We are also thinking today of the dozens of other victims who for different reasons have not been able to come forward publicly.

I welcome the State apology by the Government. This apology is a culmination of decades of campaigning by people who have been providing information. It is a long time coming but it will bring closure to many people. I also welcome the report that has been done on this issue but the process for these reports is incredibly slow. We need a permanent office of public investigation in this country, one that retains the skills and experience needed to undertake these types of investigation in a speedy fashion. The slow process of investigations is damaging. Long and winding investigations mean that those who have suffered have to suffer for longer and some people never achieve justice.

The vile crimes of Bill Kenneally have done much harm. These crimes have damaged and destroyed lives and have consumed the lives of many others for decades. In this specific case, truth and justice were prevented by some of the most powerful organisations in the State. It is shocking that senior gardaí who had been informed of these crimes in the 1980s did not act on

them. The gardaí failed these victims and survivors. The South-Eastern Health Board also failed to follow through on these complaints. In his report, Mr. Justice Michael White said that Bill Kenneally was surrounded by the influential in Waterford society, including his uncle, Billy Kenneally Snr., and his cousin Brendan Kenneally, who were both Fianna Fáil TDs for Waterford, and his uncle Monsignor John Shine, who was influential in the church. These actions may seem like they were from a bygone time but, in truth, that instinct is still in organisations to defend themselves. Organisations still often put their own interests ahead of the interests of survivors.

On the question of children being at risk today, there are dozens of children in the charge of Tusla who are missing as we speak. Many are exposed to shocking levels of abuse. My worry is that some of those children will be in the Distinguished Visitors Gallery in 20 or 30 years' time.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: I, too, welcome this belated apology after the final report of the investigation. I pay tribute to the survivors, whose immense personal bravery and persistence finally forced the truth out. It sounds like a platitude because successive Governments and we as a society have treated people with contempt. People were dealing with their own trauma and suffering. Complaints were made in the mid-to-late-eighties, yet the Garda, other agencies, the political elites and others chose to protect this well-connected predator over innocent children. The evidence was sat on for so long until another formal complaint was made in 2012.

This is the modern era. We thought we were over this and that we had dealt with historic abuses in residential institutions and were getting on with stuff. It is shocking it took so long before and after. It was a conscious, systematic cover up. Even now, we have to ask if we have learned everything we need to have learned. The Minister for Health mentioned, we have robust laws like the Children First Act now, but the system is still only as good as the culture and the resourcing. Deputy Tóibín just mentioned Tusla. It is an agency that lurches from crisis to crisis, leaving vulnerable children in unregulated and unsafe emergency hotels, bed and breakfast accommodation and so on. There have been recent reports in the news that there is movement on that, which I welcome, but there are thousands more on waiting lists without a proper social worker and there are a lot of kids who have come to this country through the asylum process who have gone missing.

We need to urgently reform the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004 to end what I believe is the forced silencing of survivors under section 11, which criminally gags them from speaking out about their own testimony.

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Mary Butler): To the survivors of Bill Kenneally's horrific abuse, to your families and your loved ones, and to those joining us in the Distinguished Visitors Gallery and the Gallery upstairs, I want to begin by acknowledging your courage. For decades, you carried a burden that should never have been yours to bear. Today is about you, about your experiences and about the failures that allowed you to be so grievously let down. I have listened intently to the survivors' testimonies in recent weeks in the wake of the report's publication. You have spoken about vindication, closure, moving on with your lives and healing. It is my sincere hope that today's State apology will help you on that journey.

I want to acknowledge the work of Mr. Justice White, his team and the former chair, Judge Barry Hickson, for the comprehensiveness of the investigation, which fully vindicates all those who were subject to the most appalling abuse by Bill Kenneally. The report makes clear that opportunities existed to stop the abuse sooner, especially in 1987 and 2001. Individuals and institutions who should have acted failed to do so. The report found that two senior gardaí in Waterford, Sean Cashman and PJ Hayes, a school principal, the South-Eastern Health Board, Monsignor Shine and two former Waterford Fianna Fáil TDs, Billy Kenneally Snr. and Brendan Kenneally, failed the victims.

Whether they stayed silent, failed to act or actively sought to conceal the truth, their conduct was inexcusable and unacceptable by any standard then and now. Children were not protected when they should have been. Those failures compounded the harms suffered. As a Waterford TD, as a Minister of State in this Government, as a mother, I am profoundly sorry for what happened to you. I am sorry that you as children were not protected. I am sorry that warnings were not acted upon. I am sorry for the years you spent seeking answers, seeking recognition and seeking justice.

I wish to thank An Taoiseach for the State apology. An apology must be accompanied by actions.

5 o'clock

As survivors, you must have access to counselling, mental health supports and practical assistance for as long as you need them. The Government will engage constructively and compassionately on the recommendations arising from the commission's work, including any measures necessary to provide meaningful recognition and redress. Mediation should now be the next step. The ordeal you have endured is incomprehensible. You have been to hell and back, but your courage forced the truth into the open. Your persistence ensured that the failures could no longer be ignored. The State cannot change what happened but it can acknowledge the truth. It can accept responsibility for its failures and commit itself to standing with you now and in the future. Today, and every day, our focus must be on you, the victims and the survivors.

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan): I echo the remarks of the Taoiseach and every Deputy who has spoken in this debate this afternoon in acknowledging, first and foremost, the courage of the victims who have brought these failures of the State into the light. This report stands testament to the perseverance of both those who join us in the Distinguished Visitors Gallery this afternoon and those who have chosen to maintain their anonymity. The bravery of all the victims represents the foundations on which Mr. Justice White's report is built. I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to meet some of the victims in recent weeks, following the publication of the report. I apologised that day to the victims, and I repeat that apology today for the Dáil record and, indeed, extend it to all those victims who chose, understandably, to maintain their privacy and anonymity.

While I do not intend to repeat what has already been said, the Taoiseach has very clearly set down on the record of this House the litany of failures that occurred in the State's engagement with Bill Kenneally. As Minister for justice, however, the failures pertaining to An Garda Síochána weigh particularly heavily on me as I am politically responsible for the Garda.

The failure in 1987 to investigate properly Bill Kenneally's crimes, the failure to arrest him and the failure to search his house for evidence that would certainly have seen him prosecuted are a stain on the history of An Garda Síochána. Standard Garda practices and protocols of the time were not followed, and attempts to deal with the matter informally through a psychiatric referral and by engaging with Billy Kenneally Snr. and Monsignor Shine go beyond simple naivety and were an abject failure to do the job which the State had entrusted to those gardaí to do. In my recent meeting with the victims I acknowledged, and I accept fully, as Minister for justice, the finding in the report that action taken by the chief superintendent in Waterford was a clear and serious dereliction of duty, even by the standards applicable at that time. That misjudgment about Bill Kenneally's risk of reoffending undoubtedly led to further despicable, and preventable, abuse.

We know, as the Taoiseach outlined, from evidence provided to the commission and statements made to the Garda that the allegations against Bill Kenneally span a much broader timeframe than those he was ultimately convicted for - almost a quarter of a century, in fact, in which children within his significant sphere of influence were at grave risk. While the criminal justice system belatedly caught up with Bill Kenneally, following an investigation that began only when Jason Clancy had the fearlessness to come forward in December 2012, he evaded justice for far too long and his death in prison does little to undo that failure.

As the Taoiseach noted, one issue Mr. Justice White asked to be addressed is the absence of a criminal offence of "misconduct in public office". Chapter 12 of the report outlines the legal confusion about whether there is a common-law offence of that nature that was carried over into law after the enactment of the Constitution in 1937. The finding of the commission is that there is no such offence of serious dereliction of duty. I have accepted the recommendation of Mr. Justice White and wrote to the Attorney General a number of weeks ago to begin the process of reviewing the matter. The Attorney General has confirmed to me that he has written to the Law Reform Commission under section 4 of the Law Reform Commission Act 1975 and has requested that the Law Reform Commission examine and research this matter further. The Attorney General has specifically requested that the Law Reform Commission examine the current state of the pre-1937 common-law offence in Irish law; whether a new criminal offence of "misconduct in public office" or "misconduct in public office by omission" could be provided for by statute, and what the ingredients of that offence would be; and what the advantages and disadvantages of the enactment of any such criminal offence would be. The Attorney General has encouraged the Law Reform Commission to engage with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and An Garda Síochána on this matter and has asked them to revert to him within nine months.

Separate to the findings of the report, and acknowledging that there is nothing that can right the wrongs perpetrated by Bill Kenneally, I have instructed officials in my Department to begin the process to secure compensation for those who have suffered as a result of the failures outlined in the report. The exact details will be worked out with engagement from the victims themselves but, on a personal level, I do not want to see those of you who have been through so much put through any further lengthy legal processes. I would like to see a mediated solution that brings much-needed closure to all parties.

As a final thought, I thank again, as has already been done, Mr. Justice White and his predecessor, Judge Hickson, for the tireless and painstaking work of compiling the report. I

was struck in my recent meeting with some of the victims by their gratitude for the work of, and their engagement with, Mr. Justice White and their belief that he had managed very difficult subject matter even-handedly and with great sensitivity. He is, indeed, a very fine person. The report is a reminder to all of us gathered in this Chamber, and those whose role it is to protect the vulnerable in our society, that we must hold ourselves to the highest standards. Mr. Justice White has clearly outlined to us the terrible consequences that result from our failure to do so. While nothing will ever take away what happened to Bill Kenneally's victims, I hope it is some comfort to them that their efforts will have made the world a little safer for the most vulnerable, including our children, who come after them.

In concluding his report, Mr. Justice White expressed hope that the report has brought some peace of mind to the victims of Bill Kenneally. I also hope it has done.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I join the Ceann Comhairle in extending the welcome to you. You have come through a harrowing journey to this day and you have exposed the State, as has been recorded by the Taoiseach, the Minister and others, in terms of the most awful failings, which have had terrible consequences on your lives and the lives of your families. If we are to take action on this, we should examine some of the submissions made to other investigations where this was spoken about by officials within the HSE. I hope that opportunity might be given to us at some stage in the future. We owe it to you and we owe it to your families, and to all others whom the State has failed, to continue our efforts to address the issues of the past and ensure they do not happen again. Actions are in our hands in this House. Thank you again.

Teachtaireacht ón Seanad - Message from Seanad

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Seanad Éireann has accepted the Postal and Telecommunications Services (Amendment) Bill 2026 without recommendation.

Domestic Violence Judgments Register Bill 2026 [Seanad]: Second Stage

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan): I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

I welcome the opportunity to present the Domestic Violence Judgments Register Bill 2026 to Dáil Éireann. The genesis of this legislation is in October 2025, when the drafting of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences, Domestic Violence and International Instruments) Bill was approved by Government. In May this year, the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Home Affairs and Migration published its report on pre-legislative scrutiny of that general scheme. Last month, I secured Cabinet approval to progress the provisions in relation to the domestic violence judgments register as a stand-alone Bill. I was determined to expedite that legislation as this is a key commitment for me. It is something I really believe will bring about positive change in our ongoing battle against domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

This legislation, as Deputies will be aware, has its origins in an appalling crime. In 2021 Jennifer Poole, an innocent young woman, was brutally murdered by her former partner. Jennifer's murderer had a history of violence against women and in the past had spent time in

prison for these crimes. Jennifer did not know this. The Poole family, in particular Jennifer's brother Jason, have campaigned tirelessly for this legislation. In doing so, their aim is to protect women like Jennie from violent predators. I have previously stated that this legislation will be known as Jennie's law, and I want to reiterate it again here in this House. It will stand as a tribute to their beloved sister, daughter and mother and to their own steadfast determination to achieve lasting change in her memory. I commend Jason Poole and all the Poole family for their work in this regard.

The purpose of this legislation is to provide for the publication of judgments relating to serious domestic violence offences. It is a straightforward aim yet it is something that is not routinely done at present. Currently, media representatives report on cases from our courtrooms in line with the constitutional principle that justice should be done in public. However, attendance is constrained by scheduling and resources. There are not media representatives at every trial. As such, some judgments of juries are reported on while others are not. There is no means by which someone can ascertain what has happened in cases which are not reported in the media. I believe that serious incidents of domestic or sexual violence, assault or abuse ought to be effectively publicised as part of the trial process and that is what this legislation sets out to do. A publicly available register of judgments will assist people who are in a relationship or considering a relationship with a person to ascertain whether they have a history of serious domestic violence convictions.

I now outline the provisions of the Bill. Section 1 of the Bill amends the Domestic Violence Act 2018 by inserting a new Part 3A into that Act. The new Part 3A provides that the Courts Service will establish and maintain a register of judgments. This will be known as the domestic violence judgments register and it will be available on the *courts.ie* website. The register encompasses serious offences such as murder, manslaughter, rape and sexual assault. In addition, a number of indictable offences under the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997, such as assault causing harm and serious harm, harassment and stalking are covered. Coercive control under section 39 of the Domestic Violence Act 2018 also comes within the scope of the legislation as well as distributing, publishing or threatening to distribute or publish an intimate image without consent under Coco's Law. The register will capture these heinous crimes where they are committed by a partner, or a former partner, against a victim. As everyone in this Chamber knows, the perpetrators of such offences are predominantly, but not always, men, while the victims are predominantly, but not always, women. I say this to underline that this is the reality of gender-based violence.

It is at the discretion of the trial judge whether or not to publish a judgment, which must include details of conviction and sentence, as well as the name, age and address, where available, of the abuser. The judge in a case is best placed to determine whether the publication of a judgment is warranted, given the particular circumstances of each case. It is also open to the judge to omit the residential address of the perpetrator where it is not considered appropriate to publish that information. Let me point out that a judgment may only be published where the victim gives their consent. Such consent is a prerequisite to publication. To be clear, the victim will not be named in these judgments. Nevertheless, where the perpetrator is named, the victim may be identifiable. As such, publication cannot and should not occur without their consent. Where a victim is deceased, the decision on publication rests with the court. Part 3A also sets out a procedure by which a convicted person can apply for the relevant judgment to be removed from the register. An application can only be made three years after the person has served their

sentence and been released from prison. In considering whether removal of the judgment is warranted, the judge must have regard to any further convictions or any efforts at rehabilitation on the part of the perpetrator. Importantly, the views of the victim are also to be taken into account where they are available.

Sections 2, 3 and 4 of the Bill provide for consequential amendments to the Criminal Law (Rape) Act 1981, the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997 and the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020 respectively. In essence, these amendments ensure that nothing in those pieces of legislation precludes the publication of a judgment in the domestic violence judgments register.

Section 5 of the Bill is a standard provision which provides for the Short Title and commencement of the Bill.

This legislation is straightforward. It establishes a framework for a register of judgments, which will contain judgments in relation to serious crimes committed by an abuser against a current or former partner. What this legislation will provide is a vital resource in relation to safety. In setting out details of a history of serious offending, it will benefit those who may be in a relationship or considering entering a relationship with such a person. Offending of this nature clearly gives warning of an increased risk of domestic, sexual or gender-based violence, knowledge which may be crucial in enabling people to make informed decisions about their personal relationships. The register is a tool which addresses a lacuna in our justice system in order to try to keep people safer.

The parameters of the legislation have been carefully drawn, some might say narrowly drawn. I expect there may be calls to expand the scope of the register or to broaden its remit. However, I stress that this legislation is novel. It remains to be seen how it will function in practice. I also expect that the legislation will be challenged in the courts. I believe that the legislation has been appropriately calibrated and is a measured and proportionate response to serious offending. My view is that it is prudent to introduce the register in a circumspect manner. Once operationalised, the impact of the legislation can be assessed with due consideration for any further measures.

I close by reiterating my commitment and that of this Government to tackling the scourge of gender-based violence. The register will form part of the Government's zero tolerance approach to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. We must make it crystal clear that there is no place for such behaviour in our society. Those with serious criminal convictions for such offences should not be able to escape the consequences of their behaviour. People in relationships, or considering entering into relationships, with convicted offenders deserve to know about their past. They are entitled to make informed decisions about their personal lives.

Abusers thrive on secrecy and shame; however, it is a fundamental principle of our legal system that justice is to be done in public. This register will contribute to ensuring that criminal convictions for these heinous crimes are appropriately publicised.

Let me end by acknowledging again the dedication of Jason Poole and his family, who have campaigned tirelessly for real and lasting change in memory of their cherished Jennie. Jennie's law will help to keep women safe, which is a fitting tribute to her memory. I urge Deputies to work with me to get this important Bill through this House before the recess. I conclude by

welcoming Jason Poole to this Chamber and commending him for his tireless commitment to this cause.

Deputy Máire Devine: It is an emotion we all have - falling in love. It is a promise. It is life-affirming, with a possibility of leading to a life partner. It is a wonderful human emotion. It has the promise of finding a sense of home, of trusting somebody, with finding a soul mate - an eye on building a future together where each person has the other's back. Then the insidious gradual picking can start, seemingly innocent, the undermining, leading to the odd slap, and be followed by the express remorse that makes one stay. There is a promise that things will get better. It does not. Little does a person know or even imagine there is a past form of violence perpetrated, overwhelmingly by men, that was brutal and life-threatening and that they were convicted in court - that this man who loves them will destroy them or end their life.

We women need to have the opportunity to know this, to be informed and to walk away before it is too late. I wholeheartedly commend Jennie's loving brother, Jason, for his dedication and tenacity pursuing the establishment of this domestic violence register. We also had David French in here a couple of weeks ago as well. Everybody needs brothers like these men. These are men. Unfortunately, we are seeing many family members of victims of intimate partner violence having to shoulder such a heavy burden in pursuit of justice and of suitable preventative measures, so no future families and victims will have to be subjected to such outrageous and upsetting violent acts.

We should not limit the scope of this Bill to convictions for physical violence. The offenders' register must include convictions of all types of intimate partner abuse. The original proposed scope of convictions to be included on the register was too narrowly limited to only physical violence. We know there are many other types that are committed in intimate relationships. The Bill now includes murder, manslaughter, rape, sexual assault, assault causing harm, threats to kill or cause serious harm, harassment and danger, false imprisonment and intimate image abuse. What a litany of horror visited on many women. We need to examine the inclusion on the register of financial abuse and coercive control and ensure that the people of Ireland are protected from those convicted of all kinds of abuse.

During pre-legislative scrutiny, witnesses testified about the concerns regarding serial perpetrators. Three years is a very short period for a domestic violence offender register. I concur with them and therefore I support Committee Stage amendments Nos. 5, 6 and 7, as submitted by my Sinn Féin colleague, which extend the length of registration to five years. I also support amendment No. 8, which gives the court the flexibility to specify a longer period before an application for removal from the register may apply with regard to the nature and seriousness of the offence and the need to protect the safety and well-being of the victim or any children or dependants.

I commend my colleague, Deputy Carthy, who chairs the committee on justice, for his careful stewardship of this Bill. I hope survivors, victims and their families are comforted in some small way by the care shown in the progression of this Bill through the House. This is a sensitive, vitally important piece of legislation and has the potential to affect for the good everyone on our island.

Jennie was a young, vibrant woman; a daughter, a mother and a sister who believed she had found a life partner but suffered the heartbreak of knowing that he was not who he seemed to be and he took her life - a murderer. Cuimnigh uirthi.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: I welcome that we have recently seen progress on a number of important measures relating to domestic abuse, but what is of crucial importance is that we get the legislation and policy right. In the face of what report after report expose as an epidemic of violence against women and girls, I do not accept incremental change as good enough. Legislation will pass in the Houses tomorrow on the callous use of counselling notes in sexual offences trials. The lack of a full prohibition is simply not good enough.

I welcome the Dáil last week supporting the EU opting into parts of the Istanbul Convention, but that convention mandates twice as many domestic violence refuge spaces as the Minister has committed to delivering. What is more, the Government has rowed back on its commitment to provide spaces in both Cavan and Monaghan. That is simply not good enough. We need to see progress to ensure that victims of domestic abuse are not those forced out of their family home.

I thank and commend Jason Poole, brother to Jennie, who was murdered by her ex-partner, on his advocacy for the establishment of a register of domestic violence judgments. I have no qualms in saying that is the reason we are here today. The legislation before us is a positive step, but I appeal to the Minister to accept the amendments to increase the timeframe in which a person can seek to be removed from three to five years, and to ensure that register evasion is not possible through plea bargains. I also commend my constituency colleague, Deputy Carthy, for all his work and efforts on this issue.

Deputy Gary Gannon: I begin by welcoming this Bill. It is a really significant piece of legislation strengthening our law on sexual offences, introducing Operation Encompass and, most important, establishing Ireland's first domestic violence register. For that reason, the Social Democrats will be supporting its progression.

Before discussing the legislation itself, I want to acknowledge the people who make this day possible. In particular, I pay tribute to Jason Poole, Jennifer's entire family, and to everyone who has campaigned for what we now know across the country as Jennie's law. No family should ever have to channel unimaginable grief into years of legislative campaigning, yet they have done so with dignity, determination and generosity. Rather than withdrawing from public life, they chose to fight so that another family might be spared what they have had to endure. I was up in Ballygall recently, close to where Jennifer was from, and one would be hard pressed not to see a car or a shopfront with a sticker proudly backing Jennie's law. It is a testament to an extraordinary person and an extraordinary family who have changed this country for the better.

I also acknowledge the tireless work of survivors of domestic abuse, Women's Aid, Safe Ireland and the many campaigners and advocates who have spent decades ensuring that domestic violence is recognised for what it is - not a private matter, but a profound abuse of power that demands a robust response from the State. This Bill is stronger because of their voices.

During pre-legislative scrutiny the justice committee heard directly from victims, families, survivors, organisations, legal experts and petitioners. They challenged the general scheme to identify weaknesses and they suggested improvements. That is exactly how pre-legislative scrutiny is supposed to work. Tomorrow's Committee Stage gives us the opportunity to reflect on much of that evidence in this final piece of worthy legislation.

The establishment of a domestic violence register is an important step. For many people entering a relationship, knowledge can be protection. No register can eliminate risk. No register will prevent every tragedy, but if it helps one person recognise a danger they otherwise could not have known about, then it has the potential to save lives.

At the same time, we have to be honest about its limitations. Women's Aid made an important point to the committee to the effect that the absence of someone's name from the register does not mean that person has never been abusive. Many offenders will never appear as a result of offences being dealt with summarily because victims choose, understandably, not to consent, cases are never reported or convictions are never secured. If we do not acknowledge these limitations, we risk creating a false sense of security. That is why tomorrow I will propose a number of practical amendments that I believe will strengthen rather than alter the intent of the Bill.

I want the register to capture the reality of domestic violence. That means ensuring that summary convictions can be included, where appropriate. Coercive control, assault, stalking and other abusive behaviours are very often prosecuted before the District Court rather than on indictment. Limiting the register to indictable convictions risks excluding some of the most common patterns of abuse. Where a victim has tragically died or cannot express their wishes, we believe that the court should consult the victim's family where appropriate before deciding whether a judgment should appear on the register. This recommendation came directly from Jason Poole and Women's Aid and is a simple recognition that families deserve a voice in the circumstances.

We believe additional offences should be included, particularly harassment and stalking, offences under Coco's Law and breaches of domestic violence orders. These behaviours are often part of the escalating pattern of coercive control that victims experience. Excluding them leaves an unnecessary gap in the protection. We also propose that children and dependents connected to the victim are explicitly recognised in the legislation. Domestic abuse rarely affects only one person in a household. Children experience its consequences too, and the legislation should recognise that reality. We propose a statutory review after three years. This is new legislation. We should be prepared to measure whether it is working, collect anonymised data, identify unintended consequences and improve it where necessary. That recommendation also came directly from the organisations that gave evidence to the committee.

More broadly, I welcome the reforms in the Bill on sexual offences. Moving from an honest belief standard to a reasonable belief standard in rape law is an important and overdue development. Consent must be freely given and people have a responsibility to take reasonable steps to establish it. This is an important progression in our criminal law. I welcome the introduction of Operation Encompass to ensure schools can appropriately support children affected by domestic violence. I also welcome the measures implementing our international obligations on trafficking and violence against women. These are positive reforms that deserve and will get support.

This legislation will not end domestic violence - no single Bill ever could - but it is another step towards a justice system that places victims and survivors at its centre rather than asking them to navigate systems that have too often failed them. The greatest tribute we can pay to Jennifer Poole, her family and every survivor, victim and campaigner who has brought us to this point is not simply to pass this legislation but to make it as strong as we possibly can. I look forward to engaging constructively on the amendments on Committee Stage tomorrow.

Deputy Jen Cummins: I welcome this register. It is important that we send a very clear message in this country that there is no place for domestic violence or gender-based violence. I read with interest that others want it broadened to include more things. It is very important that the register exists. The more we talk about and call out behaviour that is not acceptable, that is costing people their lives and that is ruining people's lives, the better.

I worked in a domestic violence project in London back in the 1990s. I was struck by the number of people from all walks of life from different projects supporting women. I stated recently in the Chamber that I do not know whether there is more prevalence now or more people reporting now but what I will say is that my clinics are constantly full of women experiencing horrific abuse in their homes. What happens to a woman in a relationship - if we can call it that - is that she is broken down to nothing. It corrodes everything, including her self-worth. It removes her independence and it removes every relationship she could possibly have with anyone who might be able to help her out of that situation.

I said here last week that we need more people around those women to call out this behaviour. We need men to call out men on this behaviour. We need our men to tell other men to stop behaving like that, to ask them what they are doing and to tell them that is not how to treat women. We need to have an education programme for men and women to say this is not how we go on with one another and to explain what a healthy relationship is. I am so glad to see youth workers around this country working so hard to talk about consent and positive relationships with one another. Our schools could be encouraged quite strongly to do more in this case. Families could be really supportive in how we support one another to educate our young people on what is a healthy relationship and what is not, and what will happen and what needs to happen if somebody finds themselves in a relationship that is absolutely horrific for them.

I pay tribute to Jennie Poole's brother Jason, who is here. I am sure this is an absolutely horrific time for him to come in here again. I am thinking about his poor sister. I would like more men to be like him. I would like more men to call out this behaviour and to challenge this behaviour so we do not have this situation.

In a previous job, I worked as a designated liaison person for child safeguarding. When a child has witnessed domestic violence and been subjected to child abuse as part of that toxic horrific relationship they also need to be protected. It is very challenging to report parents to Tusla for this. Tusla is very overwhelmed and sometimes people may not get the support they need. Helping young people to understand their mammy and daddy's relationship is very challenging. Encouraging them to keep talking about it and to keep saying the things they need to say so they get the support they need is really hard.

I have also been at the family court supporting family and friends who were seeking protection orders and barring orders. I have seen the shells those women became. I have been

really angry with family and friends, asking why they did not call him out on that behaviour, and saying to my family and friends they should call him out on that and not to let him behave like that. The full weight of the State needs to be put on men who think that behaviour is in any way acceptable because it is not. Whatever the mechanisms we need to ensure this happens, whether it is education, a register, more laws or more punishments, let us do it.

Deputy Matt Carthy: It is fitting that this legislation will be known as Jennie's law in memory of Jennifer Poole who was murdered in 2021 by her former partner Gavin Murphy. It was only after Jennifer's death that her family became aware of Murphy's history of domestic violence. The Bill introduces a register of domestic violence judgments that will apply to individuals convicted of domestic violence against a partner or former partner. Ba mhaith liom tosú le moladh a thabhairt do Jason Poole. Táim cinnte go bhfuil a theaghlach an-bhródúil as an méid atá bainte amach aige i gcuimhne ar a dheirfiúr. I acknowledge the service Jason Poole has given by campaigning for this legislation during his family's own grief. I believe that what Jason has achieved will save lives and will protect many others from danger.

I also acknowledge the Minister and commend him for bringing forward this legislation. By providing a mechanism through which relevant information can be disclosed in appropriate circumstances, the legislation has the potential to empower people to make informed decisions about their safety. The legislation lists the offences to which this will apply. Of course, it will not be a panacea for the crisis of domestic and gender-based violence. We know that abuse is not always apparent at the early stages of a relationship and understandably many people would not even think to consult a register such as this at that point. For those who have concerns, a domestic violence register will be important. It is crucial that those with concerns who seek to consult the register are offered other supports.

While I welcome the Bill, I do believe there are a number of small changes that could be made to the Bill. I appeal to the Minister to accept amendments on Committee Stage tomorrow. There are two key changes that I think the Minister should consider which, in my view, would strengthen the legislation. The period before a person can apply to be removed from the register should be increased from three years to five years.

If it is recognised that being included on a domestic violence register is not an additional punishment on the perpetrator but rather about the protection of potential victims of domestic violence, then increasing that period cannot be seen as punitive. Three years is far too short. I appeal to the Minister to accept amendments to increase the period to five years.

The other key issue is in relation to what convictions qualify for inclusion in the domestic violence register. There is a concern that the remit of the legislation is too narrow and may not actually capture the bulk of domestic violence offences. Women's Aid has warned that many domestic violence-related offences under the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997 are prosecuted summarily in the District Court and would not be captured by the proposed register as drafted.

We also know that many domestic violence charges are reduced to lesser offences through plea bargaining, for example, from a section 3 to a section 2 assault. Even where this is against an intimate partner, this could result in a person not being included on the register when, in fact, there may be a much wider pattern of domestic violence. This is something I am also hoping the Minister will look at again and accept amendments on.

Unfortunately, in the past week alone, two more women have lost their lives in violent circumstances. As I said last week when we were launching the Oireachtas justice committee's report on tackling domestic and gender-based violence, we all have to redouble our efforts to confront this crisis. This means focusing on prevention, safety, having an effective justice system and properly supporting victims of domestic and gender-based violence during and after the judicial process. I ask the Minister to examine the proposals of the Oireachtas justice committee's report, including in relation to matters such as bail, the enforcement of domestic violence protection orders and ensuring that An Garda Síochána is held to the highest standards possible when it comes to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

As I said, I welcome the fact that we are at this point. This is but a small step in what has to be in an all-of-society effort in tackling the scourge and epidemic of violence, particularly against women.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I welcome Jason Poole and thank him for his incredible advocacy and work in pushing the Legislature to reach this day. It is commendable. He has changed Ireland as part of his work. Well done. These were tragic and terrible circumstances for him but his advocacy has been incredible. A lot of the time in here, we give out about one another, and all of that, but I have to commend those who are in this space, including the Opposition spokespeople and the Minister, on the manner in which this legislation is being brought forward in a fairly timely manner, as well as those who drafted it. We will have some discussion tomorrow in relation to a few timelines but I believe, collectively, that we are all on the one page and for the right reasons. I acknowledge that.

This Bill is critically important and absolutely necessary but it is not, in the broader sense, going to change the way in which we need to fight domestic and gender-based violence. There is so much that needs to be done outside of this Bill, preventively and educationally. This commences at a very early age in relation to education and the issues around consent. I am glad to see that much progress has been made in recent years on a lot of the changes from an educational perspective. This needs to be holistic and everywhere. It needs to be in every factor in society so that the message gets out that any form of this behaviour is completely and utterly unacceptable.

In relation to the legislation itself, people should have the chance to know if their partner has a history of serious domestic violence. This is sensible. It is probably something we should have dealt with a number of years ago. There have been different approaches to this issue in different jurisdictions. I looked up what the UK did with Clare's law, and there have been various different variations across the EU in respect of what we are bringing in here this week. It is essential, however, that we make sure what is being done here is indeed the best and most effective way forward as we see it within our own domestic law.

In the UK, Clare's law put in place a domestic violence disclosure, DVD, scheme, which allows the police to disclose and proactively inform people of their partner's relevant past convictions. The new register of domestic violence under this Bill before us today differs from the UK precedent in important ways. Being honest, there are probably risks inherent either way. I am sure that those who drafted the legislation, the Minister, the Attorney General, and his officials, have gone through this. I can see the risks in both models. DVD schemes like Clare's law rely on the police providing information. This carries the possibility of there being

delays, which would be a real issue and something I am sure the Minister was conscious of. A report in the UK shows many women waiting for hundreds of days for disclosure, which would not be acceptable. Direct contact is also typically required with the police to initiate the process, something that can be a barrier, particularly for those who are marginalised, vulnerable, in difficult situations, have communication issues, etc. The efficacy of DVD schemes has been questioned, so we understand why the Minister has gone down the road of taking a different approach.

When this was being discussed previously, when we looked at it in the committee, the variation in approaches and the manner in which the Minister was going to go about this were things we looked at. We do understand why he has taken a different approach. However, we would like to hear some reassurance from him on a couple of points. The information to be included on the register is, by definition, limited in nature, relating only to serious convictions. Of course, though, the absence of information should not necessarily mean an absence of concern. The question is: how we can deal with this issue? How do we make sure that somebody does not take a false sense of security from finding out that their partner or prospective partner is not listed? This is a very sensitive and difficult question to answer but it is something that we need to discuss here. How do we also ensure that the need for victims' consent is not manipulated, with victims being put under pressure or coerced not to give their consent? This is a real question that we must address. We must make sure that the supports are in place to allow victims to safely make an independent, informed decision. In other words, what supports will be there to ensure that victims feel they have the capacity, strength and support to be able to do it? It is an important consideration. Will there be wraparound supports? Will there be other supports in this regard? The Minister might outline them further.

My colleagues in the Seanad raised the issue of possible misidentification. We need to ensure that this does not become open to abuse by vigilantes. We would have liked to have seen more details provided for in the register itself, ensuring that any possibility of misidentification was certainly minimised, and ideally zero. How can we ensure that there will not be those who will try to do something like this to affect people's reputations?

Most importantly, we must recognise that this is not a silver bullet, as I said previously. We need to see a greater holistic approach across society and greater urgency in tackling domestic and gender-based violence. This Bill is very welcome. I have raised questions, and, similar to previous speakers, I also have questions in relation to timelines. We will, however, be supporting this Bill wholeheartedly. We are looking forward to it being brought through the Dáil this week and being enacted as soon as possible.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I welcome this Bill, Jennie's law, to the House and I welcome the opportunity to speak on it. The legislation is the culmination of years of hard work, advocacy and determination on part of the Poole family. Jennifer Poole was from Ballygall and had been in touch with me many times on many different issues.

She was the 24-year-old mother of Nevaeh and Zack, an amazing healthcare worker, a much-loved member of her camogie team in her GAA club, Erin's Isle. On 17 April 2021, she was killed in her home on Melville Drive in Finglas by her ex-partner Gavin Murphy, who is now serving a life sentence. What compounds the tragedy is that Jennifer never knew or had any way of finding out that Murphy had a previous conviction for assaulting a former partner. He

told her he had been living in Spain. In fact, he had been in prison. Her family believes that if she had known this, she would have made a different decision and not have proceeded with the relationship. What was all the more difficult was that her family did not know of this previous conviction either until they heard it during the court case for her murder. They were stunned.

Since 2021, Jason, her brother, has turned his family's grief into a powerful campaign that has included petitions, media appearances and meetings with successive Ministers with one simple aim, namely that no other woman will be unable to access the fact that a previous judgment had been made against their partner. He has the full support of his community in Finglas, which has backed him from the very start. On a personal note, it has been a privilege to work alongside Jason on this campaign. He is a credit to his community, as was his sister. It has also been a pleasure to work with Senator O'Loughlin and the Minister, Deputy Jim O'Callaghan. I acknowledge the road this legislation has travelled. It started with Senator O'Loughlin's draft of an original Bill with Jason which was brought to the Seanad. The Minister backed this campaign as a backbench TD long before he had responsibility for in the area. The legislation has now been brought to Cabinet and before these Houses.

The Bill inserts a new Part 3A into the Domestic Violence Act 2018, establishing a public domestic violence judgments register managed by the Courts Service whereby if a person convicted on indictment of a serious domestic violence offence, including murder, manslaughter, rape, sexual assault, non-fatal strangulation, harassment and coercive control, the trial judge will have the discretion to publish that judgment. The victim's consent is required. A person may apply to be removed from the register but not earlier than three years after the conviction. Any removal will remain at the court's discretion.

I also welcome the elegant method the Minister used to make this information available. As Deputy Kelly said, it was tricky as to how we would proceed. The approach the Minister has selected avoids potential obstacles which could have prevented the legislation being passed. Our courts are required to administer justice in public. In principle, every conviction is already a public fact. In practice, with fewer court reporters than there used to be, a lot of judgments go unreported in the media. Rather than build a new register, the Minister has simply ensured that the judgments which are already public will actually be published, relying on a principle of open justice. I echo the Minister's point that a register alone is not a solution. It has to sit alongside a wider strategy around funding of victims' support organisations, awareness raising and the work of Cuan. This law will be transformative in helping people across Ireland who are in a relationship to discover whether their partner has a history of serious domestic violence convictions. In her life, a mother, a care worker, a club member, Jennifer Poole gave so much to our community. She stood for everything that is positive about our community. It is fitting that even after this tragedy, she and her family have inspired this community to pass Jennie's law and save lives in this country.

Deputy Mark Ward: Before I talk about the legislation, I want to put it in context. As the Minister knows, there is an epidemic of violence against women and girls in this State. Most recently, we saw the murder of two women, Jamey Carney in Kerry and Adina Raluca Constantin in Laois. I extend my condolences to their families and loves ones. The suspect in their murders is their partner or former partner. Women's Aid has published some very startling figures. Since 1996, 286 women have died violently in this State. Some 63% of them were killed in their own homes, 55% were killed by a partner or ex-partner and nine out of ten knew

their killers. Your home should be a safe place. Unfortunately, it is not a safe place for many women. This is a huge problem. That is only talking about deaths; there are countless other women experiencing domestic violence and abuse in their own homes. Domestic violence refuges need more funding. We need accommodation in every county. Another report I saw shows that over a six-month period, nearly 1,900 women were turned away from services because they were oversubscribed. I know women who could not find a safe place and had to return to unsafe and potentially deadly home environments.

This legislation will introduce a register to apply to individuals convicted of domestic violence against a partner or former partner. The register will be publicly accessible. Inclusion on the register requires victim consent before publication. As was said already, safeguards are definitely needed in relation to this aspect to make sure there is no coercion or anything like that. This is an important step to protect women from potentially violent partners. I am on the justice committee. We recommended that this legislation be named in honour of Jennifer Poole, who was murdered in 2021 by her ex-partner, Gavin Murphy. It was only after Jennifer was killed that her family became aware of Murphy's history of domestic violence. I commend Jennifer's family, in particular her brother Jason, who I welcome to the Gallery. He has led the call for the introduction of this register.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I welcome the introduction of Jennie's law. I commend her brother Jason on all of the campaigning he has done over a number of years to bring this about. My hope it will at least bring a stigma to what is called domestic violence. There has not really been the kind of stigma there should have been over the years. I want to put this in context. Women's Aid released its report recently. It shows a 33% increase in violence in the home against women in 2025. That is a 33% increase in disclosures. We do not know if this reflects a similar increase in the level of violence, but I reckon it is a bit of both. More awareness, non-acceptance and less tolerance are also factors.

Women's Aid's front-line services heard 62,275 disclosures, an overall increase of one third, as I said. Some 85% of these women were abused by a current or former partner. In fact, one third were abused by a former partner, which shows that the old cliché of "Why does she not leave?" is not the solution because the relationship ending does not mean the abuse ends. There are serious challenges within the family justice system, post-separation abuse and the housing crisis which is trapping women and forcing them to choose between violence or homelessness that the Minister has to address. We have all had many contacts on that issue.

What kind of abuse are we talking about? Trigger warning for anybody who is listening in, but there were 1,522 disclosures of abuse during pregnancy or just after a baby was born and 1,321 threats to kill women, children and family members or to self-harm. We have to recognise that on this island yesterday, another woman and child were murdered in the family home in Ballymena. There were two femicides last week. There have been 670 disclosures of abusers threatening to take children from their mothers, as well as rape, non-fatal strangulation against women, stalking online and offline - the list goes on. Every ten minutes a woman or girl is killed by a family member or partner in the world. It is a relentless situation. In Ireland, it is a huge problem.

Last week, there was an unbelievable situation where two women were murdered. One, because she was killed by somebody of a different nationality and she potentially was in a

relationship with suspect - there has been no trial - she got different treatment. There were comments on her own social media page condemning her and victim-blaming her. Imagine her daughter and her family had to see that. That is because there are racists in this country congealing around the issue of gender-based violence and trying to turn it into a race issue - people who have no interest in violence against women at any other time except if it is carried out by someone who is not Irish.

6 o'clock

I have been subjected by a male TD to online harassment about this. That is a form of gender-based violence, too, against elected women. There are disgusting social media pile-ons by male TDs who raise this issue as well. It is completely unacceptable and should be called out.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I pay tribute to the family of Jennie Poole, and particularly her brother Jason, who is in the Gallery and who fought very hard for many years to get this important legislation implemented in her memory. It is a tragedy that the law has come too late for Jennie, but it has the potential to protect other women at risk from dangerous intimate partners. At the moment and until this law is passed, there is no way for people to find out whether their partners have a history of violence against women, even if they have previously been convicted of a serious offence, such as rape or coercive control, and even if they have served a prison sentence for it.

The Bill was, in part, inspired by the domestic violence disclosure scheme in England and Wales. However, there is no provision in it for An Garda Síochána to proactively disclose a violent offender's history to a new partner. The Minister has previously said that, under Operation Devise, An Garda Síochána will provide support to new partners of people with serious domestic violence convictions, closely monitor any evidence of new violence and have a proactive arrest policy, but that is not the same as knocking on a door and warning a woman that her partner has a violent past. Instead, the law puts all the onus on women and other members of the public, such as their friends and family, to look up the domestic violence judgments register. It has been possible in other jurisdictions to enable proactive disclosure, so I am not sure why it cannot be done here.

Unfortunately, this law, while welcome, is only one part of the battle in a war against male violence against women. Gender-based violence is endemic. It is an epidemic. The courts are full of women seeking barring and harassment orders. Thousands of children are growing up in violent homes. As of last week, eight women had been killed in Ireland so far this year. They are Scarlett Faulkner, Linda Costello, Milena Ostojic, Yveta Donovalova, Masuma Sohrabi, Noreen Daly, Adina Constantin and Jamey Carney. Yesterday in Ballymeena, another woman and girl whose names we do not know yet were murdered.

Laws like this one are welcome, but they cannot tear out the problem by its roots, which are in sexism, misogyny and the way capitalism breeds and profits from that sexism and misogyny. We all know it is on the rise. It is happening among young men, who in the past would always have had more progressive attitudes than those who went before them. One of the primary drivers of this is the online manosphere. It propagates toxic masculinity and hatred of women for profit. Millions of people around the world are being exposed to this toxic content every time they log in to social media and the big tech companies are making millions out of it. It is normalising misogyny on a global scale. It is a kind of mass brainwashing that is driving

attitudes towards women back into the dark ages. It is not good enough just to deal with the after-effects. Prevention is always better than cure, so the Government should be tackling gender-based violence at source by combating misogyny, including by turning off toxic algorithms that are driving toxic content and toxic real-world behaviour.

Deputy Charles Ward: I welcome Jennie's law. The publicly available register of judgments will be a life-saving resource, as people in relationships or considering relationships will be able to see whether people have histories of domestic violence convictions.

I thank Jennie Poole's family, particularly Jason, for the work they have done on this in recent years. I have no doubt that, without them, we would not be where we are today.

This could not come at a more crucial time. We are only halfway through 2026 and the number of women killed in Ireland has already overtaken the figure for all of last year. Today's events in Ballymena echo this as it continues. There is an epidemic of violence against women. It is not stopping. It is clear that there has been a demand for domestic violence services in Donegal in recent days. Domestic abuse is increasing and becoming more and more complex. I spoke in depth with Jessica Gallagher, who is clinical director of the Uplift Project. She works alongside women who are affected by domestic abuse, coercive control and sexual violence in Donegal. She said that demand for the service demonstrates the scale of unmet need. The service receives 20 contacts from service users each day and five new referrals every week.

It is clear that there is a significant gap between the crisis intervention and long-term recovery, with many victims shockingly being left to source their own support. I was particularly struck by the case in Donegal of a woman in her 60s who had been left with intergenerational trauma, depression and PTSD and had repeated suicidal crises, having suffered prolonged domestic abuse and sexual violence. She did not receive the substantial person-centred supports she desperately needed to rebuild her life. Support has to be extended beyond crisis intervention. Full and proper recovery requires long-term support and giving women the opportunity to truly rebuild their lives, yet organisations that provide essential life-saving services are often forced to continue to operate in uncertainty regarding funding, forcing them to devote valuable time and energy to securing resources instead of expanding supports to be available to victims and survivors. Vital services supporting victims should not have to compete for funding. Fundraising should not have to happen. It is a ridiculous situation that they rely on short-term grants to remain open. Domestic abuse funds should not be relocated and unspent funds in Donegal should remain in Donegal. These services should be recognised as essential public services and should be fully funded to allow people to continue this life-saving work.

Deputy John McGuinness: I commend the Minister on bringing forward this stand-alone legislation. It is important that he continue his work reforming the various aspects of legislation that need to be examined and updated in the context of what society faces today. I have no doubt that this Bill will assist partners to know about the records of those who have committed serious domestic and sexual abuse and so on.

It is timely because, in my work in the constituency, I come across too many cases of sexual and gender-based abuse, too many cases where women in particular are controlled by their partners in terms of their finances, social activities and how they conduct their lives generally.

There seems to be very little they can do to prevent their partners continuing to make their lives miserable. There are support services, but we need to fund them more extensively. The refuge centres serve a great purpose, but they need to connect more directly with local councils to ensure that whatever housing is needed is delivered. That would require more funding for local authorities, but if we are to address this issue, all of the negative impacts experienced by people being abused must be considered.

I have come across families where the couple continues to live in the same house, the woman continues to be abused, and the Garda and local services are aware of it, but it is extremely difficult to get that person out of the house and into alternative accommodation. That is why I make the point about the funding. There are other cases of men stalking women being reported to the Garda. Letting time pass to build up evidence for a case is having horrific impacts on women. I do not know when it began to escalate, but it is now the situation that the sexual, physical and financial abuse of women is out of control. I hope that this Bill, when implemented, will provide a register that at least might save some person, male or female, from such violence in the future.

I commend the Poole family and Jason in particular.

My colleague, Deputy McAuliffe, gave a very elegant outline of the efforts made by that family. I commend them for coming forward. I commend Jason for the work he has done.

I will finish by again asking the Minister about funding. I ask him to consider what is available today and to compare it with the awful and traumatic circumstances that some people who are being abused have to face every day. I ask him to find some new way of providing a route for them to escape the clutches of their abusers. The sooner that we get to grips with all of this, provide all of the services, provide the power of arrest to the Garda and pass this legislation, the sooner we will be led to other steps that need to be taken. I urge the Minister to continue with reform and to continue to monitor the reforming legislation being brought forward so that changes can be made immediately and effectively.

Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan: I strongly welcome the introduction of the domestic violence register and fully support this Bill. It is encouraging to see cross-party support for its introduction, which is a clear sign that this issue crosses all political divides and demands action. The reality is that domestic violence is seldom a one-off incident. If it happens once, it will happen again. That is precisely why a documented history of domestic violence is so crucial.

The register will apply to individuals convicted of domestic violence against a partner or former partner based on a specified list of offences. The register will be publicly accessible via the website of the Courts Service. Importantly, the victim's consent is required before any inclusion on the register and publication.

This legislation exists because of the advocacy and commitment of Jason Poole, whose sister was killed by her ex-partner, a man with a documented history of domestic violence. The research clearly shows that individuals with prior records of abuse are significantly more likely to offend, often with escalating severity.

While we support this legislation, we will scrutinise its provisions closely to ensure that issues raised during the pre-legislative scrutiny process are fully addressed. These issues

include Jason's important concern that three years is far too soon for a person to be removed from the register.

In Kilkenny, we are fortunate to have Amber Women's Refuge, which does amazing work in providing care and support for women who are victims of abuse. Over the past 25 years, Amber has grown and become a safe haven for many women and children. For far too long, Carlow has been one of the few counties in the State without a women's refuge. Given the rise in calls relating to domestic abuse and cases of domestic abuse, that is nothing short of a disgrace. No county should be without a women's refuge.

Deputy Paul Lawless: I commend Margaret Loftus from my own constituency of Mayo for her work in raising awareness of domestic abuse. I also commend the report recently published by the justice committee. Ms Loftus has raised many concerns. The *in camera* rule is one of them. She told the committee that the *in camera* rule prevented a lot of information from coming out. It is essentially a veil of secrecy. It needs to be looked at and reviewed.

I welcome the publication of the Women's Aid report. I have read and studied it. We see record numbers of women contacting the helpline. The report details 500 cases of non-fatal strangulation, 1,500 cases of abuse while the victim was pregnant and 670 cases of abusers threatening to have children taken away from their mothers. There is a massive amount of work that must be done in relation to this issue.

I will raise the tragic case of Jamey Carney, the shocking murder we saw in Kerry. The Minister needs to come out in relation to this. There needs to be much more transparency. It is hard to believe that the person of interest has not been in any way highlighted. Photos have not been disseminated and there has been no awareness campaign. That must be addressed. How was this person of interest able to board a commercial flight and leave the country before An Garda Síochána was even aware of the situation? The law was changed on 12 June, effectively making it easier for an asylum seeker to abscond and leave the country. The law was effectively weakened. Just three weeks ago, on 26 June, it ceased to be an offence for an asylum seeker to abscond and leave the country during the applications or appeals process without notifying the Minister. Why was that the case? Why can a person seeking asylum here now abscond and leave without any trace? It is extraordinary. No one is talking about it.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: Like others, I have called for this Bill, Jennie's law, and now welcome it. It came through the Seanad first in order to speed it up. I thank the Minister for doing that to get it through the process before the recess. It is a significant step forward in protecting victims of domestic abuse. For too long, the horrific realities of coercive control, assault, non-fatal strangulation, which others have mentioned, and other forms of abuse have been hidden in this system of silence. By establishing a public register of convictions, the Bill brings these crimes committed by dangerous people into the light of day. In theory, it empowers those with information to help to protect others, although they are often victims themselves or the relatives of victims.

While I support the core principles of the legislation, we also have to listen to some of the constructive criticism raised across this House and beyond. If this law is truly to protect victims, we have to address some gaps before its final passage. For example, there is a deep structural conflict between the register and the family court system. I have raised the *in camera*

rule separately. Under this Bill, an offender can only be placed on the public register with the express consent of the victim. However, as long as the family courts operate under the strict secrecy of the *in camera* rule, victims may well be too terrified to give that consent. They may fear that publicly naming and shaming an abuser will trigger retaliation in closed-door custody and access proceedings. Currently, the system cannot adequately police such retaliation. To really help survivors, we have to reform the *in camera* rule and bring transparency to family justice.

Serious questions remain regarding the process of applying for removal from the register. As it stands and as others have mentioned, an offender can apply to be removed from the register three years after conviction or on completion of their sentence. That is too short. However, I welcome this legislation in general.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: I will say what half of this country is thinking and what this House has refused to hear: women in Ireland do not feel safe walking through the capital city, through Cork city, where my own constituency is located, or through towns and villages where women once thought nothing of walking home alone. That precious ordinary freedom has been taken from the Irish woman. It did not happen by accident. It is the result of policy. Eight women have died this year. Of the identified suspects, one is Irish. That is not an invented figure and I will not be silenced for repeating it in this House or anywhere else.

It is not only Ireland's shame; it is Europe's. The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention reports that people of foreign backgrounds make up one fifth of the population but 43% of homicide perpetrators. It is reported that half of the women murdered in the Kingdom of Spain this year were killed by foreign nationals. Across the Continent, governments have opened their doors and lost control of their borders. When their own citizens stand up and take notice, these governments lecture them and call them far-right for calling them out.

We in Europe have brought this upon ourselves and our women are paying the ultimate price. The Hibernophobic mistress of misandry, Deputy Coppinger, said it was racist to report the truth about the suspect in the killing of Jamey Carney. She blames mainstream media. She blames the toxic culture of Irish masculinity. She blames phobic this and phobic the other. It is phobic when the truth does not fit her narrative. I say to this House that the women of Ireland are not afraid of slogans. They are not afraid of slurs. What they are afraid of, however, is a man wanted for raping four children in Britain who hid out for a month in County Cork. There is an increasing feeling across this country that Ireland has become a refuge for those fleeing justice and not persecution. That must stop.

I say to the Minister that this Bill - the facts are on the record - is a good Bill and I will support it, but the people are owed the truth. As God is my witness, they will have the truth from me and they will have the truth continuously from my party. I commend this Bill to the House.

Deputy Michael Collins: The principle behind this legislation is straightforward. People should be able to make informed decisions about their own safety when entering a relationship. I support the fact that publication is not automatic. It remains a matter for the courts following a final conviction, with judicial discretion and, in most cases, the consent of the victim. That is an important safeguard. However, we must also ensure that in trying to protect victims, we

do not accidentally put them at further risk. Victim privacy must be absolute, particularly in small rural communities where identification can happen more easily. I would also have concerns about the publication of residential addresses and whether this is necessary in most circumstances.

There is another issue that has been very much on people's minds in recent days following the tragic death of Jamey Carney in Killarney. First and foremost, our thoughts are with her daughter, the rest of her family and all those who loved her. As Members of this House will know, the Garda has stated that a person of significant interest in the investigation left Ireland shortly before discovery of Ms Carney's body and reports indicate that this individual had previously come to Ireland through the international protection system. If it transpires that someone who came to this country seeking protection abused that welcome and committed such a horrific crime, then the Irish people will rightly ask very serious questions. They will ask how this could happen, how a suspect was able to leave the jurisdiction and how we can ensure that justice is done. Let me be absolutely clear - those seeking refuge in Ireland should be treated fairly and with dignity but equally, anyone who comes here must obey our laws and respect our people. There can be no tolerance for violence against women and no tolerance for anyone who would abuse the generosity of this country. While we must allow the Garda to conduct its investigation and any future legal process to take its course, this tragic case reminds us why public safety must always come first. The protection of victims and potential victims must remain at the centre of every decision we make in this House.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: The progression of Jennie's law from Second Stage today represents an important step in our efforts to tackle domestic, sexual and gender-based violence in Ireland. The establishment of a public register for those convicted of domestic violence has the potential to empower people with the information that could help them make informed decisions about their own safety and well-being. Individuals are entitled to know if a prospective partner has a history of domestic violence, particularly where that history may indicate a risk of future harm.

It is important that this register be accompanied by clear signposting to support services. Anyone accessing this information should be directed towards domestic violence organisations and other relevant supports where they are seeking help for themselves or concerned about the safety of someone close to them.

One aspect of the Bill that needs work, in my view, is the provision allowing offenders to seek removal from the register after three years. Domestic abuse is rarely a single incident. In many cases, it is a pattern of behaviour that could continue for years and leave lasting impacts on victims long after the offending has ended. Against that backdrop, three years appears to be a very short period before an application for removal can be made.

A concerning anomaly is that an offender who has received a custodial sentence may apply for removal three years after their release, potentially becoming eligible for removal earlier than someone who has received a non-custodial sentence. Why should somebody convicted of a serious domestic abuse offence and sentenced to imprisonment become eligible for removal earlier than someone who has received a non-custodial sentence? There should be a minimum period for applying for the judgment to be removed regardless of whether a person was imprisoned. It is not acceptable that, after only three years, somebody who is convicted of

abuse can essentially apply to have their record scrubbed. This register should provide confidence and reassurance, not create uncertainty where the relevant convictions may have disappeared from view after a relatively short period.

I have some concerns regarding the extent to which publication rests on the discretion of the trial judge. There is the scenario where a victim of domestic abuse would like their judgment publicly available for potential future partners to see but the trial judge, he or she, could determine that it is not appropriate. The legislation should set out the criteria very clearly for why a judgment may not be published rather than leaving it solely to the discretion of individual judges. Exclusion from the register should be the exception rather than the rule. Without clear guidance, there is a risk of inconsistency between cases and between courts, undermining confidence in the very law we seek to implement.

This debate comes at a time when the Government is seeking to address other drivers of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, including proposals to criminalise the possession, production and distribution of violent pornography, which I really welcome. I will support the Minister in that. I am a member of the all-party group on sexual violence. The way women, in particular, are depicted and characterised in extreme pornography is just shocking. The research that has been presented to us is, frankly, shocking and it is unacceptable in this country. While this legislation focuses on protecting potential future victims, we must also address some of the factors upstream that contribute to abusive behaviour in the first place. Violent pornography is definitely part of that. We cannot avoid it. We have to square up with it to deal with it for current and future generations.

Jennie's law is a welcome addition, but it cannot be the end of the conversation. We need to improve and strengthen how we tackle the cultural environment that not only enables this behaviour but makes perpetrators believe it is normal. Pornography is part of that. It is not acceptable and we must do everything we can to challenge these attitudes and behaviours.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: A couple of days before my tenth birthday, I came home from school to once again find my mother beaten to a pulp and our home smashed to pieces. The bravery of my mother that day changed the course of our lives forever. With the aid of a social care worker, we were brought to a bed and breakfast before we moved to the women's refuge in Galway for a number of weeks while waiting for a longer term placement as the first family in the new women's refuge in Navan, which opened a couple of months later. My mam, the strongest warrior I know, left with four children and only the clothes on her back, bottles and nappies for my three brothers, who were toddlers at the time, and a Boyzone album on cassette, which was my birthday present.

I know first hand the impact of domestic violence on women and more broadly on families. As a nine-, eight-, seven-, six- and five-year-old girl, I used to sit at the top of the stairs and pray to hear my mam scream or cry because it was the only way I knew she was surviving another beating. The only crime she committed in suffering that monstrous abuse was to fall in love and trust the man she married, the father of her three sons, and trust him to protect her and our family and not batter the life out of her. We were lucky. My mam was unbreakable. She is a survivor and we are a family of survivors.

Not everybody is so lucky. As I speak today, I think of Jennifer Poole, whose brother Jason prompted this legislation in the name of Jennie's law in the aftermath of Jennifer's brutal murder

by someone she too once loved. We in Sinn Féin support the introduction of a domestic violence register. A documented history of domestic violence is a strong indicator of future behaviour and serves as a protection to women right around this nation. While I acknowledge that we have come some way in the 30 years since we had to flee from our home, I still believe we need to do more in terms of preventions and supports but this welcome measure with regard to a domestic violence register is reassurance for women with concerns and offers some comfort to women in a society of ever-evolving domestic and gender-based violence. I urge the Minister, though, for the sake of the next victims and survivors and in the memory of the women who did not make it, to accept the amendment, increase the timeframe that retains somebody on the register for longer than three years and, crucially, ensure there is no evasion of entry onto this register in the first place through any sort of plea bargains.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Well done.

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan): I thank all Deputies for their contributions. I acknowledge the fact that, unusually, every person who has spoken in this debate is in support of the legislation. That is a very positive sign in respect of what we, as a House, are seeking to do in terms of changing the law. On many occasions, understandably and correctly, the legislative process is adversarial and people disagree with legislative proposals being put forward by one side or the other. However, in this instance it is instructive that there is widespread agreement across the House in respect of the legislation being introduced. It is important to note that the only other time that has happened in my experience is in respect of the Guardianship of Infants (Amendment) Bill 2026, which will be finalised tomorrow night and again was inspired by an appalling piece of violence perpetrated against a woman, Valerie French.

It indicates that there is broad recognition in this House that we need a co-ordinated response to the growing problem of domestic sexual and gender-based violence. As Deputy Byrne just indicated, it is a problem that predominantly affects women. In Northern Ireland and in the UK, this issue is referred to as violence against women and girls. In Ireland we adopt a broader approach in respect of it, but predominantly we are talking about violence against women and girls. This legislation is an important part of our legislative response to that crisis. It is a small response and nobody is suggesting that it is the full response but it is an important response to it.

It is surprising that this legislation has to be introduced at all. The reason I say that is because, as Deputies know, under the Constitution justice is required to be administered in public. That in particular applies in respect of criminal offences. There are family law cases, which Deputy Gogarty referred to, that are heard *in camera*. There are some criminal prosecutions where, for the purposes of protecting the identity of the complainant, individuals' identities are not revealed. To a large extent, cases of prosecutions for assault causing harm under section 3, assault causing serious harm under section 4, coercive control and manslaughter are all cases that are heard in public. Rape is an exception because of protecting the anonymity of the complainant.

This legislation is necessary because all of those are cases that are heard on indictment and will be determined by a jury in the Circuit Criminal Court or the Central Criminal Court. All around Ireland today, there are cases in the Circuit Criminal Court and the Central Criminal

Court where the outcome of the jury's deliberations gives rise to a sentence being imposed by the court. However, unlike in civil proceedings, there is not a written judgment of 20 or 30 pages recording the facts of the case. The courts website shows judgments from the High Court or the Circuit Court in the civil sphere and reserved reported judgments of the judges of the High Court predominantly. The only time we get a written judgment in respect of a criminal trial is if it goes on appeal to the Court of Appeal and then we get the details of what happened in the court below, the conviction, the nature of the defence and the detail about the individual concerned.

One of the consequences of the fact that verdicts are delivered by juries promptly and there is no written record of them outside of that is that sometimes people do not get to hear about them. We are dependent upon journalists being in court in order to find out about criminal convictions and the decisions of verdicts. To a large extent, journalists do that very professionally. Virtually all the cases that happen in the Central Criminal Court are reported upon even though today we have about ten Central Criminal Courts in operation at any one time. Unquestionably, individuals are being convicted of serious offences in the Circuit Criminal Court and people are not hearing about them because there is no journalist in court to report them. That is no criticism of journalists; it is just a fact of the matter. Therefore, someone looking for a record of whether somebody was convicted of, for example, assault causing serious harm under section 4 in a Circuit Court down the country will not be able to find that out. My view is that is a failing and a fault in the system. We should be able to find out information in respect of criminal convictions. That is a battle for another day.

As everyone has noted, inspired by Jason Poole in memory of his sister, Jennifer, there had to be some process of making information available arising from verdicts that are given and judgments delivered in respect of people convicted of serious offences against an intimate partner or former partner. That is the purpose of this legislation. At the outset it limits it to indictable convictions and people who have been convicted of serious offences in the Circuit Criminal Court or the Central Criminal Court. A schedule of the offences is set out, including obviously murder, manslaughter and rape. When we get down into the other offences, these are the potential offences that may not be reported upon, such as assault causing harm, assault causing serious harm, non-fatal strangulation, threats to kill, harassment, endangerment, false imprisonment and indeed coercive control under the Domestic Violence Act.

The benefit of this legislation is that the courts will now know, after a person has been convicted on indictment of any of those offences and if it involves an intimate partner or former intimate partner, that there is a statutory mechanism available for the court to put in print details of that conviction. Since this is something that is novel, I am probably adopting a conservative approach in the initial drafting of it. We will have a discussion tomorrow night about the amendments that will come forward. We had a very good discussion and debate on it in Seanad Éireann. In my view, when starting with something like this, we are better off starting cautiously rather than trying to get everything into the statutory scheme. Once we have this new statutory scheme up and running, I hope to see it develop over time.

I have picked domestic sexual and gender-based violence as the type of offences which need to be covered by this new statutory scheme because of the experience of Jennifer Poole and the appalling history of what happened to her, which my colleague Deputy McAuliffe recounted

earlier. People would like to be aware if somebody has been convicted of a serious offence against a previous partner or former partner.

As has been stated by many Deputies here, it will not necessarily be the case and it cannot be assumed that just because someone's new partner is not on this new register once it comes out that therefore they are safe. Of course they are not. Obviously, people have to engage in their own assessments of a person when entering into a relationship. Deputy Devine started off the contributions by referring to the fact that everyone hopes to meet love. It is important to recognise that, fortunately, the vast majority of engagements that people have are not violent relationships. They might not all work out, but they are not relationships which are violent.

However, regrettably in this House we have to deal with those issues which cause problems and which damage individuals. That is why it is necessary to recognise that some relationships do not end up in that specific way which I discussed a few moments ago but involve a male partner with a history of violence. I believe this House should certainly try to put in place a regime and a statutory mechanism whereby somebody entering into a relationship should be able to find out if that person was convicted of a serious offence in the past. I know people have mentioned here that they would like to see further offences included, such as summary convictions in the District Court. I will not go down that route at this stage. Maybe a future Minister or future Oireachtas may want to do it. Certainly, the State should facilitate the public being aware of persons who are convicted of serious offences and of causing serious harm to a former partner.

It goes back to the point I made at the beginning. The Constitution states that justice is to be administered in public. If we are in the court today and we hear about it, we are entitled to talk about it and so people are entitled to be aware.

Question put and agreed to.

Protecting the Copyright of Irish Artists in the era of Artificial Intelligence: Motion [Private Members]

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I move:

That Dáil Éireann:

recognises that art is the product of the labour of artists, informed by their unique human experience, creativity and skill

reiterates Article 27.2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that "Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author";

affirms that the constitutional property rights of our writers, composers, performers, actors, and artists include the intellectual property of their works and performances, the royalties from which form an integral part of the income they earn from their labour;

notes with concern that the social impacts of low pay, precarious work and poor working conditions have been identified as endemic to the arts sector in Ireland since the late 1990s, according to research commissioned by the Arts Council of Ireland, and

demonstrated in research conducted as part of the pilot basic income for artist's scheme; and

commends the work of the Irish Music Rights Organisation, the Screen Composers Guild of Ireland, The Ivors Academy, the Irish Recorded Music Association, the Irish Writers Union, Irish Equity, Recorded Artists Actors Performers, the Digital Creative Industries Forum, the Association of European Performers' Organisations (AEPO-ARTIS), the European Composer and Songwriter Alliance, the International Federation of Actors, among other organisations, and of individual artists for defending the rights of Irish artists, authors, creators and performers against exploitation and misuse, and for highlighting the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) developments on rights holders;

expresses alarm that:

- the use of generative AI systems that rely massively on protected content not only reproduce work without authorisation from, or remuneration for, the rights holders affected by such use, but may also result in the provision of products and services that directly and unfairly compete with those of the rights holders;
- generative AI systems, by massively and inexpensively creating content that mimics what was produced by human creativity, competes directly with the work of creators, particularly of cultural and media content, and that this competition may lead to a decline in the quality of online content as a result of creators disengaging, and thus to an overall decline in human cultural and creative production;
- a study on the economic impact of Generative AI in the Music and Audiovisual industries by the International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers (CISAC) in 2024 found that AI would put 24 per cent of music creators' revenues at risk by 2028, a cumulative loss of €10 billion over the next five years; and
- generative AI systems are used to massively generate outputs used to commit streaming fraud, with music streaming service Deezer finding in April 2026 that up to 85 per cent of the streams generated by fully AI-generated tracks in 2025 were fraudulent, and that 75,000 fully AI-generated tracks are uploaded to Deezer every day, representing roughly 44 per cent of total daily uploads;

notes that a majority of European Union (EU) member states responding to a consultation by the Danish Presidency of the Council of the EU into lessons learned on Article 15 of the Directive of the Digital Single Market Copyright (DSMC) Directive and on fostering a well-functioning framework for licensing in the age of AI called for immediate action to increase transparency and facilitate licensing;

criticises the European Commission for withdrawing the proposed AI Liability Directive, which would have established a new civil liability regime for AI including disclosure obligations and a rebuttable presumption of causal link between such systems and harms;

notes with concern that:

- the implementation of the copyright-relevant obligations of the AI Act, through the Code of Practice for General-Purpose AI providers and the template for the

transparency summary, has not led to effective solutions for rights holders to enforce their rights and is thus insufficient;

- the opt-out mechanism under Article 4 of the DSMC Directive has not delivered meaningful control for rights holders in practice; and
- the extension of the text and data mining exemption under Article 4 of the DSMC Directive to AI training has in effect authorised the mass ingestion of protected content to build commercial systems that directly compete with, and in many cases displace, the very creators whose work made those systems possible;

supports the creation of collective licensing models, ensuring robust opt-out mechanisms, fair remuneration to authors and performers, and transparency for creators as recommended by the Government's AI Advisory Council in its advice paper on The Impact of AI on Ireland's Creative Sector;

supports, in particular, the recommendations adopted by the European Parliament in its resolution of 10th March, 2026 on the opportunities and challenges relating to copyright and generative AI as they relate to the rights of artists, including:

- that the current copyright law is insufficient to address the challenge of licensing copyrighted material for generative AI and an additional legal framework is needed;
- those who use generative AI models and systems and do not observe copyright, should be barred from the market;
- a framework is needed for transparency and source documentation on the use of copyright-protected work or other protected subject matter, including for opt-out compliance;
- a coherent and functioning licensing framework must be established in respect of the use of content protected by copyright or related rights, to enable the fair remuneration of creators for the exploitation of their copyright-protected content by generative AI models;
- a rebuttable presumption should be established that, for any generative AI model or system placed on the EU market, works and other subject matter protected by copyright or related rights have been used for the purposes of training, inferencing or Retrieval-augmented generation, where transparency obligations have not been fully complied with; and
- content fully generated by AI that does not meet the established criteria for copyright protection should remain ineligible for copyright protection; and

calls on the Government to:

- use the opportunity of our Presidency of the Council of the EU to draw attention to and lead efforts to resolve these issues, including through the organisation of a dedicated conference focused on protecting the copyright of artists in the context of generative AI;

- introduce legislation domestically, while also seeking agreement at EU and international level, to establish the appropriate framework for licensing, transparency, fair remuneration, anti-impersonation personality rights, collective bargaining, civil liability and opt-outs required to protect the copyright of Irish artists in the context of generative AI; and

- ensure that no State funding for art is spent on content production by AI, and that the livelihoods of human Irish artists continue to be supported; and

includes representation for the arts sector on the AI Advisory Council, and that the AI Office of Ireland and other mechanisms for developing policy recognise creative industries and copyright as areas of special interest and ensure creative industry representation.

CMAT, Kneecap, Colm Tóibín, Sally Rooney and even my name are all names you will find on *The Atlantic's* AI Watchdog website, whose writings and songs have been pilfered for artificial intelligence, and there are many millions more. It is an interesting website people should look at to see the names of local artists, writers, poets and others who pop up there and to see the scale of the pilfering and robbery of their creative talents. Agus mé ag cur fáilte roimh na healaíontóirí agus na heagrais ealaíon atá san Áiléar don díospóireacht seo inniu, glacfaidh mé nath ar iasacht ó bhuaiteoir an duais Ivor Novello, Iain Archer, a dúirt nach féidir an abhainn a choimeád siar i dtaca le hintleacht shaorga. There is no holding back the river when it comes to artificial intelligence. AI is already here and is flooding the world with text, songs and videos on an unprecedented scale; some call it AI slop. The question is how we deal with this flood to ensure our artists do not sink beneath the waves of the scale of the AI flood. That is the premise of the motion before the Dáil today, which calls on Ireland to lead the world as we did before in the arts. Copyright was invented in Ireland and is the arc on which we can save our artists from the flood.

When Colmcille copied a book lent to him by Finnian, a bloody battle ensued. Thousands died and Colmcille was forced into exile when a famous judgment of the Rí, Diarmait mac Cerbaill, said, "Is le gach bó a lao, agus is le gach leabhar a chóip", to every cow its calf, to every book its copy. A millennium and a half later, with Ireland serving as the President of the Council of the European Union, it is the same law we want to see enforced in the era of AI. In the words of the author Scott Turow, in paraphrasing *The Atlantic's* Alex Reisner, the bold future promised by AI has been "created with stolen words".

We are living through the greatest art heist in history. The entire corpus of global achievement in writing, music, film and the visual arts is up for grabs and is being used and abused for corporate greed. Whole books and poems are being garbled up and plagiarised in output presented as original work. Vocals are being stripped from recordings and backing tracks sold without permission. Entire singles generated without humans attached, and not even labelled as AI, amount to 44% of uploads of music on the streamer Deezer. Spotify has even had to remove 75 million tracks in the recent past, such was the volume of AI slop tracks that had been uploaded. Whole personas, voices, faces, identities and styles have been cloned without consent, and Bollywood has seen a tragic film re-release with an AI happy ending, with neither the director nor lead actor being consulted; there was not a penny for the original creators, performers or artists.

Worse still, human artists now need to compete with this AI-generated work to make a living. Profit moguls push the private sector to cut the cost of human work in favour of AI slop. The public sector is also guilty, opening up the opportunities humans once relied on to so-called AI innovation. An Post released an AI-designed stamp and Údarás na Gaeltachta held an AI film competition. Theft is being rewarded and creativity is being punished to the tune of €22 billion globally in music and film, according to the International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers.

The European directives are no longer fit for purpose because of the exemptions granted to train AI. This is not simply Sinn Féin's view but also the view adopted by the European Parliament in March, as well as most member states during the Danish EU Presidency. Abandoning Commission proposals to reform the civil liability regime for AI could have helped artists and others besides. We must lead the charge for action at European level now but there are things we can do here at home. We need representation for the arts sector in every AI policymaking body, and we need no State funding for our art and content produced by AI. The livelihoods of human and Irish artists need to continue to be supported. Domestic legislation needs to be established for an appropriate framework for the licence transparency, fair remuneration, personality rights to guard against impersonation, collective bargaining and civil liability on upsales and much more.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion on protecting the copyright of Irish artists in the era of artificial intelligence. It is important to note this is a nuanced and targeted motion to protect Irish artists across the entire spectrum of the arts. It is not an attack on AI as a whole, which we know has its uses where appropriate.

The AI systems and databases are hungry beasts that have to be continuously fed huge amounts to learn. Unfortunately, they have been fed the copywritten works and intellectual property of artists around the world, including Irish artists. Irish artists and writers have given their labour, blood, sweat, tears and dreams to creating something uniquely human - songs, stories, music and paintings that mean so much to many - only to see their labour being fed to AI systems without their consent and without being financially compensated for their loss. This is theft, this is piracy and it is not acceptable. If left unchecked, it will rob Irish artists of the ability to earn a living and will replace them with a cheap soulless imitation.

Irish artists need this House to protect the copyright and income of artists with a fit-for-purpose framework, building on the calls of the European Parliament. They need us to ensure no State funding for art is spent on content produced by AI, and to place the creative sector at the heart of decision-making when it comes to AI policy.

We have the Presidency at the Council of the EU for the next six months and this is the opportune time to act. Whether by accident or design, putting protections in place has been non-existent or has been moving at a snail's pace. Artists have been left out in the cold when it comes to being able to properly make representations or engage on policy direction, as there are no representatives from the arts sector on the AI Advisory Council and the AI Office of Ireland. This motion seeks to remedy that, and there is a real urgency in the need to rectify this.

For a State that is rightly proud of producing so many world-renowned writers, musicians and artists, and which has acknowledged their positive contribution to the Irish economy, this

State has been slow to protect their rights to make a living. The basic income for artists scheme was only made permanent after it proved it could boost the economy. Many of our beloved cultural events are based on Irish artists having the backing to be able to hone their craft and share their art.

What would the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann look like if we allowed AI-generated music to subsume our native music? This celebration of Irish culture, attended by hundreds of thousands of people year in, year out replaced by a computer in a corporate office overseas. I do not think any of us wants to see that, and that is why this motion is crucially important. I commend my colleague, Deputy Ó Snodaigh, on his tireless lifelong campaigning for the arts and the great work he has done in compiling this motion, working collaboratively across the House to ensure it passes this evening.

Deputy Réada Cronin: Molaim mo chomrádaí, an Teachta Aengus Ó Snodaigh, as an rún seo. An Teachta Ó Snodaigh has done Trojan work for the arts community for many years, and I am sure we have plenty more years to look forward to.

Ireland is well-known around the globe for its music, arts and literature. For a country so small, we have produced countless names that are known and loved all across the world. That tradition continues to this day, as we continue to produce many incredible poets, singers, performers and writers.

Each year, Nialler9, the popular and influential music blogger publishes a list of the best Irish albums from the calendar year. Last year, his list contained country pop music, punk jazz, electronic trad, underground connections, Goth shoegaze, tin whistles, freak folk, and more. Irish artists are to the forefront in not only creating, writing and performing incredible music but they are also the vanguard of pushing boundaries and creating their own genres. In creating new genres, some are honouring our traditional music heritage by adding electronic rock, such as Huartan and the Scratch, while many others, like the Mary Wallopers, give new life to songs from Percy French, Dominic Behan and the Clancy Brothers. Our beloved Irish rap group, Kneecap, is a band that has stood up time and again to threats from the British state while inspiring a generation to re-engage with our native language.

I could name so many more, each of which are a testament to the spirit of this island. That spirit is so often invoked by our own Government politicians when they travel on official duty, dining out on poets such as Yeats and Heaney. I am glad to hear today that the Minister of State will not be opposing our motion. Now is the time for action because, today, Irish artists are being ripped off. Their work is being stolen by AI to build systems that spew out AI art, which directly competes with them, and their copyright is completely disrespected. This is making it increasingly difficult for them to make a living. This is why we in Sinn Féin believe it is essential to recognise that art is the product of the labour of artists, informed by their unique human experience, creativity, and skill, because this is what separates our artists from AI. It is genuine, authentic, human experience, which cannot be replicated by machines, algorithms or systems. It is imperative that we protect this experience and ensure that those who give voice to our great culture are shielded from the threat of AI. We have to make sure that we respect them and their creative talents deserve that protection. They have to be protected by their Government. Artists deserve to be paid. *Caithfidh ealaíontóirí na hÉireann a chosaint.*

Deputy Darren O'Rourke: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion and thank Teachta Ó Snodaigh for his work on it, on behalf of the arts in Ireland and further afield. The motion stands up for the people who created the books, music, films and art that we enjoy and sometimes do not enjoy. That is so important to our very essence. AI has many legitimate and beneficial uses, and many people, including artists, use it as a tool. The issue before us this evening is much simpler. Irish artists deserve fairness. Today, the copyrighted work of writers, musicians, performers, filmmakers and visual artists is being used to train powerful AI systems without their consent and without payment. Those systems can then generate content that competes directly with the very people whose creativity made them possible. This is completely wrong.

For many artists, copyright is not an abstract legal principle; it is their income. It is how they pay their rent, support their families, and continue creating, yet individual artists are expected to take on some of the biggest technology companies in the world to defend their rights. This is neither fair nor realistic. The warnings are coming from every corner of the creative sector. The Irish Music Rights Organisation, IMRO, the Irish Writers Union, Irish Equity, the Screen Composers Guild, the Irish Creative Industries Forum and many others have called for action. International organisations representing creators have warned that AI could place billions of euro of creative income at risk over the coming years.

Ireland now has an opportunity to lead. As we hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, we should champion a modern copyright framework that protects creators, ensures transparency, delivers fair remuneration, and gives artists meaningful control over how their work is used. Art is not simply data to be harvested. It is the product of human imagination, lived experience, hard work, and skill. It reflects our communities, language, history and future. If we value Irish culture, we must value the people who create it. I urge all TDs to support this motion and to stand with Ireland's artists.

Deputy Johnny Mythen: I welcome this motion and thank my colleague, Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh, for tabling it at this important juncture in the era of generative AI. This motion sets out the bare parameters to protect our artists in their struggle to earn a living through their creativity, culture and to safeguard a human connection that they share with the rest of humanity, and indeed the unique and special place they hold among the people of Ireland. These are the fundamental issues that we must address as a nation. The right of consent must be embedded in domestic legislation. Content creators must give full consent before their material can be used for generative AI models. The right of refusal must be covered too. Using data sets that use artists' works without their consent or authorisation to train large language models is not a fair use as claimed by many of these generative AI platforms.

We would like to see regulation that mandates these platforms and organisations to ensure synthetic text generated by LLMs is watermarked and thus detectable. Compensation and remuneration must be included in this equation for all Irish artists. The burning question to be answered here is who owns the intellectual property created by AI, especially when that same intellectual property is plagiarised from artists and used to train these large language models and other AI models. These models produce systems with text, video, voice and music inputs and outputs, making billions from other people's genius and creativity.

This motion calls for the Government to use its influence in our Presidency of the European Council to force attention on the protection of copyright of artists from generative AI. State funding for art must not be used to fund or spent on generative AI artifacts that use artists' creative works without their consent.

The symbol of our country is the harp. The symbol of culture is resilience. The motto for my own county, Wexford, is that it shall be restrung and reheard. It is now time to hear the voice of our artists, to come to their defence, and to stand up to protect their rights and livelihoods before we lose them to generative AI machines forever. I ask all TDs to support this motion.

Deputy Donna McGettigan: I thank Deputy Ó Snodaigh for this important, timely motion. I want to tell the story of Christina from Clare. Christina is an artist and like so many artists across this island, she spent countless hours creating work. She poured her talent, experience, emotions and imagination into it. Christina reflected something uniquely human in that, plus it was hers. Without her consent or permission, that work was taken and fed into an AI system. That system processed it, altered it and reshaped it to fit the image it was generating. The finished product no longer reflected Christina's vision. It reflected the priorities of an algorithm. For Christina, this was deeply hurtful, not because the technology exists, but because her creativity was treated as a resource to be harvested, rather than a work to be expected. Christina's story is not unique.

As an artist in wool myself, I am lucky that this AI cannot take my creativity and use it. I feel extremely lucky about that every day but across Ireland, artists, photographers, writers, and musicians are seeing their work taken without consent and used to train generative AI systems. Their intellectual property is being treated as free raw material for powerful technology companies. At the same time, generative AI raises serious concerns about copyright infringement, increased carbon emissions, misinformation and the loss of creative jobs. The danger is that we become so exposed to AI-generated content that we begin to normalise it and that we begin to see art created in seconds and then ask why we need artists at all.

That art is not simply the final image. Art is a lived experience, a culture, and a memory. It is joy, grief, struggle and hope all captured through a uniquely human lens. AI can imitate styles and remix existing works but it cannot replicate human experience that gives art its meaning. Too often, AI-generated images have the same familiar look, and that same polished uniformity. They lack the personal, the imperfections and the authenticity that makes real art powerful.

There is a worrying lack of public awareness about the impact this technology is having on livelihoods. Behind each piece is an artist trying to earn a living from his or her craft. Artists should be treated fairly. Ireland is known as the land of saints and scholars. We are a nation that treasures storytelling, music, poetry, and creativity, and if we fail to protect our artists, we risk becoming a land of saints and robots, where human creativity is pushed to the margins.

Not all AI is bad and not everyone who is using it is acting in bad faith but the technology must serve the people, not replace it. Innovation must not come at the expense of consent or copyright. We must ensure that the creative work of Irish people is respected, protected, and valued in the age of AI. We stand with our Irish artists and we must make sure that while this motion will be passed, it is continued, worked on, and that actions are taken on it.

7 o'clock

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (Deputy Niamh Smyth): I will begin by thanking Deputy Ó Snodaigh for bringing forward this Private Members' motion. I thank the artists and the delegation I had the privilege of meeting earlier on today. I will also mention Senator Frances Black, who has, since I have come into this role, been articulate and mobilised on this issue. Gabhaim buíochas le gach duine.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss this important topic following the tabling of the Private Members' motion by Sinn Féin on protecting the copyright of Irish artists in the era of artificial intelligence. As this House is aware, Ireland is committed to ensuring that AI technologies are developed and used in a manner that is ethical, transparent and aligned with national, EU and international law. Intellectual property is recognised as a fundamental right under the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. As I said earlier, was pleased to meet representatives of the creative sector earlier today and to engage in a constructive discussion on the implications of artificial intelligence for creators and rights holders. The concerns being raised by artists, musicians, writers and other creators are legitimate. It was interesting to hear the debate on "Morning Ireland" given by some of the artists tonight from that perspective. AI offers many opportunities, but creators must have confidence that their rights will be respected, that their works will not be used without appropriate safeguards and that innovation will not come at the expense of creativity.

At present, the European Commission is reviewing the 2019 Copyright in the digital Single Market, DSM, directive, including the text and data mining, TDM, exception. A stakeholder consultation, on behalf of the European Commission, has been shared with relevant stakeholders by my officials in my Department, and a national submission been made to the Commission. A final report is due to be published by the European Commission early in 2027. In parallel, the European Commission has launched a call for evidence on possible new measures to strengthen the position of creators and creative industries in the online and AI environment. The aim is to ensure that creators can better control the use of their works and enforce their rights, while supporting innovation and the development of AI technologies. The European Commission is developing an AI strategy for the cultural and creative sector as part of the broader apply AI strategy, also due to be unveiled early in 2027.

I thank all stakeholders who have engaged with the review process to date. We also encourage interested organisations and individuals to continue contributing their views and evidence to help inform future findings and recommendations. The AI Act establishes a harmonised regulatory framework for AI systems developed or deployed in the EU. The Act entered into force in August 2024, with its provisions applying in a phased manner until August 2028. The AI Act complements existing regulatory protections and is without prejudice to applicable Union or national copyright law. Creators are entitled to expect that their rights will continue to be protected as AI technologies evolve. The AI Act is an important part of that response. It requires providers of general-purpose AI, GPAI, models to comply with EU copyright law and introduces greater transparency regarding the content used to train AI models. Through the transparency template and related obligations, rights holders will be better placed to understand how AI systems are developed and to exercise their rights where appropriate. Effective implementation and enforcement of these measures will be essential in

maintaining trust and ensuring that innovation proceeds in a manner that respects creativity and copyright.

The AI Act introduces transparency requirements that oblige providers of generative AI systems to ensure that AI-generated content can be identified as such, including through machine-readable marking and related technical measures. I know we spoke about that earlier today. This obligation will take effect from August, and from December for certain models. From August 2026, the European Commission's AI office will directly enforce provisions on GPAI systems and models and, where appropriate, encourage and facilitate the review and adaptation of codes of practice in light of emerging standards. The European Commission is also pursuing initiatives to improve the practical operation of the opt-out from the TDM exception.

Domestically, we are progressing legislation on the establishment of AI office of Ireland, which will act as the national coordinator and enabling body for Ireland's implementation and enforcement of the EU AI Act. The office will comprise, through its board and staff, a range of expertise that is necessary for the performance of its functions, with a role in promoting innovation and enhancing public awareness in relation to rights and obligations under the AI Act.

To respond to some of the commentary this evening, I am acutely aware of the importance of having the creative industries represented there. These functions align with wider Government initiatives addressing the societal and economic impacts of AI including impacts on work and employment. More broadly, the national digital and AI strategy specifically recognises the need to support and engage workers during this period of significant transition including supporting workers through upskilling, reskilling and lifelong learning initiatives and to establish a national skills observatory and observatory for business AI readiness to inform labour market policy. It also recognises the need for ongoing stakeholder engagement, such as with the creative industries, to support a fair and inclusive transition. The Government remains committed to ensuring that the opportunities presented by AI are realised while supporting workers and businesses in adapting to change.

As Ireland holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, during our term we will progress discussions on some of the important matters raised. I will highlight three in particular. First, my Department will facilitate discussions in the Council working party on copyright on issues as they arise in the review of the copyright in the DSM directive, and matters identified in the European Commission's call for evidence. Second, Ireland will co-ordinate the EU's position at the World Intellectual Property Organization's WIPO, Standing Committee on Copyright and Related Rights meeting in November at which AI and copyright will be an informal agenda item. Finally, a Presidency associated conference on copyright and human creativity in the AI era, organised by rights holder organisations and endorsed by my Department, will be held in Dublin on 14 October. I look forward to attending that.

Ultimately, we want Ireland to be a leader in the development and deployment of trustworthy AI, while ensuring that creators are respected, copyright is protected and innovation continues to thrive. I look forward to a constructive discussion on these matters and to working with Deputies to identify practical ways forward that support these shared objectives.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: I acknowledge the huge work that my colleague Deputy Ó Snodaigh puts into the arts time and again. The fact that this is our last item of Private Members' business before we break up for the summer shows the real importance of what we are trying to do here. I welcome some of the things in Minister of State's speech, particularly her comments on Ireland co-ordinating the EU's position at the World Intellectual Property Organization's Standing Committee on Copyright and Related Rights, as well as the conference on copyright and human creativity in an AI era, organised by rights holder organisations. That is important. It is also important that the Minister of State keeps the commitments that she has made in this House.

I have acknowledged the enormous opportunities AI presents for businesses, for public services and individuals, but that innovation cannot come at the expense of Irish artists. It cannot come at the cost of constitutional property rights of all our artists. Beyond the individual damage that is being done here, there is a much wider area that we have to prioritise and preserve. Until recently, behind every song, book, painting and performance was a talented artist whose work was the product of real talent, skill, expertise and years of dedication. The fact is that Irish artists are being ripped off. They are being ripped off and the ball is in the Minister of State's court. She has the authority and the responsibility to stop that happening. Mass theft is happening in plain sight. I think the Minister of State recognises that, but the responsibility comes down to her at this particular time. Most artists are not global superstars earning millions; they are hardworking professionals trying to make a living in a sector that is already marked by low pay, precarious work and poor working conditions. This is important.

Deputy Thomas Gould: AI poses a threat to Irish art and Irish artists. They must be protected. I am really lucky to come from County Cork, which I am very proud of, which has produced some amazing poets, singers and actors, including Miles Gaffney and John Spillane, who are friends of mine.

They are unbelievable musicians and singers. There are actors like Siobhán McSweeney, Fiona Shaw and Jennifer O'Donovan, whom I saw recently. There are walkways around Cork where poetry is being written. Along the Clogheenmilcon walkway, a legendary Cork activist, Margaret O'Regan, has written a poem about a great Cork activist, Martin Leahy, who spent 200 weeks outside the Dáil campaigning against this Government's housing crisis.

Irish artists have always been able to use art to comment on really important social events and our history. That is the power that art can bring - the solidarity, humanity, respect and compassion that our Irish artists have. On the walls of Gaza, there is now a poem by the poet Bobby Sands. Irish artists have such a reach. Look at how Spicebag and Daniel MacDonald showcase Irish evictions. They are really powerful images. It is no wonder Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael do not share the same passion for Irish art. At the last general election, Fine Gael used one of the hits by The Kabin Studio, made by young people from Knocknaheeny on the northside of Cork. They make brilliant music and one of their hit songs was "The Spark". It was used without their permission. Fianna Fáil used Asbestos's iconic mural "What is a home?" on Micheál Martin's TikTok. That should not have happened. Artists should be respected. They should be paid for their work and their permission should be sought.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: It is an incredibly worrying time for artists. They are watching as their painstakingly produced works are used without permission to train generative AI that

is then directly competing with them. No permission is sought, no payment is made and it is a huge infringement of copyright. It is downright piracy. Not only that, but these AI programmes can produce content in a fraction of the time and with a fraction of the effort. I listened earlier to Danny O'Donoghue from The Script speaking about this on RTÉ. He summed it up well when he said it was intellectual property theft on an industrial scale. I told him that my wife and I expected a huge performance at Slane, which I have no doubt he will provide.

Deputy Niamh Smyth: Me, too.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: He replied that he expected that we would be there in our brown boots and Stetsons. I said I would do my best. That is the reality we are dealing with. We have to ensure that State agencies and semi-State companies do not continue to use artificial intelligence to produce what should be done by artists and is actually stolen from artists.

I commend Deputy Ó Snodaigh on an obair uilig atá déanta aige fá choinne ealaíontóirí agus na healaíne. Caithfidh cuid mhór oibre a dhéanamh. The Minister of State has made promises here. They need to be delivered upon – it is as simple as that. We need to look after artists.

Deputy Pa Daly: Bhíos ag caint le healaíontóir i gCiarraí níos luaithe um thráthnóna. Labhair sé liom mar gheall ar na mothúcháin a bhaineann le AI. Dúirt sé liom it could help to generate ideas, layouts and content more quickly, leaving more time to focus on strategy and working with clients. He uses it to explore new styles and creative marketing material and reach new audiences while continuing to produce original handcrafted work. Therefore, there is great benefit to it and it is being used by a lot of artists, particularly ones whom I know in Kerry, to take away some of the repetitive and time-consuming parts that take up so much time and to allow them to use their expertise or creativity. I thank Maurice Murphy down in Reennanallagane in Glenbeigh for his input. He accepted that many artists were facing an existential threat, that their creativity was under attack and that copyrighted work was being harvested by the AI companies. I know the Minister of State will work on this and that the Government is making promises but this is the difference between making a living and having to leave the profession altogether unless the rights they have built up and the creativity they have brought up is protected. Many artists are living month to month, week to week. They are struggling to survive and now they are being asked to directly compete against machines that are trained on their own work. That is why we are demanding action. We believe that a simple principle should apply: art is the product of the labour of artists, informed by their own unique human experience, creativity and skill, and we need the protections in place.

Deputy Shónagh Ní Raghallaigh: Gabhaim buíochas le mo chomrádaí, an Teachta Aengus Ó Snodaigh, as ucht an rúin seo anocht. An artist's work is more than just a job

An artist's work is more than just a job. It is a reflection of their creativity, their skill, and their unique perspective on the world. Every piece of music, every photograph, every painting, every written work represents countless hours of effort and something deeply personal to its creator. That is why so many artists are deeply concerned about the rise of unregulated AI in the arts.

Across Ireland, artists are already struggling to make a living, yet their copyrighted work is now being scraped and used to train AI systems without their consent and without compensation. Their life's work is being exploited to generate added value for technology companies, while the artists themselves are left behind.

This is not an abstract issue. Artists in Kildare and elsewhere across the State are already feeling the impact. A local photographer recently told me that she had lost work from organisations that once regularly hired her but now chose AI-generated images instead.

We must also address the growing threat posed by cloning and deepfakes, which undermines human artists' reputations and erodes public trust.

With these issues in mind, we have to move urgently and protect creative industries. Sinn Féin supports innovation but it must be responsible, safe, and creator centred. The first step is improving transparency. Artists must know when their work is used to train AI and have access to fair licensing mechanisms.

Is réimse é sábháilteacht na hintleachta saorga inár ngá dúinn oibriú as lámha a chéile, ag seasamh an fhóid ar son daonnacht na n-ealaíon agus slánú ár n-ealaíontóirí. Ní mór dúinn gan eagla a bheith orainn roimh na fathaigh teic a cheistiú chomh maith. Is céim dearfach í an Bille um Chosaint Glóir agus Íomhá maidir leis seo. Tá traidisiún bródúil ealaíonta againn in Éirinn. Seasaimis lenár n-ealaíontóirí, cosnaimis a gcearta agus cinntimis go bhfanfaidh an tír seo ina háit inar féidir leis an gcruthaíocht bláthú go ceann na nglún.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: "Yet we should never forget that the product of work isn't only the work—it's also the worker." That is a quote from the author Robin Sloan, which I think is very apt to tonight's discussion. I thank Deputy Ó Snodaigh for tabling this motion, his Sinn Féin colleagues and all the work done for artists here in Ireland to protect what is such a treasure within our society. I thank the organisations listed in the motion, the collectives and union organisations that have fought tooth and nail to make sure that artists can survive in a society that does not reward art. It is an anomaly in our society that we remunerate certain pursuits in life but not others. We pay people to pursue corporate goals and aims but we do not pay people to pursue art, yet we all consume and value art. It is that which enriches our society more than anything else.

It is important to name all of that because it is the context into which AI has now come and has not just disrupted, but completely annihilated the ability of artists to continue making a viable living in the pursuit of their art and their craft. I want to call out a few more truths before I get into some of the specifics in this debate. I am glad that the Government is not opposing the motion and that it can be the start of a conversation we need to have in the Dáil about how AI is impacting on artists. The AI committee has not yet reached our module on the creative industries and how AI intersects with it. I look forward to that happening by the end of this year or perhaps early next year.

AI is coming at us from all directions. The Minister of State and I have talked a lot about the climate impact, the impact on labour displacement, algorithmic decision-making in the public sector, and the case for discrimination. There are so many ways in which AI is disrupting our lives and reaching deep into the lives of every citizen here and globally. This one is crucial.

The Minister of State spoke a lot about the AI Act in her opening contribution.

It is important to call out that part of this motion calls for adequate legislation, regulations and measures to simply deal with this. The way the AI Bill was handled in the past few weeks has not made me confident that the Government is doing this well. Government spokespeople all talk about how we are world leaders in innovation in AI and governance of AI. That is just not a fact, as far as I am concerned. We are not there yet. However, we have the opportunity to do so and to actually hold big tech accountable. I will get through a few points but, ultimately, that is where we get to. It is big tech that is making money. It is the systems that control how music is delivered to our ears that are making money. That is where we need to tackle this. I will get into how we need to be a little less focused on rightsholders as a result of it. That is really part of it for me. Although the legislation and the measures the Minister of State has talked about a lot around the copyright part of this discussion are being looked at at EU level, the EU has chosen to adopt a very light-touch regulatory approach to AI, despite what Government Ministers will say. Unfortunately, I simply do not have faith in that model. We need to move the focus away from rightsholders and instead look at those who control the system and the benefit they get from that, as opposed to artists.

I want to talk a little about how the undermining of the skill of artistry and allowing theft of material will ultimately lead to the cessation of the creation of art. That is the direction of travel we are going in unless we tackle this. I want to speak briefly about how Irish music is particularly vulnerable to all of this. I will then arrive back at the business model, which is the issue we just do not tackle head on. This Government certainly does not tackle it head on.

I will start with the point about rightsholders. While that is a crucial part of this debate, we are too focused on copyright and those who hold rights to their own creations. We need to acknowledge the fact that services that provide music to music lovers sit upon troves of music data that they can use to train AI and profit from that. They have a potential interest in AI music becoming more popular and accepted because it forces musicians to compete and, perhaps, accept worse royalty payments in the long term. That is a truth we need to acknowledge. As long as they are in control, they are motivated to essentially elevate AI-generated music above artist-created music because they are a profit-driven entity and that will be cheaper to them. Therefore, if low-effort AI audio slop is compensated equally to human songcraft, songwriters will be squeezed out over time and new songwriters, whose copyright is not used in training data and who are not always represented by some of the organisations I have mentioned, will struggle to get a foothold. That is where we need to understand the difficulty with the copyright model being the sole focus. It will benefit those established artists, some of those who are in the Gallery today, the artists we all know and love, whereas it is the artists starting now, not those who started ten years ago, who will be even further disadvantaged because those platforms will be unable to resist the fact that the AI music they helped make will be cheaper for them. We need to look at questions like whether AI music can be copyrightable. That is not settled as it stands, and we will see that evolve over time.

I acknowledge that there is one platform that is tackling this, and that is Tidal. From tomorrow, Tidal, which is a music-streaming platform, will no longer pay royalties to 100% AI-generated music. There is no reason Apple, Spotify, YouTube and everybody else should not follow suit, but they will not. We have to legislate for them to do that, and that is the kind of legislation that we can lead in this country. We do not have to wait for Europe; we can do it, and we can have a greater impact as a result of it. It is those systems that are currently benefiting rather than the artists. It is those who control the system where this work is published

or who even scrape it from the Internet to feed those AI models. They have a near monopoly when it comes to controlling who sees what art and they need to see a commensurate responsibility imposed on them to treat creators fairly, to protect art and to protect artists.

AI slop is not something that creates new things from nothing. Its creations are always limited by the input, but that is going unrecognised, unrewarded and, crucially, unpaid. Allowing slop and the theft of art to go unmitigated will lead to no art being made. These generative AI models cannot create something from nothing; they are all dependent on raw material. They are incapable of creativity. If artists cannot survive, these models will also eventually run out of art to steal and we will not just face the dire situation we are currently in, but will be even worse off. In his opening comments, Deputy Ó Snodaigh gave a comprehensive outline of exactly the depth and breadth of the theft currently happening. Similarly, undermining the skills needed to create will push those creators out of existence because creating music, visual art or any other art is skilled work. It takes decades of people honing their craft and they do it because of the passion to do it, not because there is any monetary gain within it. Much of it is unpaid or low paid, but that creates inherent value to our lives and this tech is minimising what little money artists can currently make. Even when the owners of this tech have not monetised it, it is still undermining the years of investment and graft of artists to create something we all benefit from. Ní fheiceann muid riamh leath den obair a chuireann ealaíontóirí isteach ina gceird. Ní raibh sé riamh éasca a bheith ag obair sna healaíona, ach sa lá atá inniu ann ba chóir go mbeadh rudaí ag fáil níos fearr, ní ag dul chun donais.

I want to speak specifically to Irish art, which is particularly under attack. Irish music is readily recognisable around the world and, therefore, very vulnerable to imitation. If you go to YouTube right now and search for, for example, "Irish folk music", you will see a lot of AI slop in the results. If you search for that term, you will get a channel called The Spirit of the Tavern. Within that, you will find a composition, if you like, called "Irish Pub Songs". That video has had four times the views in a six-month period as Lankum's most recent single. That is terrifying to me because Lankum is creating beautiful art. This stuff is synthetic paddywhackery nonsense with just nonsense lyrics in it. That is what we are seeing. Irish artists in particular are vulnerable to this and we need to make sure we protect them.

Ultimately, we come back to the fact that these platforms and big tech have developed a business model that is parasitic. Essentially, it is "launch and iterate", "move fast and break things". In this case, they are saying they will capture the market now and monetise later. That is what is happening. They are not making the money now but they know that, unless they control it, they will not be able to make money in time. It is the same business model, the same business mindset, that has made us, the user, the product in the case of social media platforms, and it is why we are on this road to enshittification, as people say when talking about the Internet. If nothing is done, it will ultimately leave us with a powerful monopoly, just as we have seen in other areas, that we will not be able to unpick. Unfortunately, this is simply where we are getting to all the time with big tech. The Government does not yet have the political will to tackle that, to essentially hold big tech accountable, to say to it that this is enough, that the harms being wrought on society are enough and that we have to take control back.

I was helped today in preparing for this speech by a friend of mine. Shane Culloty is his name. He is an artist called Winter Aid. I simply want to read out one of his lyrics to finish

my speech tonight because this is what we are trying to protect when we do this. This is a song called "The Wisp Sings", which I encourage everyone to listen to after.

Let me sleep
I am tired of my grief
And I would like you
To love me, to love me, to love me
This is the night when these woods sigh
Come with me
There are people who cannot speak
Without smiling
They would take me from your hand
Or they would try, they would try
This is the murmur of the land
This is the sound of love's marching band
And how they hold you like a gun
And how I sing you like a song
I heard when I was young
And buried for a night like this
Buried for a night, like this

Deputy Ciarán Ahern: My thanks to Sinn Féin for tabling this motion tonight. This is about far more than artificial intelligence. It is about the value of human creativity, hard work and intellectual property and whether they will continue to be recognised and protected or we allow them to be exploited without consent, without transparency and without fair payment.

The success of the arts and the culture sector over recent decades is something that we in Ireland can be and are immensely proud of. From The Cranberries to Fontaines D.C., Dermot Morgan to my good friends Foil, Arms and Hog, Maeve Binchy to Sally Rooney, we have produced a wealth of talent in this country. In Dublin South-West, we are proud to count three-time Oscar winner for visual effects Richard Baneham as someone who is from Tallaght, as a constituent, as one of our own.

The famous painter Seán Keating lived in Rathfarnham and painted two beautiful murals in the Church of the Holy Spirit in Ballyroan. WB Yeats was also a constituent, though just slightly before my time. We in the Labour Party are deeply proud of our record in this space. It was Michael D Higgins as the first Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht who helped reshape the vision for arts in this country. We have become a powerhouse across books, poetry,

television, documentary, comedy, animation and gaming. Irish directors, writers, actors and craftspeople consistently punch far above their weight and long may that continue.

I also highlight the vibrant ecosystem that surrounds creative arts like the festivals, community cinemas and local arts organisations that create space for Irish talent to be celebrated. We have to ensure we retain artistic spaces in our towns and cities around this country. Art is a fundamentally human endeavour. It resonates with people because it reflects our experiences, emotions, imagination and hopes. It should always remain that way, a human endeavour. Every song written, every screenplay composed, every poem published, every performance delivered and every piece of art created is the result of human labour. It represents, as Deputy Gibney has said, years of practice, dedication, talent, sacrifice and lived experience. These works are not data to be harvested; they are the property of the people who created them. For many artists, the royalties earned from those works are not a luxury; they are the income that allows them to pay their bills, support their families and continue creating. Today, that all faces an unprecedented threat.

Generative AI is developing at extraordinary speed. Most of us here recognise the opportunities of AI. It has the potential to at least improve productivity or accelerate research, submit parliamentary questions and so on. Like Sinn Féin, the Labour Party is not opposed to innovation. We support responsible AI development, but innovation cannot become a licence for exploitation. There is a simple question. If an AI company builds a billion dollar product using the life's work of Irish artists, musicians, writers and performers, should those creators have any say in how their work is used? Should they be told it has happened? Should they be paid? The answer to all of this is obviously "Yes". Unfortunately, this Government has failed to show any urgency on this issue. For years, artists have warned that they already operate in an industry characterised by low incomes, precarious employment and insecure working conditions. Research commissioned by the Arts Council has repeatedly demonstrated this reality. The basic income for the arts scheme, while very much welcomed by those who can access it, has only reinforced what artists have been saying for decades: that creative workers are expected to survive on unstable and often inadequate incomes. Instead of strengthening the rights of artists and their ability to support themselves in a moment of enormous technological change, Government has been slow to respond. While other countries are actively examining how copyright law must evolve, this Government has remained largely reactive, unfortunately. While all companies rapidly commercialise products built on copyrighted works, Irish artists are left wondering whether their own music, writing or performances have already been used without their knowledge. There is no transparency, and it is pretty obvious that big tech is increasingly retreating from the very idea of that.

We have to be more proactive in this space. Research commissioned by CISAC estimates that one quarter of music creators' revenues could be at risk by 2028, representing cumulative losses of approximately 10 billion over five years. Media composers working in television, advertising and film are expected to be among the hardest hit. Streaming platforms are already reporting enormous growth in AI-generated content. Deezer, for example, has reported that approximately 75,000 fully AI-generated tracks are now uploaded every single day. Even more alarming is the finding that the overwhelming majority of streams involving fully AI-generated music were linked to fraudulent activity, diverting royalties away from genuine creators.

The exploitation and dehumanisation of creativity by big tech is not some conspiracy. It is already happening. Every day we delay action to address this, the gap between technological capability and legal protection grows wider. If an AI model has been trained using copyrighted music, books, scripts or artwork, artists deserve to know this. Transparency is not anti-innovation; it is the foundation on which trust, licensing and legitimate commercial relationships can be built. At the moment, there is no accountability or meaningful copyright protection. The current opt-out system under European copyright law has proven inadequate. It effectively places the burden on individual artists to discover whether their work has been used in the first place. This is a virtually impossible task when the training datasets are hidden behind commercial secrecy. That is backwards. The burden should rest with those building commercial AI systems, not with individual artists trying to defend rights that already belong to them.

This motion also recognises another growing threat, which is the cloning of voices, likenesses and artistic styles. Technology now allows performers' voices to be replicated almost perfectly. Actors, and even TDs, can have their likenesses copied. Musicians can find AI systems generating songs that imitate their unique artistic identity. That is not just a copyright issue. It is an issue of consent and personal dignity. It is also an issue of protecting people's livelihoods. No artist should wake up to discover that their voice has been copied, their image replicated or their artistic identity commercialised without permission. That is why stronger personality rights must become part of our legal framework.

I also address a wider cultural issue. Ireland's greatest strength has always been its storytellers, be they writers, musicians, actors or composers. They have shaped how Ireland is understood and viewed across the world. If we allow a future where AI systems endlessly reproduce derivative content trained on those creators without permission or payment, we risk hollowing out the very creative ecosystem that made Ireland culturally rich in the first place.

There is an argument that AI can support creativity as an assistive technology, but it can never replace it or exploit it. I think that is the balance this motion seeks to achieve. I welcome that the Government has withdrawn its countermotion because, to date, it has yet to demonstrate the level of leadership required to tackle this issue. Ireland currently holds the Presidency of the Council of the EU. That presents a unique opportunity to lead the European conversation on AI, copyright and creators' rights. Instead of simply administering meetings, Ireland should be shaping policy to protect Irish artists. This motion offers practical and balanced proposals.

I will make a couple of points with a view to strengthening what is already in the motion. It calls for support for the creation of collective licensing models. There is a bit of nuance here, in that a one-size-fits-all approach might not be best suited across different categories of artists. Different rights-holder sectors will have different licensing requirements. For example, a collective model might work well for book publishing, but not necessarily for music publishing. The second point is on existing copyright law. The motion states that it is insufficient and, while I do not disagree, a large part of the issue is that it is not enforced as well as it could be. I would have no issue if we were to introduce new legislation in this space, particularly with regard to AI, but we cannot allow the same situation to arise as is currently the case, where it is just flaunted with no repercussions.

Overall, this is an excellent motion. I again commend Sinn Féin and Deputy Ó Snodaigh in particular for all the work he has done with respect to the arts. The Government often tells us it wants Ireland to become a leader in AI, but leadership in this area is not just about attracting technology companies to come here. It is about recognising and protecting people from the negative impacts and ensuring the benefits are enjoyed by everyone. We can and we must protect our creative sector while embracing the potential for innovation. Leadership means ensuring Irish artists are partners in technological progress, and not casualties of it. If Government is serious about supporting our creative industries then now is the moment to act. Once artists lose control of their work, it becomes exponentially harder to restore those rights and there is obviously no art without artists. As I said, it is a fundamentally human endeavour. We should reaffirm our commitment to Ireland's creative future, and to our actors, musicians, screenwriters, designers, animators, comedians, cinematographers and all those whose artistry enriches our lives. Above all, we must insist that our creative industries remain industries built on imagination, emotion, experience and collaboration, and not plagiarised AI-generated slop.

Deputy Niamh Smyth: I want to correct the record. The Government never had a countermotion in. We have been accepting the Private Members' motion as written.

Deputy Ciarán Ahern: Okay; I apologise.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There is no amendment and no countermotion. I thank the Minister of State for that clarification.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I thank Sinn Féin for bringing this motion for IMRO, for its campaigning on this issue and for the artists who have spoken out and highlighted it. It is high time that this Government, which has gulped down big tech's Kool-Aid and regurgitated it for the public in an unthinking way, is forced to reflect on the downsides of AI, which are very many, not just for artists and the creatives in our society, but for our society as a whole.

I do not think anyone wants a world where the majority of the Internet and the majority of even supposedly creative content is AI slop, but that is the future we are heading towards. That is the future unless we collectively call stop and pull the brake on generative AI. It is not an unstoppable train even now. In the AI committee, we have been treated to person after person telling us this is unstoppable. Lots of people have correctly said it is not unstoppable, but the big tech line is this is unstoppable and you have to get on this train or else you are going to lose out. That is a narrative of inevitability deliberately created and propagated by the big tech companies who profit from AI, who want to profit from AI in the future, and who are currently gambling billions on it. They are in it up to their necks right now and they want to put us all in the same situation so that it becomes impossible for us to turn back. They want to hook us on generative AI like they have hooked us on social media and then start charging us through the nose for it, whether that is through user fees, advertising or selling our personal data to the highest bidder.

There is an immense hypocrisy here. I am old enough to remember those ads that started with "You wouldn't steal a car." I went and watched the ad. It says: "You wouldn't steal a car, you wouldn't steal a handbag, you wouldn't steal a television, you wouldn't steal a DVD but downloading pirated films is stealing." It finishes with "Piracy. It's a crime." I remember what

came after that, which was a furore about Napster, LimeWire and The Pirate Bay. Ordinary people who downloaded an album or a video were demonised as pirates and threatened with court cases, fines and even prison sentences. Even today, ordinary people can be criminalised if they download material illegally as opposed to using legal streaming services. Legal streaming services are epitomised by Spotify, whose whole business model is based on ripping off artists financially, which it is, and now, through generative AI, ripping off and copying their music and turning it into AI slop as well.

Now that we have a situation whereby big tech has effectively pirated pretty much the entire creative output of humanity, what is the official response? Are the big tech bosses being rounded up? Are they being arrested? Are they being told, "You wouldn't steal a car", given that they have stolen effectively all of the music that has ever been created? Talk about one rule for us and another for those at the top. We do not get that. We do not get any arrests. We do not get any kicking down the doors of the big tech companies. Instead, we get world leaders and our own Taoiseach rabbiting on about a fourth industrial revolution that will change everything and saying that this is as important as the printing press. We need to recognise this as the pure corporate propaganda that it is and start asking who benefits from it. Certainly not artists or not musicians, and it will not benefit people generally either.

This motion is right to warn that generative AI may lead to a decline in the quality of human cultural and creative production. The truth is that is already happening. The tech industry wants us to outsource our brains to AI and to let it do our thinking, writing and creating for us. It sounds to me like a very dystopian future that we should be doing everything in our power to avoid.

Something in it gets to the heart of the kind of anti-humanist philosophy that many of these big tech leaders spout. There was one recently talking about being confronted with the cost of training AI. They said it costs a lot to train humanity. Look at all the food you have to feed a baby and all the energy you have to commit to a baby to raise a human. They said a human takes more energy than AI to develop. It is a deeply anti-humanist philosophy. These people fundamentally do not get it - that what makes art and music special is human input. That is what we see in it. That is what we appreciate. You cannot create it by generative AI.

The fight-back against AI has to start now. We can start by legislating for the right to opt out of AI. No worker or user of public or private services should be forced to interact with AI and have AI deal with their data without their consent.

We also need to place real limits on data centres. They are using up 80% of the electricity in Dublin and an unknown quantity of water. It may be the reason for the restrictions that we are currently seeing, but we do not know because they do not have to tell us how much water they are using. Despite the data centres being so huge already, they want to double. They want to double so that they can deal with the insatiable demand of AI. That cannot be allowed to happen. If it does, it makes it impossible for us to reach our climate targets. We need an outright ban on more data centres being built and we need real restrictions on the ones that are already here. People's needs - our need for a society which is meaningful and produces decent art - and the needs of artists and creative people, all that needs to come before the profits of big tech in our society.

Deputy Máire Devine: Well said.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I thank Deputy Ó Snodaigh for bringing this motion forward. As Deputy Paul Murphy indicated, People Before Profit is very happy to support and commend all the artists, organisations, musicians and so on who are campaigning to bring this forward. I hope the fact that the Government is not opposing the motion means that it is actually going to take it seriously and do something in response to it. I have to say, I have my doubts about that.

Before we even started to discuss AI in a serious way in this House, I do not know how many times the same organisations who are campaigning for this have asked us to raise - and we have - the extreme poverty that so many people who work in the arts and music have to endure in this country. It is absolutely incredible that about 50% to 57% of all professional artists in this country live on or below the poverty line - three times the level of poverty in Irish society generally. These are the people we are very happy to jump into photographs with when they win an award or achieve something wonderful because of their artistic ability but on a day-to-day basis the Government fails abysmally to keep them from living in poverty and to truly value the contribution they make to our society and culture.

I do not know how many times we came in here campaigning on behalf of Equity and others who were campaigning for their fair and equitable remuneration for the work they do in areas like film and TV. That has still not been accomplished, as they are forced to sign buy-out contracts and not given proper payment for the work they do. Against that background, we are seeing these billionaires who run AI looking to steal *en masse* all of the artistic and creative output of humanity and to profit from it. The artists rightly are asking what the Government is going to do to prevent them making a bad situation for most artists and performers even worse.

As Deputy Paul Murphy said, the Government's approach to AI to date has just been to get down on their knees and ask the tech bros what they want. They have got massive tax breaks to the tune of tens of billions of euro every year and anything they want in terms of the proliferation of data centres. I will tell the Minister of State one thing. When we think about 80% of the electricity in Dublin being used by data centres now, it is absolutely unbelievable. On a global level, the consumption of electricity by data centres is due to go up elevenfold by 2030. They are hoovering up the water resources and electricity resources of the planet. There will not be much human creativity, art or music if we have no water and no energy. That is what is going on with these people. They are literally hoovering it up.

As has been said, the Government has bought the Kool-Aid, and so has the European Commission, it seems. Certainly Donald Trump does not pretend about his relationship with these monsters, quite frankly, in many cases, when you think about Palantir and Peter Thiel and what they do with AI, using it to help prosecute a genocide in Gaza. These people are horrific. I have difficulty with the idea that this has anything useful to contribute. I am not saying AI has no value at all.

These people actually want to replace human beings and human creativity with AI. That would literally be the road to disaster for humanity. Some people think about AI as if it is cutting edge and the most advanced thing possible, but AI is like the Neanderthal. The Neanderthal had a bigger brain than the human being but it went extinct because its huge brain was mainly dealing with memory and sensory processing and was not able to do the higher functions that the human brain does. What makes us unique, and what made the human being

adapt successfully while the Neanderthal died out, is our creative capacity. I refer to our capacity to imagine things that do not exist and not just to scrape memory. The problem with scraping memory is that it does not involve developing something new. It is not real innovation; it is just mixing around existing memories. That was why the Neanderthal went extinct. What will happen if we leave creativity and the future of human society to AI?

I am even beginning to wonder about people generating parliamentary questions using AI. How soon before these parliamentary questions are answered using AI? AI will be asking the questions and AI will be answering them. That is where we are going. We have to stop. The Government should not buy this nonsense. AI may have some uses if it is subordinate to, in this case, what the artists, musicians and their representatives want. If we want a solution to this problem, we should talk to the people in the Gallery.

Deputy Máire Devine: Hear, hear.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: In the past couple of years there has been a collapse of many forms of media in this country. The reason for this has been that the authors of content are not getting paid for their material. It is not that no one is getting paid for the material; there is a cohort of individuals who are getting paid, but they are the people who are creating the content. Journalism is an example. It is a key pillar of a functional democracy but it is dying on its feet because social media is taking the creative content and selling it for clicks and for advertising revenue. That is plainly wrong, but the political establishment does not have the backbone to stand up to the large social media firms and, as a result, this is happening. If the creators of the content do not get paid, after a while content does not get created.

The same thing happened in the music industry. Instead of artists selling records, tapes and CDs, a small number of firms started to monetise other people's content on platforms such as YouTube and Spotify and paid a pittance for the content they were selling. This means that those in the music industry have to rely on music performance in the main to be able to have a full-time career in music generation. That has significantly reduced the generation of content in music over the past number of years.

AI is bringing the whole process a large step further. A small number of very large powerful billionaires can now scrape the content of thousands of artists, authors, graphic designers and musicians and replicate similar content. It is true that the quality of this content is significantly off the creativity of human content but it is already being monetised. It is already in competition with real artists for ears, eyes and wallets. As a result, it is already shutting down content creation. There will come a time, if we are honest, that the differential and quality will narrow in the future.

Let us be honest, what is happening is theft. It is the stealing of other people's content. It is individual companies making a profit out of other people's work. People might be *au fait* with the legend that copyright was first developed in Ireland. It is recorded that St. Colmcille secretly copied the manuscript of St. Finian at night. This was discovered by St. Finian and he demanded the replica manuscript back. He felt the reproduction of the manuscript was rightfully his. He brought the case to the High King of Ireland, Diarmait mac Cerbaill. The latter sided with St. Finian, saying the famous phrase that to every cow belongs her calf and, therefore, to every book belongs its copy. What is happening here in relation to AI is in direct

opposition to this. This has a number of significant outputs. Not only is it stealing and impoverishing generations of artists, and not only is it reducing the creative output, but it is also concentrating power into the hands of a very small number of tech oligarchs across the planet.

This generation has probably seen one of the biggest concentrations of wealth in the hands of so few. I do not think this has happened since the end of the 19th century. I ask in that the Government side with the artists and ensures that there is an ecosystem in which they can operate, get paid properly and deliver content into the future.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion, not only as a Teachta Dála but also as someone who trained and worked as a journalist for many years creating original output and as someone who has had stints as a singer-songwriter, writing and recording original works, and who hopes to do so again in the future.

I do see genuine uses of AI as a tool to speed up your creative process and to generate ideas based on your own original human spark and ideas, but, to be clear, the dangers for artists vastly outweigh the benefits, and that needs to be redressed. What is happening brings the name of the band from the 1980s Pop Will Eat Itself to entirely new levels. AI bottom trawls for free, pays nobody their due reward and then regenerates original ideas into a mishmash that sounds plausible, reads plausible and looks plausible, were it not for the fact that the AI output is input-output. It is only as good as what it trawls through.

We have seen the rise of AI artists, AI music, AI authors and AI video generators. Admittedly, some of them are parodies but others are deliberate scams to outline the possibilities of the technology. Increasingly, things are being created for its own sake and the profits do not go to any original artists. Nobody can tell which aspect of a work is being used in the generative process, but it is guaranteed that the graft of artists is nowhere in it. What emerges are not the original ideas of AI, the programmers or the big multinationals that own these companies.

We have had a constant fight over decades to ensure creative work is valued as labour and not treated as a hobby or a free resource. Music artists, for example, had to put up with reduced mechanical and performance royalties from streaming services. Increasingly as Deputy Tóibín referred to, people have sought refuge in live performance. So far, it is the last retreat of human artistic endeavour, but for how long? It used to be that live music was to promote recorded works but now recorded works promote live music to a larger extent. If recorded works are being threatened by AI derivatives where will our future writers, singers, actors and film directors be? They will not exist. In light of that, I welcome the motion.

We in Ireland have always understood that art in itself has value. It is always a work or a craft; even if the process of inspiration can strike like lightening sometimes, it is often honed and edited over a much longer period. We cannot automate this lived human experience or our imagination. I read somewhere recently that our innate evolution as a species was due to becoming storytellers around the fire. People have spent years honing skills that can never be replicated by a machine, yet today we face this challenge that we would not have anticipated years ago.

Fundamentally, the economic foundation of our work as artists, including royalties, licensing commissions and performance fees, are being further eroded. This time, it is not the music industry or the publishing industry but AI and the big tech companies. The motion acknowledges the alarming findings of organisations such as the International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers in relation to the explosion of AI-generated streaming fraud and the failure of existing EU mechanisms, particularly the digital Single Market copyright directive of 2019, to provide meaningful control for the artists. AI developers can legally scrape and analyse copyrighted content for training unless the creator has opted out. I will discuss the difficulties to which that gives rise in a moment.

8 o'clock

This was originally designed for search engines and data analysis tools, not generative AI, but AI companies now rely on it to justify the mass ingestion of original creative works. Transparency licensing, fair remuneration and accountability are the very least that artists are entitled to if those companies are going to trawl through their work in this way. It is slipping away, especially with the withdrawal of the AI liability directive. The latter would have given artists something we currently do not have, namely a proper mechanism to get compensation or redress when AI systems and the companies that own them essentially misuse our work or cause economic harm through reduced incomes. This directive would have introduced a rebuttable presumption of causality, meaning that if an AI system produced content clearly derived from an artist's work, the artist would not have to prove every technical detail of how the system ingested, processed and reproduced that work. It basically states that courts may presume a causal link between the system's output and the harm caused, unless the AI developer can prove otherwise. It is a presumption of artistic integrity, and the AI company has to prove it did not steal the work.

The directive would also have required disclosure obligations, thereby allowing courts to compel AI developers to reveal things like training data logs and documentation, information that is currently hidden behind this corporate wall. In welcoming this legislation, I acknowledge that a lot of what we want to do is going to be difficult when it comes to enforceability. That is very common. The directive would have helped big time. The European Commission argues that the AI Act is enough in itself, but it does not offer any civil liability disclosure rights or anything else to win a case. The motion before the House basically calls that out and asks for measures to improve the situation, so I support it. We need infrastructure at EU level to help artists. Even if every word was taken on board and we started from where we are, we will have to follow a process in respect of what is already a race against time.

If we look at how the AI Act could be improved, for starters, there must be mandatory as opposed to voluntary transparency. That is in the code of practice. We need legally enforceable obligations requiring AI developers to disclose exactly what datasets they are using, what copyrighted works are included and how those works are processed. It is quite difficult, but it is technically possible. We need a European-wide registry of copyrighted works used in AI training. That would be the backbone of any licensing system. It does not need to be perfect on day one. It could start off with voluntary submissions, collective management organisations and the major publishers. It does need to start, and we should not listen to threats to the effect that companies will just pull their money and business out of Europe and move elsewhere. That does not wash. Europe is the sanctuary of basic rights. We should stand up for those rights.

We also need any opt-outs to be technically enforceable. At the moment, artists can tell companies not to train AI on their work, but developers cannot reliably identify or remove that work from their datasets. The European Union should therefore require dataset tracking. We also need more powers in relation to collective licensing because individual artists do not have that power in the context of individual companies. IMRO, Recorded Artists Actors Performers, the Screen Composers Guild and their European counterparts can. The EU should establish a compulsory licensing framework such that if AI developers want to train on European creative content, then they should pay into a collective pot. That is how radio, television and streaming were made to pay dividends, even if we all argue that those dividends are too low.

As already stated, getting rid of the AI liability directive was a mistake. Artists need a clear path to compensation when their work is misused, where their likenesses are impersonated and where their income is undermined by fraudulent AI content. We could show leadership here. Ireland should use its Presidency of the European Council to push for a more targeted and effective directive. Performers should have explicit legal control over their voice, their face, their movement and their personal and artistic identity. I welcome the motion and hope that the Minister of State will take it on board.

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I thank Deputy Ó Snodaigh for bringing this motion before the House. I also thank the many Deputies across the House who have contributed to the debate on what is an extremely important topic. It is only right and appropriate that it gets attention and consideration in this House and that we work collectively to address the massive challenge AI can pose to our creative sectors. We are very fortunate to live in a country that has a wonderful cultural heritage. Our international reputation across the globe is built on this in many ways.

Over the last short period, we have seen the impact that AI is having on all aspects of our society. It is crucial in respect of our creative sector that we do give the time and attention here on the floor of the Dáil to consider how it is impacting this sector and how we can work collectively in terms of regulation and policy to make sure we are addressing this technology and harnessing it in a way that is to the benefit of the public and our creative sector, as opposed to it being something that has the real potential to undermine them.

I reiterate the point made by the Minister of State with special responsibility for artificial intelligence, Deputy Niamh Smyth, which is that Ireland is committed to ensuring that AI technologies are developed and used in a manner that is ethical, transparent and aligned with national, EU and international law. The protection of copyright is, understandably, a concern for our creative sector in relation to AI, and consent and remuneration for works used are basic principles of copyright law. Important steps to protect intellectual property rights in the age of AI are being taken and these will continue during the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU.

At EU level, the inclusion of a provision on EU copyright law in the AI Act is an important step. As mentioned, enforcement of the AI Act will begin from August. In the meeting of the Council of Ministers in May, which was attended by the Minister, Deputy Patrick O'Donovan, it was clear that many member states acknowledge that more needs to be done, including on copyright and transparency. There are indications that the opt-out mechanism for the text and

data mining exception is not working well in practice. Evidence gathered by the Danish Presidency showed that some activity is taking place on the licensing of works for AI, but that it is uneven across member states and subsectors of the creative sector.

It is our shared objective that this market develops well and in a manner which ensures fair remuneration along the value chain for the cultural and media sectors. We look forward to the outcome of the European Commission's review of copyright in the directive on copyright in the digital Single Market, including the text and data mining exception and the press publishers right. The Government will consider the findings of the review and consider the effectiveness of Ireland's national legislation transposing the directive. We also look forward to the next steps by the Commission on possible new measures on licensing and enforcement in generative AI, as signalled in the call for evidence.

As Ireland holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, we have a valuable opportunity to help shape discussions on the future of Europe's digital and creative economy, including measures needed to support a sustainable, pluralistic and trusted media sector. In terms of the broader impacts of AI, the European Commission is currently working on a new strategy specifically looking at AI and the creative and cultural sector, as set out in the new European cultural strategy, the Culture Compass for Europe. This will be an opportunity for our sectors to address the challenges and opportunities of this moment of change. Ireland looks forward to participating in the development of the strategy in the coming months.

The Government's new digital and AI strategy highlighted the potential for AI to contribute to job displacement in the creative and cultural sectors. Like many other sectors in the economy, these face potential disruption. Furthermore, last year's report from the AI Advisory Council on the impact of AI on Ireland's creative sector further stressed the need for public policy to tackle income insecurity for artists and creatives. My Department is continuing to take measures to tackle the precarity of work and promote viable careers in arts and culture, in particular with the roll-out of Ireland's basic income for the arts programme, which we are delighted has now been extended permanently. Under the culture council formation, the Irish Presidency is responsible for agreeing the new EU work plan for culture for the years from 2027 to 2030. While this is still being negotiated with member states, it is clear from initial discussions that concrete measures to address the impact of AI on artists and the creative sector will be further developed through the work plan.

I again thank Deputies for their contributions this evening. I also thank the many artists and representatives from our creative sector for their contributions and for highlighting the real concerns about the impact AI is having and will have unless we, from a public policy point of view, collectively do all we can to protect this sector, protect the integrity of people's creative capacities and address the potential impact on income and viability of careers in the arts sector. We look forward to working with everyone across the House in relation to building on the work that has been done and the great amount of work that needs to be done to protect what is an integral part of our national life. It is really important, from a European perspective, that we work collectively to protect the sector.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: I thank Deputy Ó Snodaigh for tabling this motion and for all of the work he does in this area with respect to the arts and artists.

Right now, we are justifiably and rightly proud of our Irish artists. We have a flourishing creative scene despite all of the barriers - class barriers, the rising cost of living, and dwindling and ever-more scarce support. It is now all the more important that we protect artists and the craft itself. It cannot be a pursuit only for the wealthy or a career where suffering and poverty are the price of entry. We want our artists to flourish. When I was coming over, I was remembering during Covid that arts and creative arts kept us all sane. We all acknowledged it and we acknowledged in here how important it was when we could not speak to one another that people involved in the creative arts were making it happen in almost impossible situations. We owe them an immense debt of gratitude.

This morning, I was honoured to host Disabled Artists, Disabled Academics, DADA, in the audiovisual room. They spoke about the challenges. They stressed that they were not whinging or looking for a pat on the back or for anyone to tell them they were inspirational. They are men and women doing a job. It is really tough but added to that, as well as all of the other challenges they face, which are many, they face the challenge of big tech companies scraping their work and regurgitating it. It will never be as good and it will never replace the arts, but now is the time for the Government to act, listen to the arts community and move to protect that which we all agree we value immeasurably.

Deputy Pat Buckley: I thank Deputy Ó Snodaigh for tabling this motion. It is not just ordinary workers who are being made to fear for their futures as artificial intelligence continues to develop and expand. Musical artists, writers and filmmakers are also being badly hit by this AI revolution. Their copyrighted work is being used without their consent or any remuneration to build systems that spew out AI art that directly competes with them. This is making it even harder for writers, composers, musicians, performers, actors and other artists to make a living in a field where many already struggle and royalties from copyright are vital to their income. It is very difficult for struggling artists to take on the AI systems and vindicate their rights. This Sinn Féin motion is to recognise that art is the product of the labour of artists informed by their unique human experience, creativity and skill. The Script's Danny O'Donoghue on "Morning Ireland" said:

... no public funding goes towards AI-generated content, humans only. At the end of the day, if we are not looking after humans, what are we doing? What is the Government there to do? It is not there to look after robots. It is there to look after humans.

It is about doing the right thing today. Let us be first on it. We know there are problems in Australia, Italy and France. We have a unique opportunity. I am very honoured to have the support of the artists in the Gallery. It just shows how important it is to the industry. It needs to be protected. That needs to be done now. Let us not be reactive. Let us be proactive and get it done now. Please support this motion.

Deputy Fionntán Ó Súilleabháin: Irish author Emma Donoghue stated, "They are robbing us in hopes of replacing us." That is a shocking statement. Irish artists, writers, musicians, actors, composers and performers are being ripped off by big tech billionaires through plagiarism or, to give it the proper term, theft. Their copyrighted creative work is being used to train AI systems to spew out "art" without the consent of the creators and in many cases without any remuneration whatsoever. The life's work of artists is being fed into systems that generate content in seconds for big tech billionaires while the people who created that work,

often struggling artists, musicians, writers and photographers, receive nothing in return. Irish artists like many others were the driving force behind the 1916 Rising and represent the soul of this nation. They tell our stories and shape national identity. However, they are now forced to take on some of the world's largest tech companies simply to vindicate their rights. It is creating a dystopian nightmare. We have to stop it.

Sinn Féin is strongly opposed to public bodies and services opting for AI-generated content instead of supporting the work of human creators. Public arts funding should support human-made art - it sounds bizarre to even talk about "human-made art" - and not subsidise the replacement of these same artists with machines in this new dystopian world. We are talking about artists such as Fontaines D.C., The Script, Sinéad O'Connor, Dermot Kennedy and Kneecap, many of whom have identified their work being used by AI generators. It is similar for authors such as Michael D. Higgins, Joseph O'Connor, Gerry Adams, Anne Enright, Colm Tóibín and Sally Rooney. We need to see action on this in Ireland and at a European level to protect artists' rights and income, respect their creativity and defend their livelihoods. It has to stop now.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Gabhaim buíochas le gach Teachta, ealaíontóir agus eagrais a bhí linn inniu.

I thank everybody who was with us today, some of whom are still with us, and those who contacted us in advance of this debate and are watching online who shared their stories about the impact AI was having on their work and creativity and to show their support for this debate. I am humbled and grateful for their support. I will try to name all of the organisations but I apologise in advance for those I will probably leave out - Irish Music Rights Organisation; Screen Composers Guild of Ireland; the Ivors Academy; Irish Equity; International Federation of Actors; Recorded Artists, Actors, Performers; Irish Recorded Music Association, Disabled Artists, Disabled Academics; Praxis: The Artists' Union of Ireland; First Music Contact, the Music and Entertainment Association of Ireland; the Arts Council; Musicians' Union of Ireland; Screen Producers Ireland; Give Us The Night; Beta Festival; and many individual artists, especially those who shared their experiences in the past day or two with the media to outline their experience of AI and how it is robbing their work, competing against them and robbing their royalties.

Emilie Conway of Disabled Artists, Disabled Academics pointed out earlier that today was Bastille Day and in the revolutionary spirit, it is worth looking at what the French have achieved in protecting the arts. Even if the focus tonight is on sport, Victor Hugo led the campaign that delivered the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, which will mark its 140th anniversary on 9 September. International law was finally catching up with what was already in Ireland, having been established in the 6th century AD. It is thanks to the outrage in 1889 in France when a bidding war raised huge profits for the owner of a painting by the artist Millet while his family lived in poverty that the idea of *droit de suite* or resale rights brought royalties to artists. People then were not happy to sit back and let artists go without while their work created income and profit for the wealthy. That stands true to this day. That spirit continues in France where the national centre for cinema announced it would not fund art without a human author or where AI replaced a human creative role.

That spirit continues in Ireland. In this motion, we say that State funding for the Irish arts must be for humans and not for AI. It is incumbent on the Government and the State agencies to act in line with the unanimous will of the Dáil on this motion.

Bhí líne den scoth sa leabhar *Ag Caint Linn Fhéin*, a scríobh Joe Steve Ó Neachtain, laoch an Ghluaiseacht Chearta Sibhialta na Gaeltachta agus ealaíontóir ildánach, "Is é an croí atá i gceol na hÉireann a dhéanann náisiún mór den náisiún beag seo ar fud an domhain." Tír gan teanga, tír gan anam. Tír gan ealaín, tír gan chroí. Tá ár gcroí i mbaol ag an intleacht shaorga. Tá dualgas orainn go léir seasamh suas ar son ealaíontóirí na hÉireann, an croí a léiríonn siad sa ghníomh agus an cur chuige a dhéanann siad a thugann gliondar chuig a lán daoine sa tír seo agus a thugann léargas ar leith don domhan ar fad ar cad atá i gceist againn mar Éireannaigh. Tá sé go maith go bhfuil an Rialtas ag glacadh leis an rún seo agus nach bhfuil aon duine á chur ina choinne. Anois tá orainn bogadh de réir an ghnímh sin.

We have to act according to this motion, rather than just pass it.

Question put and agreed to.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am not sure that applause is allowed but I thank Deputies. We are getting near the holidays.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: That will be the end of the applause, a Cheann Comhairle.

Ceisteanna ar Sonraíodh Uain Dóibh - Priority Questions

Public Transport

1. **Deputy Conor D. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht as the Minister with responsibility for rural proofing and Our Rural Future, the engagement his Department has with State agencies and semi-State bodies to ensure that transport services adequately meet the needs of rural communities. [53140/26]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jerry Buttimer): Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta as ucht na ceiste. Is cúis mhór bhróid dom an cheist seo a fhreagairt ar son mo chomhghleacaithe, an tAire, an Teachta Calleary, agus go mórmhór an tAire Iompair, an Teachta O'Brien. I thank the Deputy for raising this important matter and for his interest in rural transport. He will have a group from west Waterford here tomorrow. I hope we will get together.

The Government is of the view that rural transport plays a pivotal and important role in supporting rural communities and ensuring rural people and places are interconnected. While responsibility for the provision of transport services, including engagement with relevant State agencies and semi-State bodies, falls under the remit of the Department of Transport and the Minister, Deputy O'Brien, with me as the Minister of State with responsibility for rural transport, the Government's Our Rural Future policy takes a whole-of-government approach to rural development, with the Minister, Deputy Calleary, leading on actions to support rural communities being delivered across a range of Departments and agencies.

The important point is that the Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan has delivered significant improvements in rural transport services over the lifetime of Our Rural Future to date. Under the National Transport Authority, with funding from the Department of Transport, 185 new or enhanced services have been delivered or implemented in the past four years, linking more than 240 towns and villages to the public transport network. With funding for the rural transport programme, regular rural services increased by 32% between 2024 and 2025. More than €87 million was invested, boosting passenger numbers on regular rural services by 47%. The important point for all of us who understand the importance of rural transport is that under the Connecting Ireland programme more than 600,000 people now have access to useful daily public transport services for the first time. We can do more. We are ambitious to do more. I accept there are difficulties and lacunas and I will come back again on that.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Transport policy and funding for most transport modes rests with the Department of Transport but I specifically put this question to the Minister of State, Deputy Buttimer, and the Minister, Deputy Calleary, because the onus is on Deputy Calleary's Department to advocate for rural communities with every Government Department to ensure the voices and needs of rural communities are heard and met. That is why I put the question in this context.

I will briefly tell the story of Grange in west Waterford. It is a rural community with a significant population which is spread out. A Bus Éireann intercity service that has served the community for a long time no longer serves it because the bus stop was taken away due to road safety concerns. It was not today nor yesterday that councillors on Waterford City and County Council - I was one of them-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: A cross-party group raised issues about road safety there and looked for investment.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister of State will respond and then the Deputy can come back in.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: The Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht needs to engage with local authorities and agencies on funding for these schemes.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: As the Deputy is aware, I have been in west Waterford and I hope we will find a solution to that impasse. Having visited the site and spoken to locals, what is happening there does not make sense to me. I have asked that it be looked at.

I will make the point in the round that the Minister, Deputy Calleary, has been proactive, as have I, in being an advocate for rural Ireland and rural communities. That voice is heard by the Minister and me and across the Government. We are close to the development of the next five-year Our Rural Future strategy. The Minister is undertaking bilateral meetings with other Departments at the moment about that document. It is important that it takes a whole-of-

government approach because the Deputy is right. Rural communities have made significant advances over the lifetime of this Government and that of the last one. Now, 600,000 people are interconnected with access to 185 new or enhanced services and-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Minister of State. You can come back in.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: -----we will continue to drive stakeholder engagement.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: That is well and good but the community had a service for many years and it was removed because of a deterioration in road quality due to a lack of investment in road structures. This is on the N25, a road I have mentioned many times to the Minister, Deputy O'Brien, and to the Department of Transport. Due to the lack of investment - the lack of money available to local authorities to do safety works and put in infrastructure around bus stops - Bus Éireann and Waterford City and County Council had to take a decision, which they did not want to take, to remove the bus stop. A whole community has been left without connection to Dungarvan, Youghal and Waterford city and onward routes. While there absolutely has been progress on Local Link, for many people living in Grange to access Local Link and other transport modes and most public services, they have to get to Dungarvan or Youghal and that is not available to them anymore.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: The Government and the Department of Transport have been proactive in their support of rural transport. I do not think the Deputy would dismiss the fact that this year €718 million has been allocated to investment in the regional and local road network. I do not think the Deputy will oppose that and Waterford, through its county council, has received significant funding.

The Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht and the Department of Transport are committed to continued investment in our roads infrastructure, and in the critical piece of connectivity of people in our rural areas. I do not think the Deputy will disagree that there has been significant improvement in the provision of rural transport and growth in the use of it. I go back to the point about the number of people using it and the number of services. I accept there are difficulties and challenges and we must, as part of the budgetary process, work to ensure rural transport receives its allocation of funding to progress new routes.

Community Development Projects

2. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht if he will approve capital funding for a community centre in Citywest; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53391/26]

Deputy Paul Murphy: Citywest has been waiting for more than 20 years for a community centre. It was written into the local area plan in 2012. It was promised again when that plan was extended. It was made a binding condition of planning permission in 2018. Since then, nearly 4,000 homes have been built and hundreds more are now planned at Boherboy and there

is still no community centre. The council's capital plan does not show any grant from the Minister's Department.

Is that correct? Why not? Will the Minister engage with the council to make sure the centre opens next year as promised?

Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Dara Calleary): Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta. I will begin by acknowledging the importance of having appropriate facilities in communities such as Citywest. Community centres are vital for bringing communities together and providing an outlet for services and for social, cultural and community activities.

The community centre investment fund, CCIF, was introduced to provide high-quality community facilities that are available to all groups in all areas. Earlier this year, the Minister of State, Deputy Buttimer, and I launched the fourth iteration of community centre investment funding. This round of the scheme is providing funding of up to €100,000 for the refurbishment of existing facilities. This is additional to the €80 million that has already been approved since 2022 for over 1,600 community centre enhancement projects.

Under the 2023 round of CCIF, over €30 million was approved for the construction of 12 new-build community facilities. These are substantial construction projects, with the scheme providing funding of up to €6 million. I hope to be in a position to announce funding for new-build community centres in 2027.

I have been informed that planning permission has been approved to construct a community centre and crèche in the Cúil Dúin Avenue area of Citywest. From contact with South Dublin County Council, I understand that the project will commence later this year and that the local authority is engaging with the developer. To date, my Department has not received any application for support for this project. I am happy to work with the Deputy, South Dublin County Council and the community in Citywest to ensure this facility delivers for the local community. My Department has funded eight different projects in south Dublin through the community centre investment fund. The Deputy's local authority has a very good record of delivering for us. We look forward to working with it on any potential application.

Deputy Paul Murphy: If you look up developer-led planning in a dictionary, I am sure you will find a picture of Citywest. It is quite incredible. It is one of the fastest growing communities in all of Ireland. Almost 4,000 homes have been built in a decade. More than 2,000 were built in just the last three years. What came with the houses? There is no community centre and no public crèche places. Families are on waiting lists for a long time across the area. There are no sports pitches. The couple of parks and playgrounds provided for tens of thousands of people are working overtime. Residents say they feel forgotten. They are absolutely right. This is just classic developer-led planning. It is about throwing up homes without providing facilities to allow people to integrate and build a community.

The story of this community centre has been a saga. In 2018, it was made a condition of planning permission. The developer built the homes but the community centre was not developed. The latest is that something is now happening but the Minister's attention would assist with that.

Deputy Dara Calleary: That is why the then Minister, Heather Humphreys, brought in the community centre investment fund. It is also why she expanded it to new builds. We will launch that again in 2027. To date, over €988,000 has been awarded to 23 community centres. Citywest sounds like a place that needs a community centre. We have a track record of investing. For example, Newcastle in Galway is an urban centre. We have worked with Galway City Council and with the local community. I had the pleasure of turning the sod on that development two weeks ago. That will be ready for occupation in late 2027. As I have said, I am certainly happy to keep the Deputy informed. We will have a call for funding in 2027. It is more than likely that will be around this time next year. I am happy to work with the Deputy and to put him in touch with other communities where new-build centres have been brought to their current stage. As I have said, 12 projects are nearly finalised. These are totally new builds and come on top of all the refurbishments.

Deputy Paul Murphy: This is not only an issue for South Dublin County Council. I obviously accept the point that an application for funding needs to be made if funding is to be granted. The reason Citywest has developed in the way it has, with homes but no adequate facilities, is the fast-track strategic housing development process. The local area plan, which included these kinds of requirements, was ignored. Developers went straight down the strategic housing development route, got permission for huge developments and then did not put in the facilities. They were sometimes promised. Community centres and crèches were often promised. They were often part of the planning permission. They ultimately were not delivered, however. The council previously said that the community centre would be delivered in June of this year. We are now in the middle of July and ground has not even been broken. I appeal to the Minister not to wash his hands of this, to engage with the council to track delivery and to make sure that this centre opens next year.

Deputy Dara Calleary: I assure the Deputy that I will not be washing my hands of it but, equally, the council has to show interest and intent. I am not going to spoon-feed the council. We have councils and, in fairness, South Dublin County Council is very proactive in relation to the scheme for the refurbishment of centres. When we launch the scheme next year, we will launch it in partnership with local authorities around the country. It is a very substantial investment programme on the part of the Department. It provides centres and places for the communities the Deputy has highlighted to gather. I hope to issue the call around this time in 2027. We will be preparing that call and engaging with local authorities through the CCMA and other groups in the meantime. I call on South Dublin County Council to step up and make that kind of investment in the Citywest community.

Social Enterprise Sector

4. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht his plans to scale up the delivery of essential services through social enterprises; if he plans to invest in not-for-profit delivery of essential services through the social inclusion and community activation programme, SICAP, particularly for the delivery of community childcare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53636/26]

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: As is always the case with my questions, this question is very straightforward. I ask the Minister of State to concentrate his remarks on the delivery of community childcare. I am interested in knowing what plans there are to scale up the delivery of essential services through the use of social enterprises.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: I do not think it is as simple as the Deputy thinks but I thank her for the question. It is an important question. The provision of community childcare is very important. The Deputy and I probably share a view on the issue. As she will know, this does not necessarily fall under the remit of the social inclusion and community activation programme, SICAP. I will come back to her again. I hope we will find common ground as we move forward.

Social enterprises have a substantive role to play in furthering the objective of the Department, the Minister and me to build inclusive, sustainable and empowered communities right across Ireland. The current iteration of SICAP for the four-year period from 2024 to 2028 contains a revised key performance indicator for goal 1 that explicitly includes the provision of social enterprise supports, both financial and non-financial, as working towards the achievement of goal 1 objectives. This is in recognition of the important role that social enterprises can play in effecting change, working with SICAP target groups. In 2025, SICAP supported over 500 social enterprises through capacity-building supports and small-scale grants of up to €2,500.

As Deputy O'Reilly will know, in July 2024, my Department launched Trading for Impact, the national social enterprise policy for a three-year period to conclude next year. This was developed in partnership with the social enterprise sector. Work is continuing to support and grow the sector through the strategy's stakeholder engagement group.

Funding of €4 million was announced in 2025 under the Dormant Accounts Fund growing social enterprise scheme. A further €4 million was allocated this year to a sustaining social enterprise scheme, which will support social enterprises to become more financially self-sufficient. I hope to announce the successful awardees with the Minister later this year.

SICAP's primary focus is the delivery of support to its 12 target groups and the provision of supports to strengthen the capabilities of organisations working with those target groups. The programme's broad parameters and wide-ranging supports have ensured that it has been and continues to be able to respond flexibly to that local need. However, while SICAP can provide some supports to community organisations and social enterprises, the programme is not designed for the direct delivery of services such as childcare.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Well, just design a programme that will do that because there is a really serious and pressing need for it. I will give the Minister of State an example. In the area known as Fingal, where my constituency is located, there are 63,000 children. Of those, 15,000 are living in poverty or are at risk of it. There are 800 community childcare places. I know from talking to the people on the community childcare committees that they are not hung up on any particular way to fund this. I am continuously struck by the capacity that exists within the social enterprise sector to do that really valuable work. The CSO statistics released in the last fortnight show that unemployment among women aged 35 to 44 has doubled. The rate is still low but it is increasing.

There is a real need for affordable childcare. The Government does not seem to be getting any closer to delivering the €200 per week childcare it promised. The way to do it is to engage with social enterprises.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: I understand where the Deputy is coming from. I genuinely do. Empower is the community childcare provider in her area. It does phenomenal work. As the Deputy knows, SICAP does not directly provide that community childcare place. I am meeting John Logue and Richard Bruton from Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland, SERI, next week to have a conversation with them in terms of this piece. I will pose the question in a rhetorical and adversarial way right now. What is the community childcare committee doing in the case of Fingal? I will just ask that question. If we look at the overarching scenario, to be fair to the Minister, Deputy Calleary, and the Department of Social Protection and the Taoiseach and his Department, we are putting child poverty and its elimination and reduction at the heart of government. I was in Drogheda yesterday where I had a very profound conversation with women there in terms of the whole piece around childcare and poverty. The important point for us is that we are working in a whole-of-government way in assisting local communities in a variety of ways. I know the Deputy might disagree with me, which is fair enough. I get that we need to do more around childcare and particularly that community piece.

An Ceann Comhairle: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire Stáit.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: Okay. I will come back again.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: The Minister of State asked me what the community childcare committee in Fingal is doing. I will tell him that it is battling against the privatisation of childcare day in, day out. In our community centres, the vast majority - over 70% - are occupied by for-profit childcare providers. It is an area in which SERI has done fantastic work and has a lot to offer in this space. Unfortunately, when Mr. John Logue reached out to the Minister of State's colleague, the Minister, Deputy Foley, she did not come back to him. He wants to engage. I am absolutely delighted that the Minister of State is meeting with him next week and I hope he gets to discuss the issue of childcare because it is essential. There is so much more that can be done in the social enterprise space. There are areas in which the Government delivers services where profit has absolutely no place, home help being one of them and school meals provision being another. The profit motive does not lend itself well to the delivery of public services, but childcare is an area on which we could agree. There is definitely a need for it and there is definitely the appetite in SERI for it.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: The important point is that there is a commitment by the Government. I share the Deputy's confidence in terms of the capacity of social enterprises to deliver. I will have that conversation next week, but it would be fair to say that we are seeing a co-ordinated response from the Government. We are tackling the key issues. There is a deficit in some places around the provision of community childcare places. In saying that, I do not agree with the Deputy in every respect. I do not share her view on the for-profit issue around home help, which was one example given by the Deputy. In my area of Cork city, home help is being provided by people through the HSE co-ordinator there. Phenomenal work is being done. I will talk to the Deputy again about it. We are committed to ensuring that people

have access to childcare and community childcare places. I will talk to her ahead of my meeting next week with the two gentlemen in question. However, the important point is that, as the Deputy knows, we have done a census in the social enterprise space.

An Ceann Comhairle: Go raibh maith agat, a Aire Stáit.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: I will come back in again if I can.

An Ceann Comhairle: No, the Minister of State is finished now.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: Okay.

Cúrsaí Tithíochta

3. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den an Aire Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail, agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil sé tar éis labhairt leis an Aire Tithíochta, Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreacht maidir leis an íslíú a thiocfaidh ar chéatadán na dtithe lena mbainfidh coinníollacha teanga i bhforbairtí ilaonad i gceantair Ghaeltachta mar thoradh ar an dréachtráiteas náisiúnta pleanála don tithíocht inbhuanaithe tuaithe agus Gaeltachta a fhoilseofar an tseachtain seo chugainn; an bhfuil sé sásta labhairt leis an Aire sin faoin ábhar sin, mura bhfuil sé sin déanta aige go fóill; agus an bhfuil sé i gceist aige aon ghníomh a ghlacadh chun tacú le daoine lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht a bhfuil Gaeilge acu bogadh go dtí an Ghaeltacht [53305/26]

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Déanann an cheist seo déileáil leis na coinníollacha teanga a bheidh ann de réir an dréachtráiteas náisiúnta pleanála agus an dochar a dhéantar do cheantair Ghaeltachta má théitear ar aghaidh leo, go háirithe toisc go bhfuil íslíú i gceist. An bhfuil an tAire tar éis labhairt leis an Aire tithíochta maidir leis seo? An bhfuil aon dea-scéal le teacht maidir leis an gceist seo? An féidir linn a chinntiú nach íslíú a bheidh i gceist ó thaobh an choinníll?

Deputy Dara Calleary: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta. Déanaim comhghairdeas leis as an mBille um intleacht shaorga. Tá sé thar a bheith tábhachtach. Déanaim comhghairdeas leis as an obair sin. Mar is eol don Teachta, is í an Roinn Tithíochta, Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreacht atá freagrach as an dréachtráiteas náisiúnta pleanála ach is cinnte go bhfuil plé idir na Ranna éagsúla atá faoi mo chúram maidir leis an dréachtráiteas seo.

Faoi láthair, níl aon mhodh comhsheasmhach ann d'údaráis phleanála áitiúla nuair a bhíonn forbróirí ag cur céatadán d'fhorbairt tithíochta atá beartaithe in áirithe do chainteoirí Gaeilge. Beidh an modh seo chun íoslíon aonad a chur in áirithe bunaithe ar chéatadán na gcainteoirí lasmuigh den chóras oideachais móide 10%, mar atá molta, bunaithe ar chomhdhéanamh teanga reatha an cheantair seachas figiúr aonfhoirmeach náisiúnta a leagan síos i ngach ceantar Gaeltachta.

Is éard atá i gceist leis seo ná cinnteacht a thabhairt do phleanálaithe agus do dhaoine ar mian leo fanacht ina gcónaí ina bpobail tuaithe nó filladh orthu agus, ag an am céanna, tacú le tuath bhríomhar inbhuanaithe in Éirinn. Léiríonn an cur chuige seo an treo ina bhfuil

polasaí an Rialtais ag dul i dtaca le pleanáil i gceantair Ghaeltachta. Ar ndóigh, beidh plé le páirtithe leasmhara sna seachtainí agus sna míonna amach romhainn. Sa chomhthéacs seo, tá cruinniú faoin dréachtráiteas sceidealta idir m'oifigigh agus Conradh na Gaeilge níos déanaí an mhí seo.

I gcás cainteoir Gaeilge nach bhfuil aon cheangal teaghlaigh aige leis an nGaeltacht agus atá ag iarraidh bogadh ann, beidh feidhm fós ag an riail chónaithe cúig-bliana, le hais riail deich mbliana do chainteoirí Béarla. Cé go bhfuil sé inmhianaithe cainteoirí Gaeilge a bheith in ann bogadh go dtí an Ghaeltacht, ní féidir linn cás a bheith againn ina bhfaigheann cainteoirí Gaeilge cead pleanála toisc gur cainteoirí Gaeilge iad amháin. Tá obair le déanamh ar an dréachtráiteas. Tá suim agam obair leis an Teachta chun an obair sin a dhéanamh.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Tá roinnt samplaí anseo agam. Glacaim leis gur chuir an conradh agus BÁNÚ roinnt samplaí eile chuig an Aire ag léiriú an damáiste a dhéanfaidh sé sin. In ainneoin an méid atá ráite aige, i gceantair áirithe, tá coinníollacha ar leith ann ó thaobh forbróirí atá ag forbairt iliomad tithíochta faoi láthair. Mar shampla, i gCois Fharraige, tá coinníoll teanga i gceist le 80% de na tithe le 15 bliana anuas faoi phlean forbartha Chontae na Gaillimhe. Faoi náisiúnta, ísleoidh sé sin go dtí 58%. Sna Déise, tá an rud ceannann céanna ann. Ísleoidh an figiúr ón 80% atá ann le 15 bliana anuas go dtí 37% faoin gcóras nua. Déanfaidh sé sin damáiste do cheantair Ghaeltachta atá ag teacht chucu féin. Beidh Béarlóirí á mbrú orthu. I gcás na Déise, beidh 63% de na tithe ar fáil do Bhéarlóirí. Tá damáiste le teacht má dhéantar é seo.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Tuigim é sin. Tuigim na buarthaí atá ag grúpaí cosúil leis an gconradh, BÁNÚ agus na Teachtaí féin ach níl aon chaighdeán náisiúnta ann ag an bpointe seo. Athraíonn sé ó údarás áitiúil go húdarás áitiúil. Táimid ag iarraidh caighdeán náisiúnta a chur air. Beimid in ann é sin a phlé tar éis sin. Chomh maith leis sin, cé go bhfuil na coinníollacha ann, an bhfuil na cainteoirí ann? Tá sé tábhachtach é sin a scrúdú freisin. B'fhéidir go bhfuil obair le déanamh againn air sin. Tá na coinníollacha pleanála ann ach an bhfuil daoine ag úsáid na Gaeilge tar éis bogadh isteach? Léiríonn na figiúirí atá againn ón census go bhfuil difríocht idir na figiúirí sin agus an líon daoine atá ag úsáid na Gaeilge gach uile lá. Nuair atá coinníollacha ann, tá sé tábhachtach go bhfuil enforcement ann freisin. Tá brón orm. Níl an focal Gaeilge agam. Ní riail iondúil é. It is not a normal rule mar gheall go mbaineann sé le cúrsaí teanga. I gcomhthéacs an ráitis, tá obair le déanamh againn ar chóras nua i gcomhair enforcement.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Cloisim é seo. Chuala mé é thar na blianta ó dhaoine a bhí ag iarraidh go laghdófaí teorainn na Gaeltachta. Bhí siad ag iarraidh díriú isteach ar na ceantair a bhí in ísle brí ó thaobh labhairt na Gaeilge chun iad a chaitheamh amach ón nGaeltacht. Bhí siad ag iarraidh go mbeadh an Ghaeltacht srianta go dtí ceantair ina bhfuil 50% ann. Má dhéanann tú é seo, bheadh i bhfad Éireann níos mó ceantar ann a bhfuil brú mór orthu, go háirithe na ceantair atá lag. Níor chóir go mbeadh am ann riamh ina bhfuil an Stát ag brú go mbeidh tithíocht shóisialta nó tithíocht d'aon shórt ann a bhfuil níos lú ná 50% di ar fáil do chainteoirí Gaeilge. D'fhiafraigh an tAire an bhfuil na cainteoirí Gaeilge ann. Tá aithne agam ar a lán daoine i gceantair Ghaeltachta nach féidir leo teacht ar thithe. Ní raibh córas acu go

dtí seo. Tá a lán Gaeilgeoirí lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht toisc go raibh orthu lonnú lasmuigh di toisc nach raibh aon tithíocht ann. Tá siadsan sásta dul ar ais go dtí a mbailte féin. Tá siad ann ach níor tugadh an deis dóibh mar ní raibh aon tithíocht ann.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Aontaím go mór leis sin. Tá na Gaeilgeoirí ann agus tá siad ag iarraidh bogadh abhaile nó go dtí an Ghaeltacht ach tá fadhb agus dúshlán ann le tithe saoire freisin.

Tá daoine nach bhfuil suim sa Ghaeilge acu atá ag iarraidh bheith sa cheantar. Dream níos tábhachtaí ná sin is ea iad daoine a rugadh sa Ghaeltacht nach bhfuil Gaeilge acu. Tá muid ag iarraidh balance a shroicheadh idir na daoine le Gaeilge atá ag iarraidh bogadh isteach go dtí an Ghaeltacht chun a gcuid Gaeilge a úsáid agus na daoine as ceantair Ghaeltachta nach bhfuil Gaeilge acu. Níl mórán suime agam i dtithe saoire. Tá mé ag iarraidh go mbeidh daoine ina gcónaí sna háiteanna Gaeltachta seo, go háirithe daoine le Gaeilge.

Tá an dréacht-ráiteas ann. Beidh mé ag obair leis an Aire tithíochta air seo, ach níl monopoly agam ina leith seo ach an oiread. Tá suim mhór agam oibriú leis an Teachta agus a chomhghleacaí, an Teachta McGuinness, air seo.

Údaráis Áitiúla

5. **Deputy Shane Moynihan** den an Aire Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail, agus Gaeltachta cén tacaíocht atá á cur ar fáil ag a Roinn maidir leis an gclár Gaeilge365; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh.. [53548/26]

Deputy Shane Moynihan: Fiafraím den Aire Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobal agus Gaeltachta faoin tacaíocht atá á cur ar fáil ag a Roinn maidir leis an gclár Gaeilge365, faoi mar atá leagtha amach sa chlár Rialtais. Is clár é seo atá ar bun sna húdaráis áitiúla i mBaile Átha Cliath, agus tá sé i gceist é a leathnú amach ar fud na tíre. An ndéanfaidh an tAire ráiteas ar an ábhar seo?

Deputy Dara Calleary: Is é Gaeilge365 an chéad aonad nuálaíochta a oibríonn trí mheán na Gaeilge sa tseirbhís phoiblí agus é mar aidhm leis deachleachtais a chruthú i dtaobh na modhanna is féidir le húdaráis áitiúla a úsáid le tuilleadh deiseanna labhartha Gaeilge a chruthú don phobal.

Bhunaigh Comhairle Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath Gaeilge365 mar thionscadal píolótach in 2023 le tacaíocht airgid ó chlár Éire Ildánach, tacaíocht a bhí fíorthábhachtach le tús a chur leis an tionscnamh. Ba é aidhm an tionscadail phíolótaigh sin cur chuige nuálach a chur sa siúl ionas go gcruthófaí breis deiseanna don phobal an Ghaeilge a labhairt trí sheirbhísí Chomhairle Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath. Leis an gcur chuige nuálach a bhí ag Gaeilge365 ón tús, agus baill fhoirne ón gcomhairle cathrach trí chéile rannpháirteach ann, bhíothas in ann cruthaitheacht na Gaeilge a chur i láthair.

Tá Gaeilge365 leathnaithe anois go réigiún uile Bhaile Átha Cliath. Tá maoiniú os cionn €4.5 milliún bainteach leis an gclár seo don tréimhse 2025-2028. Tá 50% den mhaoiniú sin ag teacht ó mo Roinn féin, agus tá an 50% eile ag teacht ó na ceithre údarás áitiúla i mBaile Átha Cliath.

Tá leathnú ar Gaeilge365 leagtha amach mar ghníomh sonrach sa chlár Rialtais, mar a dúirt an Teachta. Táthar ag súil go mbeidh an deis ann amach anseo eiseamláir Bhaile Átha Cliath a chur i ngníomh sna húdaráis áitiúla ar fud an Stáit. Déanaim comhghairdeas le foireann Gaeilge365, a raibh an t-ádh uirthi duais a bhaint amach ag Gradam na Seirbhísí Poiblí Níos Fearr cúpla seachtain ó shin. Is project iontach é agus tá mé ag iarraidh é a leathnú amach go gach cuid den tír.

Deputy Shane Moynihan: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra chuimsithigh sin. Faoi mar a dúirt sé, is é ceann de na rudaí a dhéanann idirdhealú idir Gaeilge365 agus tograí agus tionscadail eile Gaeilge agus Gaeltachta de chuid an Státchórais ná an tomhas atá air maidir le haischur. Cruthaíonn sé deiseanna cainte do dhaoine dul i ngleic leis an Státchóras agus le seirbhísí poiblí. Is cur chuige nuálaíochta é sin. Ba chóir dúinn an cur chuige sin a leathnú amach, ní hamháin i measc na n-údarás áitiúla ach i measc na n-áisiúneachtaí Stáit agus na gcomhlachtaí pobail araon. Ní mór dúinn impí orthu féachaint ar líon na ndeiseanna cainte Gaeilge a chruthaíonn siad do Ghaeilgeoirí agus daoine atá báúil don Ghaeilge. Ar a bharr sin, nuair a chuireann muid maoiniú ar fáil dá leithéid de chlár, beidh muid in ann féachaint ar líon na ndeiseanna cainte atá cruthaithe de bharr an mhaoinithe sin. Cén sórt scála ama a bhfuil muid ag labhairt faoi chun é seo a leathnú amach go dtí na húdaráis áitiúla eile timpeall na tíre?

Deputy Dara Calleary: Ar dtús, ba é an aidhm a bhí agam le haghaidh Gaeilge365 ná airgead a chur ar fáil dó le go mbeadh sé in ann dul ar aghaidh leis an obair thábhachtach i mBaile Átha Cliath. Tá sé tar éis 150,000 deis chainte Gaeilge a thabhairt do dhaoine a bhíonn ag úsáid seirbhísí sna ceithre údarás áitiúil i mBaile Átha Cliath. Leis an airgead atá ag teacht ó mo Roinn, agus leis an obair atá idir lámha agam agus ag an Aire Stáit, an Teachta Buttimer, beidh an t-airgead sin ann agus beidh sé in ann leanúint leis sin. Gabhaim buíochas leis na húdaráis áitiúla atá rannpháirteach, go háirithe leis na comhairleoirí ar na húdaráis áitiúla a sheas i bhfabhar an airgid seo, atá ag teacht ó na húdaráis áitiúla féin sna ceithre áit sin.

Tar éis sin, tá muid ag scrúdú Gaeilge365 chun na cleachtaí a fhoghlaim le go mbeidh muid in ann dul ar aghaidh leo i ngach cuid den Státseirbhís. Mar is eol don Teachta, tá sprioc le haghaidh deireadh 2030 go mbeidh 20% den Státseirbhís in ann Gaeilge a úsáid. Is sprioc mhór agus dúshlánach í sin dúinn, ach beidh muid ag úsáid na gcleachtaí ó Ghaeilge365 chun é a oibriú amach.

An Ceann Comhairle: Bogfaidh muid ar aghaidh go Ceist Uimh. 7 in ainm an Teachta O'Rourke.

Deputy Shane Moynihan: Nach bhfuil deis agam teacht isteach arís?

An Ceann Comhairle: Excuse me. The Deputy is correct.

Deputy Shane Moynihan: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. Ag eascairt as an méid atá ráite aige, tá mé an-sásta cloisteáil go mbeidh deachleachtais á bhfoghlaim maidir lena bhfuil bainte amach ag Gaeilge365. Cuirim fáilte roimh an tomhas atá á dhéanamh ar dheiseanna cainte chomh maith.

An bhfuil sé de thuairim ag an Aire go leathnófar é seo amach go dtí na húdaráis áitiúla ar bhonn moillithe, is é sin, go dtosófar le cúpla údarás i gCúige Laighean, cúpla ceann eile i gCúige Mumhan agus, de réir a chéile, cúpla ceann eile i gCúige Connachta? Cén sórt cur chuige a bheidh an tAire ag cur chun cinn leis an gclár Gaeilge365 a leathnú amach chuig na húdaráis áitiúla eile sa tír?

Is é an rud is sonraí faoi Ghaeilge365 ná go mbogann sé amach an cur chuige a bhíonn ag go leor áisíneachtaí Stáit agus comhlachtaí poiblí go dtiteann sé faoin oifigeach Gaeilge polasaí na Gaeilge agus deiseanna cainte Gaeilge a chruthú. Ina áit sin, cuirtear rudaí mar chleachtaí snámha agus ióga trí mheán na Gaeilge ar fáil le go mbíonn daoine in ann plé le seirbhísí an údarais áitiúil trí mheán na Gaeilge. Is é sin an rud a sheasann amach.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Tá deiseanna iontacha ag teacht as Gaeilge365 maidir le húsáid na seirbhísí. Léiríonn sé seo go bhfuil suim againn sa Roinn oibriú le daoine a bhfuil ideas nua acu. Níl gach rud ar eolas againn sa Roinn, agus níl gach rud ar eolas againn sa Teach seo ach an oiread.

Déanaim comhghairdeas le Daithí de Buitleir agus an fhoireann i nGaeilge365. Mar a dúirt sé, bíonn a lán rudaí ar siúl, cosúil le binse comhrá ina mbíonn binsí sa chomharsanacht áitiúil agus ar an trá. Tá an togra, snámh le spraoi, ann freisin. Baintear leas as spórt le go mbíonn na daoine a imríonn spórt ag úsáid na Gaeilge. Tá cleachtaí ó Ghaeilge365 a mbeidh aon údarás áitiúil in ann úsáid a bhaint astu ina gcathair nó ceantar féin. Tá mé ag cur brú ar gach comhairle áitiúil Gaeilge365 a scrúdú agus é a úsáid mar shampla agus teimpléad ina gcuid ceantar dúchais féin.

Bíonn a lán cruinnithe agam le príomhfheidhmeannaigh na n-údarás áitiúil maidir le tithíocht. Tá mé chun Gaeilge365 a chur ar an agenda chomh maith.

Ceisteanna Eile - Other Questions

Question No. 6 taken with Written Answers.

Community Development Projects

7. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht to provide an update on the town centre first policy; his views on whether it is achieving its stated aims, taking the Dunshaughlin town team as an example; the evidence he would point to that suggests this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52566/26]

Deputy Dara Calleary: The town centre first, TCF, policy, published in February 2022, is a joint initiative between my Department and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The policy sets out a framework to facilitate and resource the regeneration of Irish towns to ensure they are vibrant, viable and attractive places to live in, work in, invest in and visit. Important progress includes the establishment of a dedicated national TCF office and the appointment of town regeneration officers, TROs, in 26 local authorities, including Meath County Council. TROs lead on implementation of the policy at the local level. They

work with the local town teams through a place-based approach to develop a TCF town plan, such as the new plan which the Dunshaughlin town team launched last month.

TCF provides for an integrated policy approach for the development of our towns underpinned by funding streams across Government, including a range of measures from my Department. For example, under the rural regeneration and development fund, RRDF, over €3.6 million has been allocated to five projects located in County Meath since 2020.

9 o'clock

This included over €950,000 in category 2 funding for Dunshaughlin courthouse and public realm project, which I recently visited with Deputy Gillian Toole. Recent funding calls for proposals from my Department have shown that the TCF approach is having an impact. Higher quality and more considered applications have been received and have secured funding for project proposals emanating initially from town centre first plans.

We are committed to the TCF policy and I will continue to work with the Ministers of State, Deputies Cummins and Buttimer, in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and we will have a joint Departments of rural and community development and housing and local government event later this year in Waterford around TCF and learning the lessons from TCF to date.

Deputy Darren O'Rourke: I welcome the work of the Dunshaughlin town team, which has produced the town centre first plan that is very comprehensive. I have participated in some of the consultations, and my colleague, Councillor Fionnan Blake, is on the town team. There was tremendous engagement at the launch recently in the pastoral centre, which would say that the level of commitment from the local community, their interest and ambition for their own place is there in absolute spades. People from all different backgrounds, from those who are new to Dunshaughlin to those who have been there a lifetime, contributed to this. The question then is how to turn this into a reality. The vision is there but the question regarding the funding stream will be the next one asked. When is it going to happen?

Deputy Dara Calleary: I fully agree with the Deputy and I commend the town team in Dunshaughlin on the town centre first plan. My Department is engaging closely with Meath County Council across several different projects, including a RRDF application. As a consequence of the TCF plan, I understand Meath County Council and the town team are closely engaged in working on an RRDF application. As the closing date is 27 July, I cannot tell the Deputy if it has come in or not. However, the officials in my Department have a call scheduled with Meath County Council on RRDF for next Friday, 17 July, at which they will get a steer from Meath County Council as to whether this is coming in.

I know from a meeting I had at the beginning of June with the CEO of Meath County Council and with the then Cathaoirleach, Wayne Harding, that this was seen as a priority within the county. Until such time as we get an application in, I cannot make any further comment. The only thing I will say is the town centre first plan will considerably accentuate the application and strengthen it.

Deputy Darren O'Rourke: I appreciate that but I have to say that understandably, the community in Dunshaughlin feels as though there were missed opportunities in the past with regard to our RRDF funding and that a huge amount is riding on the next application. We certainly will be making the case to Meath County Council and to the Minister himself that this funding application be successful, because it is an excellent one.

In the wider context, there is a long list of priorities in terms of amenities in the public realm and in other areas such as active travel and transportation. Will the Minister's review of the town centre first policy look at how to integrate the funding streams for towns to ensure all these policy objectives align with one another?

Deputy Dara Calleary: Definitely, Deputy. In the context of the discussions we are having with the Ministers of State, Deputies Cummins and Buttimer, we want to make that alignment true to the funding streams within our Department, as well as their Department, such as with the former URDF project. There is a new name for that now on which I have drawn a blank. However, I will say that on the previous occasion, the Dunshaughlin application was not grounded in the town centre first plan but it is now. Some of the feedback we discussed on the previous one was that there needed to be a plan and we now have a very solid plan.

We have a town regeneration officer within Meath County Council who will be driving on, not just for Dunshaughlin but also for the rest of the county. I highly recommend all the Deputies in the House visit Kells to see what has happened there in the Kells Printing Works. It is an extraordinary project and I am going to get back there myself to see it properly over the summer. That is a similar idea. It is outside the Deputy's own constituency but what is happening in Kells is coming from the town centre first plan-----

Deputy Darren O'Rourke: It is not outside my constituency. It is bang in the middle; it is my hometown.

Deputy Dara Calleary: My apologies. If there is regeneration happening there, it can happen in Dunshaughlin too.

Gaeltacht Policy

8. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht if he has assessed the potential impact of the draft national housing statement, particularly the proposed changes to occupancy requirements in multi-unit housing developments in Gaeltacht areas, on the implementation of the language planning process under the Gaeltacht Act 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53016/26]

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: A total of 2,119 pubs have closed since 2005, and another 1,000 pubs are currently at risk. It is estimated that 100 local shops close every year in Ireland, which means two shops are shut on a weekly basis. In the past decade, 257 post offices have closed; that is one post office closing every fortnight for ten years. Some 139 Garda stations were closed 13 years ago, and if you put it over a stretch in time, that is equal to one Garda station closing every month. Indeed, there are 53 Garda stations with no garda at all.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy. The Minister will respond, and then the Deputy can come back in.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: What is the Minister doing as regards information and stats to be able to develop rural Ireland?

Deputy Dara Calleary: I have a question regarding the draft national housing statement in the Deputy's name. I can give the Deputy chapter and verse, because it is the-----

An Ceann Comhairle: This is Question No. 8.

Deputy Dara Calleary: -----same question Deputy Conway Walsh has asked, but I have Question with the reference number 53016/26 on this one. That is what is on the Order Paper as well.

Deputy Darren O'Rourke: He corrected you there.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: He did.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Does the Deputy want to give the big intro again?

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The Minister can go ahead and I will come back in.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Am I answering the question on the housing statement?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister is answering that one quickly, because he only has a minute and a half left.

Deputy Dara Calleary: In fairness, the question I have and the question the Deputy----

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy asked. No, the question is Question No. 8.

Deputy Dara Calleary: That is on multi-unit housing development.

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes.

Deputy Dara Calleary: I can give the Deputy the work we are doing.

First, with regard to the draft national planning statement, and I will follow up and email the Deputy with a full answer, that is exactly about restoring population to these areas. Second, the investments I have just discussed with Deputy O'Rourke, and I highlighted an amazing project in the Deputy's own county in Kells, are investing in the RRDF projects to put investment back in rural communities. Through the town centre first plan, working with the Minister, Deputy Browne, and the Ministers of State, Deputies Cummins and Buttimer, we are

putting in town regeneration officers to get people back living in towns. Through the vacant house and derelict house site, we are giving people the chance to get a start and to get the kind of refurbishment grants needed to get them back in.

As regards services, it is difficult. We face the challenge of digitalisation. We need people to work and support local communities. I am working with the Minister of State, Deputy Buttimer, around the whole area of community cafes, which are taking hold around the country. Communities are setting up cafes and we are looking at the notion of community shops as well. We will be publishing the new draft of our rural future in mid-September and it will contain many new initiatives to deal with exactly the kind of challenges the Deputy has dealt with. However, I will send the Deputy a full response subsequently.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: A part of that question focuses on the development in the Gaeltacht areas. Obviously, the Gaeltacht is the well of the Irish language. The Gaeltacht is currently at such a level where it is at the edge of continuance. This could be the last generation with the Irish language as a community language within the Gaeltacht. One of the big elements of the Gaeltacht has obviously been the ability to raise families in the Irish language. Housing is a very important element of that and there are significant campaigns currently out there as a result of the lack of proper housing within the Gaeltacht. There are also language schemes but there is a threat potentially of people coming into Gaeltacht areas with only English and therefore changing the community language within that area. Recently, the Government had produced new guidelines on that and there were major concerns those guidelines would have the effect of reducing the Irish spoken in Gaeltacht areas if we sought to house a large number of English speakers in those Gaeltacht areas.

Deputy Dara Calleary: We had a discussion earlier with na Teachtaí Ó Snodaigh and McGuinness around the draft planning statement, which has been introduced by the Minister, Deputy Browne, and on which the Ministers of State, Deputies Buttimer and Cummins, and I have worked closely with him. It is a draft statement, in which we have tried to introduce a national standard regarding Gaeltacht planning and quotas in Gaeltacht areas.

In some local authorities, there are varying degrees of that quota. It is 80% in some counties and it changes from area to area within counties.

As I said, I will engage with any Deputy, since I do not claim ownership over this, about the Gaeltacht side of the draft planning statement to make it as robust as possible. We want to ensure that it protects the language. I am absolutely with the Deputy and every other Deputy about the notion of multi-unit houses in particular. They should be preserved or prioritised for people who have Irish, but we also have to respect that within Gaeltachtaí, there are people who do not have Irish. They have to be given a housing a right in their own community too.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: To illustrate the idea, if there are ten people in a bar in the Gaeltacht and one is an English speaker, there is a tendency for the other nine to default to English to make sure that the English speaker is not left out of the conversation. One of the big threats in Gaeltacht areas is often high numbers of English speakers. Once it gets past a certain threshold, it significantly changes the language in that local area. It should be a prime objective of the Government to create a strong, vibrant, Irish-speaking area That cannot be done anywhere else

where the language is not a community language because outside the Gaeltacht, the language really only exists in networks, and networks are far poorer in terms of language depth, knowledge, and so on. Údarás na Gaeltachta should be the housing authority for the Gaeltacht, because it is the only organisation that is really knowledgeable about the task and that has the prime objective of it. I know the Minister is shaking his head, but many local authorities simply do not really have a focus on the Irish and Gaeltacht areas.

Deputy Dara Calleary: We published the draft planning statement. We did not pull it out of the sky. I hate using the word "quota". The figures relating to the clause were taken from the census plus 10% in each language planning area. They were based on the number of active Irish speakers. They were not based on nine people not speaking English because of one person. We are open to discussing those thoroughly and constructively. Second, I want people to live in communities that are Irish-speaking where they can raise a family. I want education facilities at primary and secondary level and we are engaging in that. I want all of the elements of a successful community to be put in place.

I also have to be realistic. We have to ensure that we have planning conditions that give Gaeltacht people with Gaeilge the chance to live in their home area and to move to another Gaeltacht. This is the first time there has ever been a draft national planning statement on the Gaeltacht. I am not precious. It is not perfect and I am happy to work with people to improve it over the next number of months.

Rural Schemes

9. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht for an update on his Department's efforts to reverse rural depopulation in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53292/26]

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: Rural depopulation is one of the greatest challenges facing Mayo, with too many young people leaving because they cannot see a future at home. One of the main reasons they are leaving is they cannot afford a place to live. As a Mayo TD and Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, I ask the Minister to provide an update on the plans and efforts the Minister is making to reverse rural depopulation across the county.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Our Rural Future is the policy document that, since 2021, has been delivering vital investment and supports, strengthening local economies and improving quality of life across rural Ireland. Significant achievements include the delivery of the national broadband plan, the development of a national network of over 400 remote working hubs and enhanced public transport services through the connecting Ireland rural mobility programme, which is shared by the Minister of State, Deputy Buttimer, in both Departments. Through the rural regeneration and development fund, the town and village renewal scheme and the outdoor recreation infrastructure scheme, we are investing in rural communities all across the country and indeed across County Mayo.

Recent figures from the CSO show a 5.8% increase in the number of people living in rural areas between 2016 and 2022. In areas classified as highly rural and remote, including many

in Mayo, the increase was 6.4%. However, I am conscious that this growth is inconsistent and that many areas are still losing population. That is why the new draft national planning statement will be important not just for Gaeltacht areas, but for rural areas to bring people back into areas with families and to support schools, post offices, and services.

Under Our Rural Future, we have invested significantly in County Mayo, with €8.8 million under the current LEADER programme, over €39 million in RRDF funding and over €5.8 million under the community centre investment scheme. I was delighted to be in one of our more remote communities recently on Inishturk, where we launched the fibre roll-out of the national broadband plan. Through the town and village renewal scheme, I allocated €1.5 million to six projects.

However, I am aware, as the Deputy is, of those areas. I am committed to working on those areas where the population is leaving. I want to make sure that we get families back in and, through issues like the vacant property grant, we are trying to do that.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: I do not deny those things that the Minister has read out. The problem with it is that there is not a consistent approach. While there are many really good projects that the Minister and I have both visited, and this is not us saying it as a party, let us consider the GAA, for instance. It is a minor miracle that Mayo is in the all-Ireland football final with so many of our young people being in Australia. I know the Minister wants to join me in wishing Mayo the very best of luck on Sunday week. Hopefully, after 75 years, we will have some good news, although it will be fairly difficult to get any focus from my Belmullet constituency office with Brenda O'Donoghue, Ryan's mum, concentrating on the football for the next two weeks. By the way, she will be here tomorrow, so the Minister can congratulate her. That is to one side. There are many issues.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister will respond now and the Deputy can come back in.

Deputy Dara Calleary: All I can say is that if Brenda was in charge of the Mayo team, we would have won many all-Irelands. I absolutely mean that. I wish the team every success. It will be a great week and it would be an amazing achievement.

The Deputy is absolutely right. The Minister of State and I have met the GAA demographics committee and we have discussed this with Deputy McGuinness too. I will incorporate much of its work into the new Our Rural Future programme. The GAA has led in what it has done with the demographics committee. I congratulate Benny Hurl, the chairman of the committee, and our former colleague, Shane Cassells, who has joined that committee, for doing a lot of work on this. I will incorporate some of the ideas. Many of the ideas are captured in the national planning statement such as getting people back, investing in sporting facilities and remote working to give people a chance to return to their home areas. People are going to travel but I want them to come back. I want to give them communities to come back to. Communities have a standard that they are used to travelling to, and if we do not provide that standard of facilities and infrastructure, we will not get them back. I absolutely want to get them back. I want us to win multiple all-Irelands.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: On the planning guidelines, the Minister needs to engage in proper consultation with groups across the country and counties in rural Ireland. I do not believe there has been enough consultation. The Minister knows what we need in Mayo, such as the non-sterilisation of land along the N59, people being able to build on their own sites, consistency in planning. All of those issues need to be addressed. When will people see the impact of that and be able to build homes or live in their own communities? That is an important message.

On transport, the lack of connectivity between the services is just crazy. An awful lot more can be done without even further investment in public transport, even though we always need public investment. The train coming into the station and the bus having left ten minutes beforehand is an issue. This might seem very minor, but I raise the lack of a trolley service on the train to Mayo. The Minister will have seen today that there was a woman, six months pregnant, in 30° heat on a three and three quarter hour journey. It is totally wrong that we cannot even get a trolley on that train.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Hear, hear.

Deputy Dara Calleary: I agree about transport. We are lucky with Sarah and the team in Local Link. Co-ordination is better, which is something that Deputy McGuinness and the Minister of State discussed earlier around bus stops. We have the same problems with bus stops, which has hopefully just been resolved with the National Transport Authority. On the trolley, it is beyond me, in 2026, why we cannot have trolleys on trains. Irish Rail needs to cop on. I got that email this evening. It was a very distressing situation for that passenger.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: Absolutely.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Irish Rail is being ridiculous about trolleys at this stage.

On the N59 and the draft planning guidelines generally, it is the Minister's intention that they will take effect next year. I have asked my party's councillors and I will ask Councillor Murray as well because our councillors are the best planners and experts on planning to look at the guidelines.

That would be a useful exercise for us all to do, for our councillors to examine these guidelines. We will certainly feed that through to our review process. It is important we get them in as quickly as possible.

Departmental Schemes

10. **Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht the criteria used for the designation of SÍOL areas; whether these areas will be expanded in future funding tranches; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53259/26]

Deputy Dara Calleary: Táim féin agus an tAire Stáit, an Teachta Buttimer tar éis sáróbair a chur isteach chun SÍOL a chur ar an mbóthar. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta freisin mar iarArd-Mhéara as a thaithí leis seo. I thank the Deputy for sharing his experience with the

Minister of State, Deputy Buttimer, in relation to urban disadvantage. SÍOL was launched on 8 July. It means "seed" in English. It actually stands for scéim infheistíochta ag obair le chéile, which translates to "working together investment scheme". It aims to target small areas of disadvantage in our towns and cities, providing funding for infrastructure to improve the areas and the lives of the communities. The areas chosen are those with the highest population of extreme disadvantage.

The new programme is focused initially on 15 areas that have been designated as SÍOL. The areas were selected using an evidence base which included the Pobal HP deprivation index, information from the CSO report, Urban and Rural Life in Ireland, and research by the ESRI. We also looked at the areas in Ireland already covered by the CLÁR programme to ensure geographical complementarity.

Capital funding of €31.5 million has been secured by the Minister, Deputy Buttimer, and me up to 2030. We announced an allocation of €5 million for 2026 and I plan to increase that amount over time, with annual funding expected to reach €7 million by 2030. The Department will keep SÍOL under review, with a view to potentially adding additional areas on an annual basis. Any area added will be based on the Pobal HP deprivation index and CSO and ESRI evidence.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: I will segue a little into Deputy Tóibín's contribution in relation to an Ghaeilge. I was reared in Cois Fharraige, Connemara, in the Gaeltacht. The change in attitude towards the Irish language in Cois Fharraige and the Gaeltacht is nothing less than transformational. When I went to school, an Ghaeilge was not cool. That is the bottom line among the younger generations. That is where the idea of nine Irish speakers converting to speaking English with the single English speaker comes from. That is no longer the case in Connemara, as far as I am concerned. It is very hard to pinpoint what happened. I think a combination of TG4, "Ros na Rún", Telegael, Gteic and that type of stuff has made it cool again to speak the Irish language. There is an entire generation, the next generation down, which is supportive of Irish and favourable to it. If the Minister were to walk into Siopa an Phobail in Indreabhán, the nine speakers will convert the other way round. I have a couple of other questions to ask, but I will leave it at that for now.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Aontaím go mór leis an Teachta. Tá sé iontach an spreagadh chun na Gaeilge a fheiceáil. I spent three summers in Baile na hAbhann in Coláiste Uí Chadhain, so I know the Indreabhán area very well. Tá an Teachta fíor. Freisin tá sé bunaithe ar mhúinteoirí. It is based on teaching, our naíonraí and our Gaelscoileanna. That is why we need more Gaelcholáistí. I have a very strong view that we have to continue this journey through the education system. We are forever in this House kicking social media, but TikTok has a lot of stuff on the Gaeltacht. There are some fantastic podcasts, such as "How To Gael". Social media has actually turned out to be a good friend of an Ghaeilge agus an Ghaeltacht. Tá sé sin tábhachtach. Sin an fáth a bhfuil cúrsaí cosúil le Gaeilge365 chomh tábhachtach. Gaeilge365, which has extended from Dublin City Council to all four Dublin local authorities, is innovative. It is using things differently. It is using Gaeilge in a day-to-day fun way. Every local authority can learn from it.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: Tiocfaidh mé ar ais go SÍOL ar feadh nóiméid. I welcome SÍOL. As the Minister has said, síol is the Irish word for seed. It is very positive. It can make a huge difference, if funded properly, to those communities the Minister mentioned in terms of disadvantage. I understand it provides capital and project funding? Can the Minister confirm that? Like any TD, I am interested in areas in my own constituency and there is serious deprivation in parts of Coolock and Darndale. The Minister referred to funding of €5 million for this year. Will it be up to the local authorities to advance initiatives in tandem with the use of Pobal's data? How will that work? Should we be working with our local authorities to advance particular projects or ideas in areas? How can we help to bring those forward?

Deputy Dara Calleary: The Minister of State, Deputy Buttimer, and I were conscious that the scheme was only capital. We wanted to keep it very simple initially and get the projects rolled out. In terms of the current programme, in the 15 areas, there is a closing date of mid-August. It comes from the local authorities. We will make sure we get money quickly to local authorities. A regular complaint from local authorities in relation to our schemes is that it costs them money to implement them. A total of 5% of the budget will go toward each managing local authority to cater for the management of the project locally.

The projects will be small. They could be local health and sports projects and initiatives. I have compared it in some places to CLÁR for these 15 urban areas. They are small, important local capital projects that otherwise would not happen. The projects will be 100% funded, with no local contribution required. It is our intention that, with increased resources, we will keep the scheme open for potential expansion. I know the area the Deputy mentioned. We have good engagement with the Northside Partnership, which does fantastic work and the Minister of State and I respect that work. We look forward to working with the Deputy in relation to that.

Questions Nos. 11 and 12 taken with Written Answers.

Urban Development

13. **Deputy Sinéad Gibney** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht the actions his Department is taking to advance the community development of urban village centres such as Dundrum village; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53309/26]

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: As we see housing developments near many of our village centres, it is imperative that we also undertake projects that facilitate community development for those villages. A civic, cultural and community centre is needed for Dundrum village in my constituency of Rathdown. What is the Department doing to address issues such as this? Will the Department work with local groups such as Imagine Dundrum to see this project delivered?

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: I thank the Deputy for the question. The Minister, Deputy Calleary, and I have developed a range of funding schemes and interventions which advance the development of communities across the country. While many of the Department's schemes are focused on rural areas, others traverse both rural and urban communities. These include the social inclusion and community activation programme, SICAP, the community services

programme, the community centre investment fund, the community recognition fund and the local enhancement programme.

The Department's SICAP programme is the country's primary social inclusion programme. As the Deputy knows, SICAP aims to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion and equality in Ireland through supporting communities and individuals, using community development as its main method of approach. The Southside Partnership implements SICAP in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, which includes Dundrum in its catchment area. The Department has also approved significant capital investment in Dundrum to support the development of community spaces. For example, €99,000 has been allocated to the upgrade of the Patrick Doyle Road playground in Dundrum under the community recognition fund. Also under the community recognition fund, €146,000 has been approved for an upgrade to Balally scout den. Under the community centre investment fund, over €14,000 was allocated for the upgrade of kitchen and toilet facilities at Rosemount Family Resource Centre.

As announced recently, the local enhancement programme for 2026 provided €7 million in capital supports to many small community groups and organisations, particularly those who serve disadvantaged communities in rural and urban areas. The list of successful projects for the 2026 programme was well propagated and includes a number of organisations in the Dundrum area, supporting activities such as the provision of youth services. I will comment further following the Deputy's supplementary question.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: Imagine Dundrum is a brilliant community organisation. It has repeatedly demonstrated the case for this space and the need for such a space is highlighted in the county development plan and local area plan. Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council is supportive of a potential project, but what we need in Dundrum are the resources and structure centrally to make it happen. I appreciate the listing of the funding schemes, but these are not yet getting it over the line, and that is what we need to happen.

Many urban villages are facing the same problem of increased populations but decreased community space and unclear paths to establishing new civic space. We need to see greater security of funding and greater investment in our urban villages, so that every community can have the space it needs to thrive. In Dundrum, there is a local family resource centre and local youth services that help some of my most disadvantaged constituents, all of whom need a home.

Will the Department consider its funding mechanisms, particularly in advance of the budget, so that we can get projects like this over the line?

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: I appreciate that Dundrum, in some cases, is not eligible for funding under some of the criteria for schemes. The Minister and I have had conversations with many Deputies in the House, especially those from west Dublin, parts of Cork South-Central and parts of the Deputy's own constituency. We are very much committed to community development and regeneration. The Deputy will have heard the Minister, Deputy Calleary, speaking a moment ago on the regeneration of urban village centres in reply to another question. It is pivotal to us. Our Department and the Government place a strong emphasis on social inclusion and addressing social disadvantage. We are open to discussion on the mechanisms of support for many different projects. For example, Dundrum is eligible for funding under the urban regeneration and development fund administered by the Department

of housing. Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council has been approved for funding of €4.3 million for the new Dundrum community hub. I understand a preliminary business case has been made.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: It seems everyone who needs to be involved is on board to make this project a reality but available funding is not adequate to make this happen for Dundrum village. The new towns and cities regeneration investment fund as currently constituted will not be able to make this civic centre happen. I am asking that the Minister of State work with me and other representatives on the ground to make this happen and address the gaps in our funding streams that have left this vision unrealised. I understand that communities throughout the country are in need of support and funding to develop and I understand the Minister of State's Department has to balance these needs nationwide, but inaction on this means wasting a golden opportunity to transform an urban village in a way that will affect thousands of residents, which has the backing of the community and the council and which is desperately needed to guarantee the sustainable development of the community.

We are 20 years since Dundrum Village as a shopping centre was established. Although it has been pivotal in providing employment to young people and so on, it has had a detrimental impact on the actual community spirit and the civic centre of the town and village. This has to be addressed and it is a project which we must advance.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: In a previous reply, the Minister, Deputy Calleary, mentioned the new building and community investment funding. It is important to make the point that it is a cross-governmental approach working with the local authority. In terms of civic and community culture and civic hubs, the Minister and I want all local communities to develop. We are ambitious that people can live and flourish in some cases where they are from and are able to regenerate that area. We have allocated significant funding to Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council for a variety of projects, including library development, playgrounds and different vibrant areas of the community. I encourage everyone, including the Deputy, to encourage everyone to collaborate with the local authorities to ensure we can bring many projects over the line but also to ensure that at the core of what we do is dealing with the challenge of social inclusion.

We have a variety of schemes, including the local enhancement programme in recent weeks, which is small projects with small money but which are important transformational projects. I will sit down with the Deputy in the coming weeks to have that conversation. We are ambitious. We recognise the contributions of people in local areas and we want to see them flourish. I will be happy to sit down with the Deputy.

Questions Nos. 14 and 15 taken with Written Answers.

Gaeltacht Policy

16. **Deputy Conor D. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht the role his Department will play in amending and finalising the recently published draft national planning statement for rural and Gaeltacht housing. [53184/26]

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: I put this question in English but tá roinnt de a bhaineann le cúrsaí Gaeltachta. Is féidir an dá theanga a úsáid, má tá an tAire sásta leis sin. It is about the role the Minister's Department will play in amending and finalising the recently published draft national planning statement for rural and Gaeltacht housing. I know this has been discussed several times here this evening and the Minister and I have discussed it as well. This is a document that relates to the core mission of the Minister's Department so I want to know precisely what role his Department will play in those aspects.

Deputy Dara Calleary: I thank the Deputy for his ongoing work on this. It is not back-of-the-envelope stuff. His inputs and those of Deputy Ó Snodaigh are always considered.

As he knows, the primary responsibility lies with the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The draft statement is, in my view, one that strengthens the planning system's support for the Irish language and Gaeltacht areas, making it clearer and more consistent by setting out the language criteria which may be submitted with applications for new single rural dwellings and requiring a proportion of multi-unit developments to be lived in by Irish speakers. Importantly, the policy also recognises that Gaeltacht communities share a specific culture, language and identity. It introduces the idea of inter-Gaeltacht recognition, meaning Irish speakers who live and work in one Gaeltacht can use that experience and time to show they may meet local need requirements in another Gaeltacht.

One of the key benefits will be the introduction of a new policy approach applied consistently across the country, providing more certainty for people wishing to build a new house in a rural area and the avoidance of prescriptive local policies that see different standards applied between neighbouring counties and, indeed, sometimes within a county. Currently, there is no consistent method for local planning authorities when developers are reserving a percentage of the housing development for Irish speakers. This method of using the percentage of speakers outside the education system plus 10%, as proposed, will be based on the current linguistic composition of the area rather than setting a uniform national figure across all Gaeltacht areas.

This is about giving certainty both to people who wish to remain living in or return to their rural communities as well as planners while supporting a vibrant sustainable rural Ireland. There will be discussions with interested parties in the coming weeks. In that context, a meeting is scheduled between my officials and Conradh na Gaeilge later in the month. I look forward to engaging with the Deputy and Deputy Ó Snodaigh in this space and we will engage very directly with the Minister, Deputy Browne, and the Minister of State, Deputy Cummins, on this over the coming months.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: When the document was published last week, we were all taken aback. Commentators, Opposition politicians and campaign groups and people working in the space were disappointed both on the rural housing piece and that of Gaeltacht housing. Not only was it underwhelming and the cúrsaí Gaeltachta deeply disappointing but it looked like something that had been utterly rushed and that had been put together very quickly without a lot of thought. It has taken very little from the consultation, submissions and recommendations of various Oireachtas committees and discussions here in this House. I feel it was a rushed job by the Department of housing - the Minister may disagree; he may not be

at liberty to agree with me publicly – which did not take into account the good work and fair policies the Minister's Department has been promulgating over the past while.

On rural housing, as part of our analysis we spoke to analysts, engineers, architects, planners, merchants, builders and auctioneers and they do not see this would dramatically increase the delivery of housing and they do not think this would lead to a liberalisation of policy. They just do not see that happening. That leaves many communities in the lurch and facing the demographic crises that have been mentioned in this House already this evening.

Deputy Dara Calleary: I reject the Deputy's analysis of the draft plan on the Gaeltacht. We worked very closely with the Department of housing on it to try to get a balance. The important thing is to get a balance in Gaeltacht areas between those with Gaeilge, those who have Irish and use it as a daily language, and new people moving into it, but also those from a Gaeltacht area who do not have Irish, because they equally have a right to stay in their place. Second, I was anxious that we got a balance in terms of not allowing further holiday home development. I want permanent residences for families to grow, live and work through Irish and then drive the demand for Irish schools, Irish education, Irish cultural facilities and so on. I am happy to work with Deputy McGuinness and Deputy Ó Snodaigh in particular and colleagues across the Gaeltacht side of it to address some of the Deputy's feedback, although we will not incorporate it all. There is an environmental streaming process under way. I will share the information involved with that with the Deputy after this session.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: I dtaobh chúrsaí Gaeltachta, ní aontaím leis an Aire in aon chor go bhfuil dearcadh nó aighneachtaí na ndreamanna éagsúla atá ag obair sa spás seo iniata leis an gcaipéis seo. Is léir go ndearna an Roinn agus an bheirt Airí sa Roinn tithíochta neamhaird air sin. Iarrfaidh mé ar an Aire féachaint air seo, gur úsáideadh staitisticí ó dhaonáireamh 2016 sa cháipéis chun an argóint seo a chruthú mar gheall ar líon na gcainteoirí Gaelainne in ionad na staitisticí is déanaí. Molaim don Aire féachaint siar air.

Dá mba rud é go raibh siad ag éisteacht leis an Aire nó lena Roinn, ní dóigh liom go dtarlódh a leithéid de rud. Tá an-chuid fadhbanna. Bhí cruinniú agam in Indreabhán i gConamara oíche aréir. Tá daoine an-fheargach mar gheall air seo. Ní fhéadfainn a rá go bhfuil sé mar gheall ar cúpla sonra a athrú anseo agus ansiúd. Tá daoine feargach mar gheall air seo. An rud a bhí ag eascairt as seo ná nach bhfuil sé chun cabhrú le daoine as na ceantair sin atá ag iarraidh maireachtáil sa Ghaeltacht agus clann a thógáil trí mheán na Gaelainne tithe a thógaint. Ní fheictear go bhfuil sé sin ann. Molaim don Aire comhairliúchán poiblí a dhéanamh - ceann gairid ach an comhairliúchán sin a dhéanamh agus brú a chur ar an Aire tithíochta a leithéid a dhéanamh mar níl sé maith go leor a chluasa a dhúnadh agus gan éisteacht a thabhairt don phobal.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Scrúdaíomar na figiúirí. Tá na coinníollacha nua bunaithe ar census 2022, cé go bhfuil deacrachtaí ansin. Mar a dúradh an oíche a d'fhoilsíomar an dréachtráiteas, táim oscailte go feedback. Nuair atá fearg ann, oibrím leis an bhfearg nuair a thagann rudaí as an bhfearg sin. Táim sásta obair leis an Teachta. Mar a dúirt mé, tá oifigigh as mo Roinn, a chuir an-obair isteach leis na hoifigigh sa Roinn tithíochta, chun cruinniú a bheith acu le Conradh na Gaeilge roimh dheireadh na míosa seo. Bhí siad chun é a dhéanamh an tseachtain seo caite, ach ní raibh an conradh in ann é a dhéanamh. Táim sásta, mar a dúirt mé, suí síos le

haon Teachta a bhfuil suim acu ní hamháin ráiteas a fhoilsiú ach obair air seo. Táim sásta é sin a dhéanamh agus obair leis an Aire, an Teachta Browne. Beimid in ann obair leis an gcoiste agus leis an Teachta Moynihan, agus, tar éis na hoibre sin, leis an Aire, an Teachta Browne. Tá suim agam obair orthu. Sin an tsuim is mó atá agam.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Glacaim leis sin.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Jen Cummins): We move on to Question No. 19, also in the name of Deputy McGuinness.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: Tá na Teachtaí an-ghnóthach.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Tá muid an-ghnóthach, an triúr againn. Leanfaimid ar aghaidh pé scéal é.

Questions Nos. 17 and 18 taken with Written Answers.

Departmental Programmes

19. **Deputy Conor D. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht if he plans to substantially increase funding for the CLÁR programme in light of the recent expansion of the scheme's eligibility. [53185/26]

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: This relates to the CLÁR programme in light of the recent expansion of the scheme's eligibility. I really welcome the expansion of the CLÁR scheme. It is something that I think all of us representing rural areas and, indeed, many councillors from all parties and none have been seeking for a long time. It is something about which, as the Minister probably knows, I have put in several written questions over recent weeks. I am talking here about not just an increase in funding to keep pace with inflation but a substantial increase to take into account of the increased number of areas covered.

Deputy Dara Calleary: I thank the Deputy for his question about CLÁR. As he knows, CLÁR provides funding under a number of different measures for small-scale infrastructural projects in designated rural areas. The programme is investing in community facilities and amenities, including community centres, MUGAs, playgrounds, walking tracks and sensory gardens. The scheme also funds vehicles for community groups providing vital services such as community first responders, meals on wheels groups, and transport for people with reduced mobility. There is also a measure providing targeted supports to our island communities. The Minister of State, Deputy Buttimer, and I launched the 2026 CLÁR programme in March and we expect to announce all successful projects before the end of the year. The 2025 programme for Government made a commitment to carry out a comprehensive review of all eligible CLÁR areas. Following this review, an additional 110 electoral divisions, EDs, have been designated as eligible under CLÁR. This means that there are now over 1,700 CLÁR EDs across the country. For the first time, the total population living in CLÁR-designated areas is over 1 million. The Minister of State, Deputy Buttimer, and I are acutely aware of the importance of this programme to some of our most rural areas. I was delighted to be in a position to bring

more areas into the programme. To prepare the way for this expansion, I secured a €1 million increase in the budget for CLÁR in 2026 to bring the level available to €12 million. Funding for CLÁR has increased from €5 million in 2020 to its current allocation of €12 million. We are reviewing the budget for CLÁR as part of the budget 2027 process. We are engaging with ministerial colleagues across the Department of public expenditure on this. I absolutely share the Deputy's interest in CLÁR. We have prioritised it in terms of a quadrupling of the funding since 2020, and I want to continue to increase that level of funding.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as sin. On the ground, in rural areas, particularly those deprived rural areas, we see the advantage of CLÁR. It is relatively small money. There are small amounts that are provided, but that money goes really far in these areas and it is very much appreciated. It is possibly not transformative but it really helps to keep those communities' heads above the water. We have spoken here about the challenges communities are facing in terms of housing and demographics. The last time the three of us were in this Chamber discussing these matters, we were talking about isolation and loneliness. There are so many challenges. We could talk about rural policing. We could talk about access to public services. There are so many issues facing rural areas, particularly those more isolated and less well-off rural areas, and the CLÁR funding is really valuable. I encourage the Minister to do what he can to make that argument in his budgetary discussions this year.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Absolutely. The Minister of State, Deputy Buttimer, and I are working hard to ensure that CLÁR gets increased funding. As Deputy McGuinness knows, under 2025, Waterford received €572,000 for nine projects under measures 1 and 2. On the Deputy's comments about loneliness, that is why we have the mobility scheme and the transport scheme. It gives local organisations in rural areas that would not have the resources to invest in buses the chance to do that. I was with a group the other day involved with a bus that brings to hospital appointments, to mass and to social events people who otherwise, through illness etc., would be isolated in their homes. Ardmore, Glenwilliam, Lismore rural and Tallow have all been added to the CLÁR programme within the Deputy's county, so I look forward to seeing the applications from Waterford later this year for projects in those areas. Over the course of the summer recess, we hope to be in a position to announce this year's mobility grants, but it is a really important programme. CLÁR used to be a transformative programme. It is transformative in a different way now, but in terms of its capacity for our rural economy I have a vision of getting back to that as well in terms of power etc.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: I wish the Minister luck in those negotiations and discussions ahead of budget 2027. Those of us who represent CLÁR areas and rural areas will be watching. The addition of those townlands - Glenwilliam, Tallow, Lismore and other areas the Minister mentioned - is really welcome and will facilitate groups on the ground there accessing funding. Not every area, unfortunately, can be included in CLÁR funding, but that is something we might revisit and have a discussion about at some stage. I know a threshold or a line has to be drawn somewhere, but I note that in the Comeragh area of County Waterford - the Portlaoise-Kilmacthomas local electoral area - there were no new areas designated for CLÁR funding. That could be a blessing in disguise in some ways because the metric is not there to qualify but, on the other hand, it means that those community groups that are facing

some of the same challenges do not qualify. It is something that maybe we can come back to and have a look at some time in the future and maybe keep that expansion going, maybe not year on year but over time, in order that more and more areas would begin to qualify.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Absolutely. I am very much open to that. Along with the Ministers of State, Deputies Butler and Cummins, I had the pleasure of visiting the area mentioned by the Deputy back in June. I know that the Comeragh area has a super weekend in the Comeraghs Wild Festival. We were able, through ORIS, to make investments in the forests there. The project in Lismore is one of the best LEADER projects I have seen. I refer to what has happened at the back of the bank there, in terms of the glamping pods, and the plan for the bank. There are other alternatives apart from CLÁR. The community groups in the area the Deputy has mentioned are some of the best in the country. I put on record my appreciation to all the community groups across Waterford - we had a super day of engagements - and to Waterford County and City Council, which is kind of the scaffolding around this, and to Waterford LEADER. There are a lot of really good groups there, including a lot of fantastic community groups. The Deputy is lucky to be in a county where volunteers are willing to stand up and take the leadership and the initiative that we saw right across the county that day. A lot of counties could look to Waterford and learn from that work but also the fact that it is all community-led and community-driven.

Questions Nos. 20 to 23, inclusive, taken with Written Answers.

Údarás na Gaeltachta

24. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht cén dáta faoina bhfuil sé i gceist aige toghcháin a eagrú do bhord Údarás na Gaeltachta [53302/26]

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Beidh an Aire agus an Aire Stáit bréan dom ag an tráth seo.

Baineann an cheist seo le toghchán do bhord Údarás na Gaeltachta. Mar is eol don Aire, bhí an-chuid plé againn sa Seomra Dála seo mar gheall ar Bhille Údarás na Gaeltachta agus na toghcháin. Cé nach rabhamar ag aontú lena chéile ró-mhinic, glacaim anois go bhfuil an Bille rite agus go mbeidh toghcháin ag Údarás na Gaeltachta. Cad é an plean? Cathain a mbeidh siad? An féidir aon léargas a thabhairt ar cén cur chuige a bheadh i gceist?

Deputy Dara Calleary: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta. Shínigh an tUachtarán Connolly an tAcht um Údarás na Gaeltachta (Leasú), 2026, ina dhlí ar an 1 Iúil 2026. Is é príomhchuspóir an Achta an próiseas ainmniúcháin agus roghnúcháin reatha a rialaíonn ceapachán bhord Údarás na Gaeltachta faoi Acht na Gaeltachta, 2012 a athrú agus próiseas toghcháin agus roghnúcháin nua a chur ina áit. Leis an leasú seo, comhlíonadh gealltanais a tugadh i gclár an Rialtais toghcháin do bhord Údarás na Gaeltachta a athbhunú.

Nuair a chuirtear na hailt ábhartha den reachtaíocht leasaithe i bhfeidhm, beidh deichniúr comhalta tofa agus seisear comhalta arna n-ainmniú ag an Aire ar bhord an údaráis. Beidh ionadaíocht ag gach ceantar Gaeltachta ar an mbord, agus ní bheidh uainíocht comhaltaí do cheantair bheaga Ghaeltachta i bhfeidhm a thuilleadh. Chun nasc níos láidre a chinntiú idir an

pobal agus obair an bhoird, foráiltear leis an Acht freisin go mbunóidh an t-údarás trí choiste réigiúnacha reachtúla atá cosúil leo siúd a bhí i bhfeidhm roimh 2012, ach a mbeidh sainchúram beagán difriúil orthu. Beidh comhaltaí ainmnithe ag údaráis áitiúla ar na coistí réigiúnacha seo agus ní mór do gach ball den údarás agus dá choistí réigiúnacha a bheith in ann leibhéal inniúlachta sa Ghaeilge a léiriú atá riachtanach chun a gcuid feidhmeanna a chomhlíonadh.

Chun críche na dtoghchán do bhord Údarás na Gaeltachta, bhí gá roinnt leasuithe teicniúla a dhéanamh ar Acht Toghcháin, 1992; an Acht Toghcháin, 1997; an Acht um Thruailliú ó Bhruscar, 1997; agus an Acht um Chosaint Sonraí, 2018. Foráiltear leis na leasuithe seo go gcuirfí tagairtí do thoghcháin Údarás na Gaeltachta san áireamh sna hachtanna seo. Coimeádfar ceist na dtoghchán faoi bhreith leanúnach agus déanfar cinneadh maidir leis an bhfráma ama dóibh in am trátha.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Tuigim go bhfuil leasuithe le déanamh ar na hAchtanna sin a luaigh sé, is iad sin an Acht Toghcháin, 1992; an Acht Toghcháin, 1997; agus na hAchtanna eile maidir le bruscair, truailliú agus cosaint sonraí. An bhfuil amlíne i gceist i gcomhair na leasuithe nó an bhfuil sé sin le baint amach i mbliana? An bhfuil buile faoi thuairim ann i dtaobh amlíne do na toghcháin? An bhfuil muid ag caint ar iad a bheith ar siúl roimh dheireadh na bliana seo nó i samhradh na bliana seo chugainn? An mbeidh sé faoin Roinn tithíochta na toghcháin sin a rith nó an mbeidh siad á rith i Roinn an Aire féin?

Deputy Dara Calleary: Níl mórán ama tugtha do na céad céimeanna eile. Bhí muid dírithe ar an mBille a chur tríd an Oireachtas. Táimid chun é sin a scrúdú anois. Le haghaidh gach toghchán, tá cúram na dtoghchán faoi chúraim na Roinne Tithíochta, Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreacht. Beidh na leasuithe le plé le hoifigigh na Roine sin leis na rudaí eile agus beidh na sonraí eile le haghaidh na dtoghchán á bplé ag leibhéal an Rialtais. Beidh mé ag cur an próiseas do na coistí réigiúnacha ar siúl chomh luath agus is féidir mar tá siad tábhachtach le haghaidh an údaráis taobh amuigh de na toghcháin. Tá sé tábhachtach go mbeidh siad ag obair agus go mbeidh na daoine bunaithe ar na coistí sin. Beidh mé sásta teacht ar ais chuig an Teachta tar éis bhriseadh an tsamhraidh chun sonraí eile a phlé faoin gcéad próiseas eile agus na céimeanna eile sa Bhille seo. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Uachtarán as an reachtaíocht a shíniú agus gabhaim buíochas léi freisin as an obair a chur sí isteach sa Bhille nuair a bhí sí sa Teach seo.

Deputy Conor D. McGuinness: Nach suimiúil é sin mar fhíric go raibh baint ag an Uachtarán sa Bhille seo. Níor glacadh leis na leasuithe faraor ach chuir sí leasuithe isteach ar thaobh amháin agus shínigh sí an Bille ag an deireadh. Impím ar an Aire gan tuilleadh moille a chur leis an bpróiseas seo, agus pé rud gur féidir a dhéanamh chun tacú leis na toghcháin seo a dhéanamh. Tá muintir na Gaeltachta agus na pobail Ghaeltachta ag fanacht le fada an lá i gcomhair na toghcháin seo teacht thar n-ais. Mar a dúramar ar an dtaobh seo den Teach le linn na ndíospóireachtaí ar Bhille Údarás na Gaeltachta, tá géarghá le tuilleadh daonlathais istigh san údarás. Cé nach bhfuil an Bille, inár dtuairim, foirfe i dtaobh an méid daonlathais - bhíomar ag súil le níos mó - táimid ag iarraidh an Acht mar atá sé a bhaint amach chomh tapa agus is féidir ionas gur féidir leis na pobail seilbh a ghlacadh arís ar threoir Údarás na Gaeltachta.

Is féidir teacht ar Cheisteanna Scríofa ar www.oireachtas.ie.

Written Answers are published on the Oireachtas website.

Ábhair Shaincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Matters

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Jen Cummins): 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 Sinéad Gibney - to discuss the closure of Carlow College.

Deputy John Connolly - to discuss the provision of appropriate public housing for families that provide foster care.

Deputy Michael Cahill - to discuss delays in payments to subcontractors to Uisce Éireann.

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

Deputy Tom Brabazon - to discuss the proposed new Garda station at Northern Cross.

Deputy Barry Ward - to discuss removing the means test for carer's allowance.

Deputy Séamus McGrath - to discuss the State acquiring the Bessborough site in Cork city to provide a memorial.

Deputy Jen Cummins - to discuss the future of James Weir nurses' home, Cork Street, Dublin 8.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh - to discuss wind farms in County Mayo.

Deputy Rory Hearne - to discuss the cessation of the financial contribution scheme in Dublin North-West.

Deputy Mark Wall - to discuss the provision of youth services in Newbridge, County Kildare.

Deputy Pa Daly - to discuss measures to prevent the spread of harmful content on social media platforms.

Deputy Colm Burke - to discuss use of lands in Glanmire, Cork, leased to the FAI by Cork County Council.

Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan - to discuss a potential State purchase of the Bessborough site in Blackrock, Cork city.

Deputy Louis O'Hara - to discuss the need for a 24-hour rapid response vehicle at Tuam ambulance base.

Deputies Paul Murphy, Aengus Ó Snodaigh, John Lahart, Seán Crowe and Ciarán Ahern - to discuss the feasibility of continuing MetroLink from the city to south-west Dublin.

Deputy Thomas Gould - to discuss the bus service in Cork city.

Deputy Darren O'Rourke - to discuss the Government response to the rejection of the workforce development plan proposals by SNAs.

The matters raised by Deputies Sinéad Gibney, Jen Cummins, Rose Conway-Walsh, Michael Cahill and Colm Burke have been selected for discussion.

Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate

Third Level Staff

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: In recent months the staff of Carlow College have faced the sudden loss of their jobs as the college is closed and acquired by South East Technological University. The workers were led to believe that the future arrangements and merger involving SETU would involve the transfer of employment. It now appears that this is no longer the case, and this has caused huge uncertainty for all involved. We have heard from the Department that there was consultation and engagement on the closing of Carlow College and the transfer of its assets to SETU, instead of a merger, which was what the staff and students of the college were led to believe was happening. Staff did not find out that their jobs were gone and this continuity not guaranteed until the announcement in May. This has caused enormous distress among staff, many of whom have devoted decades of service to Carlow College and who have spoken to my colleague, Senator Stephenson, who has done a huge amount of work on this. A protest was held last weekend by staff and students of the college who are feeling incredibly let down and distressed by this change of circumstances. They need transparency, accountability and honesty from every party involved - the Department of further and higher education, Carlow College and South East Technological University. Vague platitudes of informal arrangements or opportunities for continued employment do not reassure these workers who now have zero security. It is my understanding that the Department for higher education has decided that the transfer of undertakings regulations do not apply in this situation. This is disputed, particularly as this is not the simple sale of a campus but the merging of one educational institution with another.

It is clear to me that this situation has been poorly handled by all involved and it is the staff and students who now face the consequences of this. The needs and asks of the staff and students are clear. First, they want the Department to oversee a working group involving the Department, SETU, Carlow College and staff representatives, including trade unions. This would be to examine the options that could preserve employment for them. They are also asking for the Government to guarantee enhanced redundancy protections through the ring-fencing of five weeks' redundancy arrangements for affected employees. I am keen to hear an outline from the Minister of State's Department on what it will do to ensure that pathways to staff redeployment or transfer into SETU can still be facilitated and that proposed redundancy packages are adequate and fair, especially in light of the decades of service many of these staff members have given to Carlow College.

10 o'clock

As employment spokesperson for my party, I have to say that again and again we are coming across issues where workers are having to face uncertainty in a framework that does not protect

workers' rights strongly enough. It is that simple. They have to ask - there is no expectation that they have certain rights within this situation - that those minimal redundancy offers are going to be met and their representative bodies will be recognised. Instead we have a voluntarist system, which I believe does not protect workers adequately, particularly in situations like this.

I will also point out that we do not want to see any differential treatment between staff, for example, in one of the more established universities versus staff in this kind of a university. Carlow College serves many of the disadvantaged communities within the area. It provides crucial educational opportunities to people in these communities. We want to make sure that they get the same treatment and the same recognition for their many years of service as any other third level employee.

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Marian Harkin): I thank the Deputy for raising this very important issue. At the outset, it is important to note that Carlow College, St. Patrick's is and always has been an independent private institution operating outside the State-funded higher education sector. Decisions regarding its strategic direction and governance rest entirely with its own governing body and neither the Minister, Deputy James Lawless, nor I have a role in the appointment of its members. Additionally, as a private institution, Carlow College does not fall under the remit of the Higher Education Authority, whose remit extends to publicly funded higher education bodies. Matters such as staffing, pay and other operational costs are therefore the responsibility of the college itself as an independent employer.

Despite its private status, Carlow College has benefited from substantial State support in recent years, including more than €3.1 million in student fee grant assistance, alongside an additional €750,000 annually since 2022. While this support helped address immediate financial challenges, an independent review completed in 2024 found that the college's financial position was not sustainable in the longer term. The intervention recently announced is a necessary response to the imminent risk of a disorderly collapse, which would have had serious implications for students, staff, the wider community and the future of higher education provision in Carlow.

The priority of the Minister, and my priority, was to see a solution identified that protected learners, treated staff fairly in difficult circumstances and safeguarded the future educational use of the campus. With this in mind, SETU agreed in 2025 to engage with Carlow College, with support from my Department. This process involved extensive analysis and due diligence and ultimately resulted in a detailed report being provided to both institutions in early 2026.

Throughout this engagement, conducted bilaterally between the two institutions, the Department did not prescribe any particular outcome. However, financial considerations were inevitably a key factor, and both governing bodies were required to assess the risks associated with the options available to them. An independent valuation of the college was also carried out in order to establish the level of financial support that could be provided by the State. Throughout these discussions, the interests of staff and students remained the central consideration.

Working together, the two institutions agreed an approach designed to protect current learners while also strengthening higher education provision across the region. The model

approved by both institutions, and supported by the Department, is a teach-out arrangement that will continue until 2028. This framework provides a clear basis for protecting students, avoiding a sudden closure that could have led to immediate job losses, and ensuring that the campus continues to serve as an important educational resource for Carlow and the south east.

During the teach-out period, Carlow College will continue to deliver its academic programmes and will retain full responsibility for its staffing matters and academic governance. At the same time, SETU must operate within sustainable financial parameters and determine staffing needs based on its current and future activities. The planned transfer of the college's lands and buildings to SETU will generate significant State funding for Carlow College, providing essential support for the restructuring process, including measures related to staff.

We fully acknowledge the distress and uncertainty experienced by staff, as the Deputy has outlined. The Minister, Deputy Lawless, has heard these concerns directly during meetings with staff representatives and SIPTU, and we understand that constructive engagement between management, staff and trade unions is continuing.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I finished my last contribution by pointing out that there should not be any hierarchy within our educational offerings in this country. I appreciate that it is not State funded, but that does not make it any less of an experience for those students who are studying there and for those teachers who, as I said multiple times, have offered decades of service to teaching in their region and community. I would have thought it all the more reason in this instance, when it is a private college where the staff do not necessarily have the same level of workers' protections as they might enjoy in the public sector, for the Department to step in. What we are looking for once again is security for staff. The staff are asking the Government to guarantee enhanced redundancy protections through the ring-fencing of five weeks redundancy arrangements for affected employees.

The Department should lead immediately to establish and oversee a formal working group involving SETU, Carlow College, staff representatives and SIPTU to examine opportunities for redeployment and integration into SETU and other alternatives that minimise compulsory redundancies. If Ministers genuinely believe in stakeholder engagement, now is the time to demonstrate it. The Minister of State mentioned multiple times that the students and staff of Carlow College have been at the forefront of her thinking and that of the Minister's, Deputy Lawless. Unfortunately, that is not the message we are getting. What we are hearing is that they were not informed until late in the process that this was not a merger but in fact a selling off of assets. They were led to believe that transfer of employment would be available to them, and that there would be pathways by which they would be able to access new teaching roles in SETU after the merger. Instead, they have been faced with a very different reality in the last number of weeks. That is what we are asking for - that the Minister will engage and step in, regardless of the college's private status.

Deputy Marian Harkin: If Deputy Gibney is fair at all, she will accept that a great deal of engagement has already taken place between the Minister, Deputy Lawless, the different institutions, the trade unions and the workers. The Deputy spoke about students there. Every current learner at Carlow College will be able to complete their studies and graduate as planned without disruption or disadvantage. Those are the facts.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: That is not what is coming through.

Deputy Marian Harkin: I am stating that here in the House tonight on the record. I want it to be true and it needs to be true. I think both of us agree that should be the situation. Commitment, continuity and fairness have guided every step of this process. We have every confidence that formal discussions commenced by Carlow College with their staff and staff representatives will be carried out in a transparent and forthright manner.

It is not in my response here, but I did hear what Deputy Gibney spoke about in regard to the transfer of undertakings. That is something I am quite familiar with myself. I will check that out for her. I will ask about that because it is an important point and an important issue, but there is not any information about it here. To be fair, a lot of work has gone into this to try to ensure that staff and students are protected. The Minister, Deputy Lawless, has worked very hard on this. A master plan for the campus will be published in the coming months, and subject to consideration by SETU in consultation with the Department and relevant stakeholders.

I do understand the Deputy's real concern on this issue and the people, students and lecturers in Carlow College. I will come back to her with any information I can glean on the transfer of undertakings. To be fair, real consultation and engagement have taken place on this issue.

Vacant Properties

Deputy Jen Cummins: I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak about James Weir nurses home on Cork Street in Dublin 8, only a stone's throw from where I live. This building was built in 1903. It was originally built by James Weir, a Scottish-born merchant and philanthropist. It was built for nurses working nearby in the fever hospital, which was also called the house of recovery. It accommodated up to 50 nurses, who were able to stay there. Only around the corner, about 20 years later, the first tenant purchase scheme was built by the State in 1922 in The Tinters.

This part of the city is very historic and a lot of tourists come to see things in Dublin 8 but Dublin 8 has a real challenge when it comes to providing community spaces and permanent homes for the people who live there all the time, and not transient accommodation for students who pay a huge amount in private student accommodation or, indeed, hotels. There is a campaign called No More Hotels because what we need Dublin 8 are homes for people who live there all the time. We also need community spaces.

What I would like to discuss this evening really is the fact that the Weir Home is now owned by the HSE, which has decided it will not be able to do anything with it and so it wants to give it to Dublin City Council but the council does not want it. No one wants it because it has been vacant for so long and it has been left to go into a state of disrepair and it will cost a lot of money. Originally, from 1903 to the 1970s, it was used for nurses' accommodation. From the 1980s onwards, it was used by the HSE as an overflow for mental health facilities linked to St. Brendan's Hospital. In 2021, the remaining residents were relocated from the area. It has been vacant since then.

It is a very beautiful building. Beside it is a very precious Quaker burial site. In Dublin 8 when we celebrate culture, this is one of the buildings that should be celebrated. It is one of

the buildings that could bring a huge amount of joy and peace to people living in the city centre. Campaigners are looking to see whether it can be used for housing. I know negotiations went on with the Peter McVerry Trust but it does not seem to have been possible. The Solas Project, which works with young people, has also been in negotiations to have the site transferred to it. It supports many young people throughout Dublin 8 and beyond but I am speaking about Dublin 8 right now. It does not have a permanent premises. This is a huge disadvantage for it. If we want to tackle issues that challenge young people and their ability to thrive, having a proper fully decked-out space for them would be fantastic.

We are in a housing crisis and we do not have enough homes. This is a ready-made home. Why are we not using it for healthcare workers? There is St. James's Hospital, the Coombe hospital is just down the road from it, around the corner is James's Street and we will have the new children's hospital. There are plenty of places and if we were going to house healthcare workers, this would be a fantastic location for them. There is a housing crisis and people cannot afford to live in the city. They are choosing not to live in the city and we see this in the education system.

I really hope something can be done from a central government funding perspective so the HSE can hand this over to whoever will use it but with an injection of funding to be able to resource it so it is successful.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kieran O'Donnell): I thank the Deputy for the opportunity to update the House on the position of the James Weir nurses home on Cork Street in Dublin 8. I am taking this Topical Issue on behalf of the Minister for Health, Deputy Carroll MacNeill.

The Health Service Executive is responsible for the management of the public healthcare property estate. The HSE has a significant property portfolio extending to *circa* 4,300 buildings across *circa* 2,300 locations throughout the country. The health estate is varied and complex and the HSE actively manages its evolving property portfolio. Decisions in respect of vacant properties are informed by HSE service management and based on an understanding of current or future healthcare service needs in the relevant area. A building may be vacated by one service with a view to refurbishment for an alternative use or a property may be maintained for future service expansion at a specific location for demographic or service requirements.

Following extensive review, the property known as the James Weir nurses home, or Weir Home, on Cork Street in Dublin 8 was identified by the HSE a number of years ago as surplus to its requirements and it was decided to dispose of the property. The disposal of Weir Home is being carried out in line with statutory obligations, including the Land Development Agency Act 2021, Department of public expenditure Circular 11/2015, the protocols for the transfer and sharing of State property assets and Department of public expenditure Circular 17/2016 on the policy for property transactions by State bodies. The Department of public expenditure circulars require all State bodies to update the State Property Register with details of all properties that are surplus to their requirements and available for occupation or disposal.

The HSE offered this property to all State stakeholders through the property mapping register viewer site of the Office of Public Works. The HSE engaged with all expressions of interest from State bodies in relation to the property. However, after this engagement process,

no other State body chose to acquire Weir Home from the HSE. While one State stakeholder expressed interest, this transaction did not proceed.

The HSE will now progress to disposal of this property on the open market in line with Department of public expenditure circulars and the HSE's property protocol. The HSE continues to engage with the Department of Health, the Department of housing, the Land Development Agency, local authorities, the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration and the Department of An Taoiseach in relation to its surplus assets as part of an all-of-government approach to increasing housing stock. I note the comments Deputy Cummins made earlier and I have no doubt she will develop them a bit more in her response.

Deputy Jen Cummins: I appreciate that the HSE has gone through all of the steps it needs to. The challenge is that the country has a problem with housing. If we are giving away State-owned buildings and State-owned land - not giving it away but selling it on the open market - where are we going to start to develop things? There is fear in my constituency. The building should really be protected as an historic building and it should also be used either for healthcare accommodation needs or affordable housing in a housing crisis.

Why do we need to keep giving away and selling really valuable assets? This does not happen in other countries. That building is so beautiful. What will happen to it when it is sold on the open market? Will it become more really expensive apartments, which Dublin 8 is already littered with, or co-living or student accommodation? We have enough of these and we do not need any more of them. We need proper housing. We need young people to have a youth service in there or workers giving essential care to people not only in Dublin 8 but throughout the city and country who come from all over the place to James's Street, the Coombe and the new children's hospital.

Here we are again. This has been going on for a really long time, whereby we have beautiful buildings that no other State agency wants to take on. The HSE has to be called out for letting it go into such disrepair that now it will cost so much to bring it back up. That happened with the hospital on Baggot Street also. There have to be better fines for this. We should be fining the HSE for how it allowed the building to fall into disrepair since it got it. We should not celebrate the fact it will now make money by selling it on the private market and who knows what will happen. I am cross on behalf of my constituents because here we go again in Dublin 8. We will have more student accommodation, more hotels and more really expensive apartments.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: As I said earlier, following extensive review the property known as Weir Home on Cork Street in Dublin 8 was identified by the HSE a number of years ago as surplus to its requirements and it was decided to dispose of the property.

Disposal of Weir Home is being carried out in line with the statutory obligations, including the Land Development Agency Act 2021 and the relevant circulars from the Department of public expenditure.

The HSE engaged with all expressions of interest from State bodies in relation to the property. However, no other State body chose to acquire Weir Home from the HSE. While interest was expressed by one State stakeholder, as I said earlier, this transaction did not

proceed. The HSE will now progress to dispose of the property on the open market in line with the circulars from the Department of public expenditure and the HSE property protocol. The point the Deputy raised will be brought to the attention of the HSE and I have no doubt she will follow up directly with the HSE herself on this particular matter.

Wind Energy Guidelines

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: I requested that this issue of renewable energy be discussed tonight because I am dumbfounded that we are now finishing another year without having the national guidelines for wind turbines. There are no national guidelines. I just cannot believe that we are in the last week of this session and we still do not have them. It is absolutely outrageous that we are developing onshore wind energy with planning guidelines that are 20 years old. It is crazy. How are we supposed to be taken seriously in respect of climate change and what we need to do in that area? Communities surrounding proposed wind turbine developments in County Mayo deserve better. These communities are crying out for national guidelines that will force the developers of these wind energy facilities to adhere to guidelines. In the absence of such guidelines, however, it is like a free-for-all. These communities deserve respect and proper, meaningful consultation.

The saturation of Mayo with onshore wind farms without any guidelines is a growing concern. The Tirawley wind farm, at Lacken along the Céide coast, disregards 6,000 years of cultural heritage, never mind the effects on the ecology and biodiversity in a special area of conservation. We recently launched a hugely ambitious tourism plan. The proposal for Geesala, Mount Jubilee and Srah communities, alongside the proposal in Rinmore, will disrupt an area with some of Ireland's rarest species. The proposed site sits on healthy, functioning blanket bog, which is a priority EU habitat and a major natural carbon sink. The project involves draining substantial peatland areas. As the Minister of State knows, Erris's economy is heavily dependent on tourism, relying on unspoiled landscapes along the Wild Atlantic Way. According to the Erris Chamber of Commerce, the erection of 180 m high turbines will cause significant visual blight, undermine the region's tourism appeal and threaten local businesses and livelihoods. The proposed development in Mayo Abbey again undermines an area of high cultural amenity. The proposed site is also prone to flooding. Why develop a wind farm in an area that is prone to flooding?

I am giving these areas as examples, not because I am against the development of renewable energy but because it has to be done in the right way and in the right place. It is being done in the wrong way and in areas too close to houses and that have all the issues I mentioned. There are depopulated remote areas that lend themselves to the establishment of wind energy projects. The families living close to massive wind turbines struggle, and too often fail, to get planning permission, even to build modest homes for their sons and daughters to return. Yet, they are supposed to accept the development of these wind farms using guidelines that are 20 years old and not fit for purpose.

Where are the plans to develop offshore wind? We have a huge expanse along the west coast but there is nothing for the west coast in the proposed development of offshore wind energy. I am concerned because these communities are growing angrier and angrier, and they feel disrespected because there is no proper consultation. Asking somebody to come along to a hall at a particular time, and telling them they can bring three people with them, is wrong and

disrespectful to communities. There is a right way of doing this, which I will tell the Minister of State about in my next contribution.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I thank Deputy Conway-Walsh for raising this important issue, which I am taking on behalf of the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Deputy James Browne.

As the Deputy will be aware, the programme for Government reaffirms Ireland's commitment to 80% of electricity demand being met in the near term and there are plans to move to net zero by 2050. The deployment of renewable electricity, including wind energy, is vital to Ireland meeting its ambitious domestic targets and international commitments.

The commencement of Chapters 1 to 4, inclusive, of Part 3 of the Planning and Development Act 2024 provides the statutory basis for the national planning framework and regional spatial and economic strategies and introduces provisions for what are known as national planning statements. These national planning statements have been introduced to replace ministerial guidelines issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000. All existing section 28 guidelines will, over time, be revoked and replaced with new national planning statements. Any current section 28 guidelines will, however, remain in force until revoked or replaced by a corresponding national planning statement. Subsequently, this means new guidance on wind energy development will issue as a national planning statement following review of the existing 2006 wind energy development guidelines.

While this has been ongoing for some time, progress has been made towards concluding the review process. In light of the evolving policy and legislative framework, there is a need to ensure the national planning statement will be fit for purpose, while having appropriate regard to the impacts of wind energy development.

In respect of sectoral national planning statements in particular, such as onshore wind energy development, there is also an important role for the relevant policy Department collaborating with my Department on the development of these national planning statements. In that context, my Department is working closely with the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment as the Department with responsibility for this area of Government policy in order to identify the factors relevant to the preparation of the national planning statement. It will address key matters, including noise, setback distance, shadow flicker, community obligation, community dividend and grid connection.

The Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment, in the context of its environmental noise, climate and renewable energy policies remit, has been working to advance guidance on the noise aspect of the national planning statement, which is highly technical in nature. With regard to the impact of development on communities, the upcoming national planning statement will aim to strike an appropriate balance between addressing the concerns of local communities by ensuring there is greater and earlier community engagement by wind energy developers, while maintaining Ireland's ability to deliver on its binding climate and renewable energy obligations.

Public participation is the key element of substantive decision-making processes under the Planning and Development Act 2024. It is open to members of the public to make an observation or submission on the draft development plan to the local authority. Any member

of the public may make an observation or submission on a planning application, including in relation to wind energy developments. Planning authorities are statutorily obliged to consider such submissions before making a decision on the application. Further to this, the draft national planning statement on wind energy will be subject to strategic environmental assessment and a public consultation will be held as part of the process, whereby individual stakeholders, including community groups, will have an opportunity to make observations on the draft national planning statement.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: I thank the Minister of State. That response makes more promises but there is nothing for the here and now and what people are experiencing right now. The damage caused by the Government's regulatory vacuum is leading to a deteriorating situation in local areas. That is a fact. It is also a risk to Ireland's energy security. Meanwhile, households live in fear of their ever-increasing, and already huge, electricity bills.

We want to do renewable energy in a very different way. Rather than excessive commodification of energy for profit, we would treat it as a public good and translate that into national wealth, increased community ownership, proper consultation and fair and democratic decision-making. There is a right way to do all of this. I fear that the vacuum left by the Government is doing damage to these rural areas.

Have we learned nothing from the Corrib gas project, the lack of consultation there and how that started off? I ask the Minister of State to ask the Minister to publish the guidelines as quickly as possible. I want to see offshore wind being developed along the west coast as well.

We cannot just keep accepting excuse after excuse. There is huge wealth to be gained for the community along the western seaboard if this is done properly. We are supposed to be in the Atlantic economic corridor. That has to mean more than just a phrase. The opportunities there for offshore wind energy generation would alleviate all of this, help us to meet our targets and do what we need to do in the first place. It is one of the Government's greatest failures not to have these guidelines in place and to leave this vacuum. It is hugely disrespectful to the communities I mentioned and other communities across Mayo and across the western seaboard.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Progress has been made in this regard. The Department is working towards the publication of a wind energy national planning statement as a matter of priority. The programme for Government commits to prioritising publication and review of the guidelines, which will form a national planning statement. The Department is working towards meeting this commitment to finalise a national planning statement having regard to evolving policy, public consultations and technical contexts while having appropriate regard to the impact of wind energy developments. It is imperative that a robust up-to-date policy is provided that will take account of the evolved policy and legislative context of the technological progress of recent decades, the need for Ireland to meet its ambitious targets of 9 GW of onshore wind energy capacity and the informed decisions of stakeholders and the public.

The Minister is satisfied that in the short to medium term the existing evolving planning system alongside the 2006 guidelines supported by Government policy more generally provide a sufficiently robust policy and legislative framework to facilitate the role of renewable energy development in a sustainable manner and to assist with meeting our renewable electricity

requirements while balancing the perspectives of the local community and public and stakeholder engagement. The 2006 wind energy development guidelines remain in force pending the finalisation of the review.

Water Services

Deputy Michael Cahill: I call on the Minister for housing and local government to intervene in a most urgent matter in County Kerry where subcontractors to Uisce Éireann are being left to wait for two, three or four months without being paid for work that has been carried out. This is not acceptable. These delayed payments mean subcontractors are unable to pay wages or for diesel due to cash flow problems. This is happening right across my county in Tralee, Dingle, Killarney, east Kerry, Killorglin and Kenmare. In every corner of Kerry, this is happening as we speak. It is disgraceful carry-on by Uisce Éireann. It is not acceptable. Will the Minister of State request the Minister for housing to intervene to ensure contractors are paid within a reasonable timeframe especially after submitting their invoices? They should be paid within two weeks at the most. This is inexcusable. It must be addressed immediately. Contractors and subcontractors to Uisce Éireann are experiencing unacceptable delays. There are huge issues with issuing purchase orders, POs - orders are issued weekly and often contractors wait two months to get PO.

Another big issue is when invoices are submitted to payables, it seems it is a central invoicing email address dealing with this and they are not uploaded to the system for processing, causing further delays. These are all internal Uisce Éireann issues. When invoices are not processed, the spin-off effect is delayed payment. Local engineers have informed me that this is all removed from them, it is centralised and they have no contact details for anyone to help as payments are not received. On contacting payables by email, contractors are told invoices were not processed or picked up from the previous Monday and there is no payment on the Friday. Furthermore, there is no payment run at the end of the month, which means contractors are waiting another couple of weeks which has been the case. I am aware of one contractor who was informed today that he will eventually be paid on 17 July for works carried out last March. This is not good enough and has to be addressed. These people cannot continue in business this way.

I plead with the Minister of State to ask the Minister for housing and local government to simplify the whole process. What is happening needs to be addressed. It is bordering on criminal. Will the Minister of State please request that Uisce Éireann addresses this incompetence in its payment systems and work with contractors to address these issues? Payments were always slow but have gotten so delayed that subcontractors are unable to pay wages or pay for fuel, etc., due to cash flow problems caused solely by Uisce Éireann. In regard to these delayed payments, there is a way of addressing the issue. It is in everyone's interests to address this matter as soon as possible.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I thank the Deputy for raising this important issue, which I am taking on behalf of the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

The operation of the public wastewater treatment systems together with operational issues locally are matters for Uisce Éireann which has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water

services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local level. Contracts and payments are matters for Uisce Éireann and I have no function.

However, the Minister has made inquiries with Uisce Éireann on the Deputy's behalf and has been informed that Uisce Éireann has contracts in place with its contractors for all works and services provided. These contracts set out the applicable payment terms and processes to be followed. Where a contractor raises a concern regarding payment, Uisce Éireann will engage directly with the contractor to understand the circumstances and to address the matter in accordance with the relevant contractual arrangements. Responsibility for the payment of subcontractors rests with the principal contractor in line with the terms and conditions of the relevant contract.

Where there are delays with some payments, there can be a number of reasons. Where such matters arise, Uisce Éireann endeavours to resolve them as quickly as possible once identified. Uisce Éireann is aware of isolated challenges in the timeliness of purchase requisitions and purchase order receipting. These issues have been escalated and are being dealt with as a priority.

It should also be noted that the Commission for the Regulation of Utilities, CRU, was assigned water regulatory functions under section 27 of the Water Services Act 2013. In performing its functions under the Act, CRU has regard to the need to ensure that customers of Uisce Éireann are provided with the quality of service provided for in its code of practice, water services are provided by Uisce Éireann in an economical and efficient manner, Uisce Éireann operates in a commercially viable manner, Uisce Éireann can meet all reasonable demands for water both current and foreseeable; Uisce Éireann performs its functions in a manner that will enable the achievement by the State of the environmental objectives of the EU directive, and that Uisce Éireann performs its functions in an open and transparent manner.

The matters the Deputy raised have been brought to the Minister. He has followed up with inquiries to Uisce Éireann. I have no doubt the Deputy will elaborate on the point he raised in his supplementary contribution.

Deputy Michael Cahill: With delayed payments, interest should be applied to overdue accounts paid to contractors similar to local authorities, utilities and other bodies that have this payment system. Why not Uisce Éireann? Why should it be allowed to get off scot-free especially with the manner in which it is blackguarding contractors and subcontractors?

It does not pay to provide a 24-7 call-out service without payment. That is an obvious fact. A simple solution would be to put contractors on a monthly drawdown system. That would cut out red tape and delays.

I will throw a spanner in the works. A few months ago, a friend of mine approached me about a quote they received for a 60 m extension to a water main to a single house. They were quoted €450 per metre. That comes to €27,000. Think of a 100 m sprint by Usain Bolt and then 60 m of that 100 m. People are flabbergasted by these quotations. People are expected to pay that while contractors are not being paid by Irish Water. They are waiting four months. Uisce Éireann is well able to charge people, but when it comes to payments it is a totally different story. Contractors and subcontractors are being put through hell and put under enormous financial pressure. This must be addressed and the sooner the better.

I will raise this again and I will put down a vote of no confidence in Uisce Éireann if there is no progress on this matter.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: As I said earlier about specific points the Deputy raised, the operation of the public wastewater treatment systems, together with operational issues locally, are matters for Uisce Éireann, which has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels.

Contracts and payments are matters for Uisce Éireann and the Minister has no function in this area. However, he has made inquiries with Uisce Éireann on the Deputy's behalf and was informed that Uisce Éireann has contracts in place with its contractors for all works and services provided. These contracts set out the applicable payment terms and the processes to be followed. Where a contractor raises a concern regarding payment, Uisce Éireann will engage directly with the contractor to understand the circumstances and to address the matter in accordance with the relevant contractual arrangements. Responsibility for the payment of subcontractors rests with the principal contractor, in line with the terms and conditions of the relevant contract. Where there are delays with some payments, there can be a number of reasons for these. Where such matters arise, Uisce Éireann endeavours to resolve them as quickly as possible, once identified. As I said, Uisce Éireann is aware of isolated challenges in relation to the timeliness of purchase requisitions and purchase order receipting. These issues have been escalated and are being dealt with as a priority.

I have no doubt the Deputy has raised the matter directly with the Minister and will raise it further. His Topical issue will have drawn the attention of the Minister and no doubt will be seen by Uisce Éireann. The Deputy is representing his constituents on the ground.

Furthermore, the CRU was assigned the water regulatory functions under section 27 of the Water Services Act 2013. In performing those, it has regard to a number of factors including that water services are provided by Uisce Éireann; that it operates in a commercially viable manner; that it can meet all reasonable demands for water; that it performs its functions in a manner that will enable the achievement by the State of the environmental objectives of that directive; and that it performs its functions in an open and transparent manner.

I expect it is a matter the Deputy will bring up directly with the Minister as well.

Sports Facilities

Deputy Colm Burke: The Department of Culture, Communications and Sport provides funding to the FAI on an annual basis. I understand it is more than €6 million. Can the Minister of State ascertain why 30 acres of land in Glanmire, Cork, which was leased to the FAI by Cork County Council in 2017, has remained idle? What progress has been made by the Department, the FAI and the county council to bring these lands into use for sports activities? Will he make a statement?

I am raising this issue because these lands were purchased by Cork County Council more than 25 years ago, when the Cork-Dublin road was being built, and have been vacant since. In 2013 or 2014, the council decided it would lease these 30 acres to the FAI to build a new facility

for the development of soccer in the region. The lease was signed in 2017. It is ten years later and not a sod has been turned.

I got then Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, to come to Glanmire in 2023 where we met 18 of the sports clubs. As a result of that meeting, the FAI started negotiations again with the county council. My understanding is that they came to an agreement that 12.5 acres would go back to the local soccer club, but despite the fact I wrote to the chief executive of the county council on 5 May, and sent a follow-up letter and made a follow-up phone call, I cannot get a reply from the county council about what is proposed for these lands. My understanding is that the FAI does not intend to use them.

Glanmire has a population of more than 20,000. The Minister of State was there recently in Vienna Woods where he met sports organisations to talk about applying for grants. How can they apply for grants if they do not have grounds or planning permission? A Government Department is paying out money to the FAI, which is hoarding this land, and a local authority is sitting on it and not doing anything with it. There are 20,000 people living in Glanmire and 1,000 houses and apartments are being built there at the moment. We have Sarsfields GAA and camogie clubs, Glanmire GAA club, the football club, soccer clubs and rugby clubs. There are a lot of clubs there that do not have adequate access to facilities and there is not even planning permission for the 30 acres.

If it were to start in the morning, it would still be a good 12 months down the road. The Department is still giving out money to the FAI and not calling it to account for getting the land from a Government agency, the local authority, and leaving it to sit idle, while clubs are now refusing to take in new members because they do not have capacity for them. It is time for the Department to step in. There is an athletics club in north Cork which got all the clubs together and they got €2 million in grants, and rightly so, because they got everyone together. The clubs in Glanmire have tried the same thing and still we are not making any progress on this. In August 2023, then Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, was there. It is now three years later and not one thing has happened in those three years, despite the fact the issue was raised publicly and followed up by me and other public representatives.

The Department can hold the FAI to account in this case. Why has it taken three years to make any progress? Even if it is possible to put it out to clubs for tender, that will take six months and then it will have to go through the planning process. It is time for the Department to intervene and deal with this issue.

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. The programme for Government commits to maintaining sports funding to get more people participating in all levels of sport, particularly targeting cohorts in society where there are lower than average participation levels. The Department operates two capital funding programmes for sport: the community sport facilities fund, CSFF, and the large scale sport infrastructure fund, LSSIF. The first allocations under the LSSIF opened in 2018 and were announced in 2020, with €86.5 million awarded to 33 projects. Additional funding of €37.5 million was allocated to 27 of these projects in December 2023, bringing the total awarded under that LSSIF round to €124 million.

Under the 2018 round, announced in 2020, €2,025,000 was provisionally allocated to the Munster centre of excellence in Glanmire. The proposal involved the development of grass pitches, an Astro turf facility, flood-lighting and dressing rooms.

The Football Association of Ireland wrote to my Department in 2023 stating that it no longer intended to proceed with the LSSIF-funded centre of excellence in Glanmire. According to the FAI, the decision not to proceed with the proposal was due to the fact that the original proposal no longer represented the greatest return on investment for the parties involved. Since then, there have been regular updates from the FAI to my Department including, most recently, an update on the progression of a revised proposal, which will involve University College Cork. In May, the FAI forwarded a draft business case for the revised proposal for a centre of excellence and my Department reverted to the FAI with observations on 21 June. It is anticipated that the final business case will be submitted shortly to my Department. In relation to the site in Glanmire, my Department has been informed that the property has now been leased to Riverstown Football Club by Cork County Council. I also understand that Riverstown Football Club is working with Cork County Council to develop a multisport facility at the site.

Of the total €297 million allocated under LSSIF to date, €96 million was awarded to soccer projects that are either directly sponsored by the FAI or incorporate soccer elements. Six projects under the first round of the LSSIF were allocated just under €12 million. Under the 2024 LSSIF funding announcement, €84 million was awarded to a further six soccer projects. This includes projects such as Dalymount Park and the Sligo Rovers stadium development. My current focus and that of the Department is on ensuring project delivery under the first two rounds of the LSSIF. This process will inform any decisions regarding the timing of a future round. The community sports facilities fund will also open over the course of the month. The previous round funded over 3,000 projects. Since 2000, €134 million has been allocated to 259 projects in County Cork under the community sports facilities fund. The most recent round saw €30 million allocated to 347 sporting projects in Cork. We will now be opening a new round over the course of the summer.

I share the Deputy's desire to ensure this site is put to sporting use very promptly. The information my Department has is that Riverstown FC has a lease with Cork County Council. The club is working with the county council to develop a multisport facility at the site. The FAI is working with University College Cork to put a facility in place with the university as opposed to making a written proposal. I want to see that come to fruition. There is very intensive engagement between them and my Department. We will be insisting that the project is moved on if the funding for it is to be retained. The issue of this site has been raised by Deputy Burke and by Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan previously. I am very happy to work with them to see this particular site at Glanmire made available to the local community for sporting use.

Deputy Colm Burke: I am absolutely astonished at that reply. The county council told councillors that it was leasing 12.5 acres to Riverstown FC rather than the full site. What the FAI is telling the Minister is totally different. State agencies, the Minister of State's Department, the county council and the FAI, which gets funding from the Department, are all involved and I cannot get a clear answer. I am getting one answer from the Department, which is getting from the FAI, and we are getting a different answer from Cork County Council.

This is State land that is lying idle. The population of Glanmire is growing at a phenomenal rate. One thousand new houses are being built. The Minister of State's Department agreed to provide funding to the FAI back in 2017 or 2018. This was never taken up by the FAI. That is not the Department's fault but the FAI was not asked any questions about bringing this land back into use for sporting activities in Glanmire. There are 30 acres lying idle. Not a sod has been turned and no planning application has been made.

We are now getting mixed messages about what is actually going on. I am not happy with this answer. The Minister of State can say that to the FAI. I also ask his Department to get clarification directly from the county council. The Minister of State is involved in developing sports facilities. Most of the population that will use this facility live in the city. There should therefore be a joint approach to developing these lands between the Department, the county council and the city council. We need them. Soccer clubs and GAA clubs are turning people away. Schools are under pressure. Some of the schools down there have over 1,000 students. They have some facilities but not facilities at the scale they would like. I ask that the Department now give priority to this issue. There are 1,000 houses being built. We are collecting planning fees and all sorts of contributions for these developments to go ahead but we are not providing any facilities of any description. Both the Department and the local authorities are guilty of not dealing with this issue.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: The objective of the Department of sport is to fund projects to deliver sporting outcomes and increase participation. In my previous response, I outlined the number of projects that have been funded across County Cork. Under the most recent round of the community sports facilities fund, the figure was 347. There have been just over 2,000 over the past 20 years or more.

I will certainly seek clarity on the situation regarding this land. The information I have is that Cork County Council has leased the land to Riverstown Football Club. I will seek further clarity on that. The use of the land is obviously primarily a matter for Cork County Council to decide upon. From our engagement with the FAI, I am clear that the funding that was initially allocated in 2020 is not to be used on this particular site. It is going to be utilised on a different site in conjunction with University College Cork. We are going to facilitate that as long as it happens. We are intensively engaged with the FAI to make sure that funding delivers new football facilities that can be of benefit to people who want to participate in and enjoy football in Cork. We want to see that happen.

I absolutely agree that this site should be used for sporting activity. The information I have is that it is being leased to Riverstown FC, which is working with Cork County Council to develop a multisport facility. I will certainly be following up to clarify the points the Deputy has raised here this evening. Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan has also raised the issue. Everyone within the local area wants to see this land utilised for sporting activity. As Minister of State with responsibility for sport, it is also something I want to see. I will certainly work with the Deputy to do anything we can to see this moved on.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar athló ar 10.58 p.m. go dtí 9 a.m., Dé Céadaoin, an 15 Iúil 2026.

The Dáil adjourned at 10.58 p.m. until 9 a.m. on Wednesday, 15 July 2026.