**Vol. 317**
**No. 8**

**Thursday,**
**12 November**
**2026**

DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

# SEANAD ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—Neamhcheartaithe
(OFFICIAL REPORT—Unrevised)

Teachtaireacht ón Dáil - Message from Dáil ..... 459
Teachtaireacht ó Chomhchoiste - Message from Joint Committee ..... 459
Gnó an tSeanaid - Business of Seanad ..... 459
Nithe i dtosach suíonna - Commencement Matters ..... 460
Pesticide Use ..... 460
Schools Building Projects ..... 463
International Agreements ..... 465
Alcohol Sales ..... 468
An tOrd Gnó - Order of Business ..... 471
Protection of Young Persons in Employment in the Food and Beverage Services Sector: Motion ..... 486
Short-Term Letting and Tourism Bill 2026: Second Stage ..... 488

# SEANAD ÉIREANN

*Déardaoin, 12 Samhain 2026*

*Thursday, 12 November 2026*

Chuaigh an Leas-Chathaoirleach i gceannas ar 9.30 a.m.

*Machnamh agus Paidir.*

*Prayer and Reflection.*

---

## Teachtaireacht ón Dáil - Message from Dáil

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** I have received the following messages from Dáil Éireann. Dáil Éireann passed the Short-Term Letting and Tourism Bill 2026 on 11 November 2026, to which the agreement of Seanad Éireann is desired.

## Teachtaireacht ó Chomhchoiste - Message from Joint Committee

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** The Joint Committee on Agriculture and Food has completed its consideration of the following regulations in draft:

Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund Regulations 2026.

## Gnó an tSeanaid - Business of Seanad

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** I have received notice from the following Senators that they propose to raise the following matters:

Senator Malcolm Noonan - The need for the Minister for Education and Youth to make a statement on the maintenance of school grounds and in particular the use of herbicides.

Senator Ollie Crowe - The need for the Minister for Education and Youth to provide an update on the college development project for St. Joseph's Patrician College, "The Bish".

Senator Alice-Mary Higgins - The need for the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to make a statement on the position Ireland will take at the convention on certain conventional weapons review conference on lethal autonomous weapons systems.

Senator Linda Nelson Murray - The need for the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration to make a statement on the introduction of legislation to make it less easy to access alcohol from delivery apps.

Senator Sarah O'Reilly - The need for the Minister for Education and Youth to provide an update on additional accommodation for schools in Cavan.

Senator Eileen Lynch - The need for the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage to make a statement on the amendment of the croí cónaithe property refurbishment grant to allow for private limited companies to be eligible to apply.

The matters raised by the Senators are suitable for discussion. The Cathaoirleach has selected those raised by Senators Malcolm Noonan, Ollie Crowe, Alice-Mary Higgins and Linda Nelson Murray, and they will be taken now. The other Senators may give notice on another day of the matters they wish to raise.

## Nithe i dtosach suíonna - Commencement Matters

### Pesticide Use

**Senator Malcolm Noonan:** Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire Stáit. Níl clóis na scoileanna in Éirinn ina spásanna do nimh. Tá na spásanna seo le haghaidh súgartha. Tá muid i measc ghéarchéim na bithéagsúlachta agus, mar sin, tá freagracht orainn go léir oibriú le chéile chun ár ndúlra a athchóiriú.

We are in the depths of a biodiversity crisis. It is incumbent on us all to play our part in restoring nature and it should start with our schools. Our national biodiversity action plan is an all-of-government and all-of-society plan and was adopted by the Government in 2024. It is also a statutory plan; it is no longer a nice-to-have. As Minister of State at the time, I made a commitment to the children and young people of Ireland at the Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss that I would take the 58 calls to action they presented to me and stitch them into our national biodiversity action plan. We ensured all but two of them appeared in that plan and were enshrined in law, which was really transformative.

Call to action No. 50 was to ask us to phase out the use of herbicides and pesticides so here I am trying to honour that promise I made in Killarney a few years ago. It was disappointing to learn from the Irish Schools Sustainability Network, ISSN, on biodiversity in schools that these harmful chemicals are still being used in our school grounds. These are places of education where children and young people should be learning about why these chemicals are so bad for us and so bad for nature. The biodiversity in schools survey found that over half of our schools routinely use Roundup, which is the brand name for glyphosate, the most commonly and most widely used weedkiller in the world, to control weeds around school grounds.

While I appreciate schools are really busy places and the maintenance and upkeep usually fall on the lone caretaker in the school, the use of weedkiller at all in the school environment is wholly unnecessary and wrong. Apart from the immediate risk posed to the whole school community and to the caretaker who may have to handle such chemicals, it invariably will end

up in water courses through drains and in rivers and streams, or wastewater treatment plants, many of which do not have the capacity to remove such chemicals.

The national pesticides and drinking water action group reminds us that pesticides are routinely detected in drinking water supplies and that every effort should be made in the community to eliminate their use. They are found to be ubiquitous in our food and traces of glyphosate are even found in breast milk, so eliminating their use in school grounds, public parks and spaces and roadside verges should be our priority. The sight of yellow burned grass and plants - some might call them weeds - in school grounds is not a welcoming one. There are other, natural, means of managing vegetation, some of which could be part of school activities or the green schools programme. Today, the Aire Stáit's colleague, the Minister of State with responsibility for nature, is launching the Our Dúlra Agreement, a schools network-wide agreement towards managing biodiversity in schools. This is what is required, namely, a whole-of-school approach in partnership with local authority biodiversity officers. Indeed, it suggests our schools could do with a network of biodiversity officers all of their own to work with teachers, parents and students. I ask the Minister of State that the Department of Education and Youth work with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the ISSN on biodiversity in schools to develop a protocol that would eliminate the use of herbicides and pesticides in our school grounds. In my gardening days I worked a lot with schools, putting in school gardens, mini woodlands, ponds and orchards, which was really enjoyable work. However, breaking up tarmacadam to put in a garden in a school was really rewarding and the garden became a wonderful educational resource in its own right. We need to do lots more of this around the country and to see our school grounds as contributors to our national nature restoration plan but first, let us stop spring poisoning them.

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Youth (Deputy Michael Moynihan):** I thank the Senator for raising the issue. The issue is for the boards of management and the management of the schools and I know they take it desperately seriously. A prepared document will be circulated containing a response to the Senator's queries about the various functions and managing the school grounds for biodiversity. I will pick up on his second last point in terms of the amazing work that is being done in school communities the length and breadth of the country. I often think that when we were going to school - certainly when I was going to school - one of the major issues was litter awareness and now the vast majority of Tidy Towns committees are populated by people of our age group so it certainly sank in. In many of the schools I have had the honour to visit over the past year and a half, the amount of biodiversity work that is going on in schools is quite incredible. Some stand-out schools remain with me. One school in the inner city in Limerick had a dome and one of our Oireachtas colleagues, equipped with the heath advice students are getting now, said that we will live into eternity. We have to compliment the amount of excellent work that is going on at school level on biodiversity, on the natural environment and protecting it, as well as enshrining in the students that love of the environment and of nature as I have seen in some clips over the past day or so of students being taken on biodiversity and nature walks and to biodiversity gardens.

They also grow their own vegetables. I do not think there is a school, certainly in rural Ireland but also in urban Ireland, that does not have a plot allotted to growing its own food to show where food comes from and the respect we have for food.

With regard to ensuring pesticides are eliminated in schools, we have to give credit to the school leadership and particularly the caretakers who manage these facilities in school communities. Recently I was at the CBS in Charleville, to mention one school, and I saw the work done there by somebody who trained as a horticulturalist and then went on to become a teacher. I saw the love he has enshrined in the students. We had also been there more than two years ago when he was taking the students out to plant bare root trees at this time of the year. We have to applaud what is going on at school level and we certainly have to acknowledge it across the system. Of course we need to do more but in the first instance we must thank the teachers, the school leadership and all those instilling in our students a love of nature and biodiversity.

Of course we can look at this. Senator Noonan asked me specifically to work across Departments. All Departments are acutely aware of ensuring we protect our environment and protect biodiversity. We have an opportunity to protect it and to keep what we have. So much has been lost but a lot of it has been protected through an intergenerational love of nature and love of environment. A person who had been in school many years ago spoke about the nature walks they did in the woods and the information they were given by the teachers. The teachers inspired a love of nature in them and she continues to translate this into her own garden. A lot of great work is being done. I will look across government but I assure Senator Noonan that we take this very seriously.

**Senator Malcolm Noonan:** I thank the Minister of State for his very eloquent and unscripted reply. I absolutely agree wholeheartedly with him that the work going on in schools throughout the country is absolutely exceptional. I note that the scripted speech mentions a protocol for managing school grounds for biodiversity. Biodiversity in Schools discovered that more than half of the schools it surveyed still spray weedkiller in the school grounds. This is a cause for concern. I know how busy it is particularly for caretakers, as if a cistern breaks or a window will not open they are first on call for all of the maintenance on school grounds and this is another headache for them. However, it is important that we have a unified approach to it. I know it is a matter for school boards of management but, more broadly, direction from the Department would be helpful. Some guidance from the Department, coupled with support from the National Parks and Wildlife Service, would help. I appreciate the Minister of State's reply and I agree wholeheartedly with everything he has said.

**Deputy Michael Moynihan:** To confirm, the Department has worked with the National Parks and Wildlife Service to promote biodiversity. In the role I hold as Minister of State with responsibility for special education and inclusion I cannot underestimate the importance of biodiversity and a sensory garden. Some of the best practice we have seen throughout the country is where school communities come together and plant trees and other permanent plants on a piece of their property and over the years, ten or 15 years later, they become so important for those with additional needs. I fully understand the need for it and we have to give enormous credit. Perhaps the protocols are not in place but certainly the goodwill is there, as is the commitment of school communities and caretakers throughout the 4,000 schools in the amount of work they are doing to protect it. There is also the amount of work being done throughout school communities to harvest water. The importance of this is being instilled in the younger generation of people and I have no doubt this will translate into their adult life and into the

habits they will develop. I take the points on board. We take it very seriously and I compliment the work being done.

## Schools Building Projects

**Senator Ollie Crowe:** I thank the Minister of State, Deputy Moynihan, for being here this morning. He is a regular visitor to the Chamber. The issue I want to raise this morning is the need for St. Joseph's Patrician College in Galway city, known locally as the Bish, to have a new school. It has been a big issue for a long number of years and grows more urgent year on year given the increasing demand for school places in Galway city. The buildings the school operates in are simply not fit for purpose. The classrooms are small and poorly insulated and there is no green space on the site, which limits what can be done in physical education and for the school sports teams. The Bish led on special educational needs classes and established two on its current site but the facilities are not adequate. The new building will provide the facilities these children deserve.

The Bish's main facility, which was built in the 1960s, was designed for 450 students but the number on the roll is above 750. This also impacts the wider community in Galway city as the Bish is significantly restricted in how many students it can accept. Last year it had to refuse over 250 applicants. More than 70% of this year's applications came from west of the Corrib including from Spiddal, Moycullen, with which the Minister of State is familiar, and Bearna. Despite a rapidly rising population in Galway's western suburbs, no new secondary school has been built there since Coláiste na Coiribe relocated there from the Tuam Road in 2015 to purpose-built buildings on Ballyburke Road in Knocknacarra.

In 2024 planning permission was granted to the Bish for the development of new school buildings on lands in Dangan secured as part of a land swap agreement with the University of Galway. The new building will provide modern facilities catering for 1,000 pupils, unlocking the school's ability to expand its offering. It will allow the school to have the on-site pitches and sporting facilities it requires to allow these activities to take place safely in one location. The site in Dangan is shovel ready. We need the Department of education to move on this as quickly as possible. After 20 years of being at the planning stage we need this project to be given the prioritisation it deserves. The stage 2b report went to the Department more than seven months ago and the school has not heard a word since. This is an unacceptable delay and I would be grateful if the Department could take urgent action to address this matter.

**Deputy Michael Moynihan:** I thank Senator Crowe for raising this issue and allowing me to give an update this morning on behalf of the Minister, Deputy Naughton, on how we are proceeding. I thank Senator Crowe for the many engagements he has had with me on St. Joseph's Patrician College, or the Bish, in Galway city. I understand full well the amount of work he is doing on the project, and we have had an amount of engagement and a number of discussions on it.

This project was approved for major devolved construction and refurbishment to provide for a new school building with capacity for 1,000 students, including four classrooms for special needs. The project has been devolved to the Le Chéile Schools Trust, which has appointed a design team to design the accommodation being provided and to bring the project

through the tender and construction phases. A Department team has been responsible for progressing the project as expeditiously as possible through all stages of architectural planning.

Projects progress from stage to stage in accordance with the project itself and the Department's design guidelines. The project for the Bish is at stage 2b, detailed design. As Senator Crowe is aware, the stage 2b report was submitted to the Department and he alluded to it in his contribution. It has been with the Department since April 2026. It is going through a detailed technical and cost review in line with the infrastructure guidelines. At this juncture it is not possible to give an indication of a timeline for delivery of the project. The Department will continue to engage directly with Le Chéile to provide assistance in regard to the project as required.

Senator Crowe will also be aware of the total allocation of €7.55 billion for the Department of education in the national development plan. Part of the development plan involves basing a strong emphasis of provision for children with special educational needs and, in line with this emphasis, a number of spaces are being provided in the new Bish project. That is hugely important because we want to build capacity not just at primary school but also at post-primary school.

The next tranche of projects for progression to tender is expected to be announced in 2027. Prioritisation is ongoing and has included consultation with patrons and management bodies. The project for the Bish will form part of this prioritisation project.

We are very conscious of the need for this school project. I have spoken about it a number of times in this House and the Dáil. It is over 1,000 school places and includes a school education requirement. It is going through stage 2b. That was submitted to the Department and is being meticulously gone through by the Department at the moment. We will continue to engage. It is a major project for Galway. We understand the need for more investment in second-level education in Galway. This project has been around for some time. I and the Minister, Deputy Naughton, are very aware of the project and will engage with Le Chéile and the school authorities to ensure there are no delays. It is impossible to give a commitment this morning except to say we are aware of the importance of the issue.

**Senator Ollie Crowe:** I thank the Minister of State for the detailed response. I appreciate the information. The project is not only important for the school but to meet the urgent need in Galway city and its suburbs for a greater number of school places. When the school was left off the priority funding list last February, the Department said in response that other schools may be added to the priority list ahead of the next full list due to be published in 2027-28. The Bish, after decades, deserves to have that. Once the approval of the stage 2b report is complete, I would urge the Department to take action.

Is the Minister of State confident of progress in 2027 for the Bish? I will leave it at that for now.

**Deputy Michael Moynihan:** There is nothing like the direct question at the very end of the contribution. I do appreciate it. I will not come in here and say we are turning water into wine immediately. We are very much aware of it. I have answered a number of questions here and in the Dáil on the Bish. I am acutely aware of it. The detailed report was submitted to the

Department in April 2026. That is being worked through. There has been engagement with both the patron body and the project design, the Le Chéile trust, on that issue.

Following this Commencement matter, I will go back to the Department to liaise with it and convey the Senator's interest in the project and what he has outlined about the importance of it moving forward. It is a huge investment for Galway and for second-level education - both mainstream and special education. I cannot give anything further than that but I will convey the Senator's concerns and make sure there is no delay on our side in progressing the 2b report.

## International Agreements

**Senator Alice-Mary Higgins:** The Minister of State, Deputy Richmond, will be aware I have previously brought forward legislation in respect of lethal autonomous weapons. I want to begin by recognising the constructive engagement I have had with the disarmament unit in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in respect of that legislation and the ongoing process. The intention of the legislation was to support a stronger mandate as we go into those negotiations. We are at a crucial point in terms of a horrific new form of warfare involving lethal autonomous weapons. Machines are setting targets and carrying out actions, including killings, sometimes without any meaningful human control.

This is urgent in two ways. First, these weapons are already being tested and used. We are seeing them in Ukraine and Gaza, and we are seeing them marketed, celebrated and developed with investment going towards their further development. It is a huge danger that is already happening right now.

Second, there is urgency because the mandate of the group of governmental experts is about to expire. They have been tasked with looking at conventional weapons and treaties. A crucial meeting is happening next week at which the decision will be made whether to proceed with a protocol to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. I am interested in seeing what position Ireland is taking. We want the mandate that comes out of next week not to be a mandate to continue talking about this but one to discuss and develop a binding protocol. It will still be opt-in, of course. That is the nature of these things, but a binding protocol should be negotiated and the timeline for the negotiations should be one year because of the urgency and the speed involved. We know there are those who would like to put this on the long finger while continuing to actively develop and use these weapons.

It is also crucial we have the phrase "meaningful human control". I know there is discussion of "human control and judgment" as a potential alternative but that language is crucial. I am also worried there is a loophole in the definition. There is the exclusion of what is sometimes called "fire and forget", that is, situations where a human may set the target or targets but then the autonomous action is taken by the machine in terms of the actual execution. Machines like this do not recognise a white flag or surrender. That is not consistent with the Geneva Convention or international humanitarian law. That is a real concern that I want to highlight. There were some good aspects to the definition. It includes components as well as the finished product but in the "fire and forget" space we could end up with a loophole which would diminish the effectiveness of this.

I am concerned about things like autonomous target identification mechanisms, which fall slightly outside the remit currently. Where both the identification of targets and the execution

and killing sit within the machine area without meaningful human control on either of those sides of it, that could end up falling outside the remit of what we are talking about.

I know Ireland has had a constructive position. I want to know more about it and to encourage Ireland to take a robust position. If we are not seeing what we need to see coming from this process, might Ireland be willing, as it has been in the past, to take leadership on other processes, whether an independent treaty, as in the case of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, or a UN process or discussion? There are articles within the convention on conventional weapons which can be used to trigger a further discussion.

While it is done by consensus, a majority can be employed to demand that there would be a General Assembly debate before resuming discussions. There are a few options there.

My apologies, I went a little bit over time.

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Neale Richmond):** I am grateful to Senator Higgins for raising this important issue.

The control of autonomous weapon systems is one of the most pressing issues facing the modern arms control agenda. Ireland has been at the forefront of states seeking to address it. The development and deployment of such systems raise serious ethical, moral and legal questions and the possibility of contravening international humanitarian and human rights law. For the seventh review conference of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, CCW, at the United Nations in Geneva next week, high-contracting parties to the convention will be asked to endorse the set of elements of an instrument on lethal autonomous weapons systems without prejudice to its nature. This set of elements gained consensus agreement last September from the group of governmental experts on lethal autonomous weapons systems, otherwise known as LAWS. I apologise in advance, as I will be using that acronym throughout my remarks.

It is important to be clear about what systems we are discussing, particularly now that there is agreement on a working characterisation or definition. LAWS are a specific set of autonomous weapons systems that are capable of identifying, selecting and engaging targets without human intervention. This means that they have the capability to be fully autonomous. Ireland's strong and long-standing view is that meaningful human control over such systems is required for compliance with international humanitarian law. That is what we fought for in negotiations through the group of governmental experts. We welcome the consensus agreement by the group in September on the characterisation of LAWS, the need for control and human judgment over them, and some measures on how to effect the required control.

It is now necessary to build on that agreement through a negotiation mandate for an instrument to govern LAWS. Ireland helped to shape the European Council conclusions for the CCW review conference, which called for an ambitious negotiation mandate. For Ireland, any mandate should provide an opportunity to ensure that measures that have been discussed over the past 13 years but did not make it into the agreed set of elements can be included in any future instrument or instruments. Among a broad range of measures, this includes adequate legal reviews, robust testing and evaluation requirements to ensure predictability, traceability and explainability of digital systems under a human chain of command and control and the mitigation of bias from such systems, including automation bias and algorithmic bias.

As the Senator will be aware, Ireland is among a group of states seeking a negotiation mandate to agree a legally binding instrument that will govern LAWS. In our view, this should be a sixth protocol to the CCW and should include a combination of prohibitions and regulations on their development and use. Any negotiation mandate should be time-bound and fit to address the urgency of the issue. That is why we and like-minded partners have sought a one-year mandate with a sufficient number of meetings to address outstanding legal and technical issues. In short, Ireland will seek a progressive outcome at next week's CCW review conference on LAWS and will continue to support international efforts to mitigate the risks associated with the use of AI systems in the military domain.

**Senator Alice-Mary Higgins:** I thank the Minister of State. It is an appropriate building on Ireland's history in the area of disarmament, from the work on nuclear non-proliferation through to our key role in negotiating the convention on cluster munitions. I have no doubt that Ireland will go in with a strong and progressive agenda on these issues. While Ireland is also very good at seeking consensus, I would urge that in the event that a binding instrument with an appropriately short timeline does not emerge from this process, Ireland should be willing to work with like-minded countries to develop parallel processes, such as a separate convention, if necessary, in order to ensure that action is taken on these appalling weapons. Sadly, investment is regulating the pace.

I ask that Ireland would bring the expertise that it brought to the disarmament negotiations and regulatory negotiations into a more robust response within the European Union. As we know, AI weaponry is not included in any of the EU instruments in respect of AI regulations. It is either a national or a global competence. There is a huge lacuna there at time when we are seeing massive investment in militarisation. I am very concerned that this investment is happening in a period when there is a lacuna in terms of regulation. I have to flag that I am concerned about our own industrial development Bill, which is removing the requirement for Enterprise Ireland to engage with the Government on military investment. These are areas for consistency, with a very strong position, which I am very proud that Ireland is bringing into those UN negotiations. We need to carry that back into our EU and national policies in these areas.

**Deputy Neale Richmond:** It is Ireland's view that this is an urgent issue. States need to seize the opportunity of this review conference and meet the needs of the moment. We recognise that the CCW operates by consensus and the challenge in achieving an outcome in the current international security environment. However, in our pursuit of an instrument through the CCW, Ireland will consider all options and mechanisms available under the convention. The Senator will understand that I will not prejudge any discussions at this time, but her point is well made and taken on board by the Government.

It important to add that while LAWS will be a key focus of the review conference, they are part of a wider range of issues in relation to the use of AI in the military domain. Ireland supports other relevant and complementary initiatives, such as the UN dialogues and the summits on responsible artificial intelligence in the military domain. These initiatives incorporate discussions on AI decision support systems and bias, which are key concerns. Ireland is funding research on a addressing bias in military AI through the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Without getting into another round of debate on the related issues that Senator Higgins added, I would like to point out that this is increasingly becoming the most threatening part of how humanitarians work in the world. I spent quite a bit of time at the United Nations this year working with like-minded ministers in relation to drone attacks and AI-powered attacks on humanitarian aid workers, particularly in Sudan. This is an area of real consequence, with the last two years being the deadliest in history to be a humanitarian worker. Part of that is due to not only autonomous weaponry, but the inability to control whose hands those weapons find themselves in and what happens thereafter.

I hope that we can continue to work together on this.

## Alcohol Sales

**Senator Linda Nelson Murray:** I thank the Minister of State for being here. We all get many emails and calls about different things every day. We try to help people as much as we can. Sometimes, an email can really resonate. I will quote part of one that did so. It deals with the delivery of alcohol from delivery apps and supermarkets:

> Dear Linda,
>
> I am writing to you to ask for your support on a campaign on protecting vulnerable people on home delivery of alcohol in Ireland. My concern stems from the experience of a close female friend of mine in her mid-30s who suffers from chronic alcoholism. She spends much of her time at home and is able to order alcoholic drinks online, which are delivered directly to her front door by delivery services. She wouldn't be easily able to obtain access to alcohol without these delivery services. As someone who cares about her, I find it deeply troubling that a person struggling with such a serious addiction can obtain alcohol so easily, without having to even leave her home. The convenience of these services can make it easier to continue drinking and harder to break the cycle of addiction. What I find particularly concerning is just how easy this process has become. A person can order two bottles of vodka on a smartphone and have them delivered to their door with much the same ease as ordering two cartons of milk with a grocery delivery. The products are obviously very different but the convenience and simplicity of obtaining them are almost identical. For someone who is not struggling with alcohol dependence this may seem like nothing more than a convenient service, but for someone suffering from chronic alcoholism that same convenience can have devastating consequences. There may be no need to leave the house, no meaningful interruption to the drinking cycle and very little to prevent another order from being placed. I believe this raises a serious question for public policy. Should obtaining alcohol be quite so effortless when we know that alcohol dependence can destroy lives?

I think it is a fair and legitimate question from my constituent. We have spent years developing policies to reduce alcohol-related harm, protect young people and encourage responsible consumption. However, the growth of instant delivery creates a right new challenge. Alcohol is no longer something that necessarily requires a journey to a shop, pub or off-licence. It can be ordered on a phone and delivered to someone's sitting room within minutes. I genuinely had not thought about this until this man contacted me. Apart from Christmas when getting my groceries I might include a couple of bottles of wine, I have never

had alcohol delivered to the house. It has implications for people experiencing dependency or those trying to maintain recovery; young people and children living in households where alcohol is being ordered; domestic violence and family welfare; people who are already intoxicated and can continue drinking without leaving home; and vulnerable people who may be particularly affected by targeted online promotions.

I am asking that we support a review of the public health implications of on-demand alcohol delivery, particularly for people experiencing alcohol dependence. Should we be considering legislation prohibiting third-party platforms - we all know who they are - facilitating the home delivery of alcohol? Should we examine whether any prohibition should extend to other commercial home delivery services, including direct delivery by off-licences and supermarkets, to ensure a consistent approach? I am proposing that we have proper age verification to be asked for at the point of sale and also on the physical delivery and I am also calling for a cap on the total volume allowed per customer per night. In Australia, they offer a two-hour safety pause between order and delivery, as that can release the temptation if you have to wait two hours to get it; a limit on the hours during which alcohol can be delivered; mandatory responsible service of alcohol training for delivery drivers; and, most importantly, the ability to opt-out of alcohol delivery marketing.

In April of this year, the Minister said that updating licensing laws was a Government commitment. Where are we on that, because there is an important distinction between having legislation and ensuring that it works in practice?

**Deputy Neale Richmond:** I sincerely thank Senator Nelson Murray for raising this pertinent issue, not only from a legislative point of view, but from a human one as well. This is something that will cross all of our inboxes at various stages. There is a very painful human dimension, possibly not for the person directly at the centre of it, but definitely their family and loved ones.

On behalf of the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, I thank the Senator for raising the matter. There is widespread interest in this topic from members of the public, representatives from the industry and members of the Government. Neither the 2022 sale of alcohol Bill nor the 2024 intoxicating liquor Bill progressed in the lifetime of the previous Government. The programme for Government commits to updating the licensing laws. The autumn legislative programme, published on 16 September, sets out the 32 Bills that have been prioritised for publication and a further 32 Bills prioritised for drafting in the current Dáil session. Other legislative works, including work on updating the licensing laws, will be taken forward in subsequent iterations of the legislative programme to be determined by Government in due course. In that regard, the points raised by the Senator in respect of regulations around alcohol delivery in the interests of public health have been shared with relevant officials in the Department and will be considered as part of this work.

However, it is important to note that under existing legislation, where alcohol is purchased online, the same restrictions on the sale and supply of intoxicating liquor apply as do to on-site purchases. Under section 17(3) of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003, it is an offence for a licensee with intent to evade the conditions of the licence to take the intoxicating liquor from the licensed premised for the purpose of it being sold on the account or for the benefit or profit

of the licensee or to permit any other person to do so. The penalty on conviction is a fine of up to €1,500 for a first offence and up to €2,000 for a second or subsequent offence.

Any proposals for reform will need to be informed by engagement with relevant stakeholders and Departments, such as the Department of Health. The Department of justice is committed to ensuring that any changes to alcohol licensing would be evidence based, balanced and capable of supporting a modern licensing system while maintaining appropriate protections for communities and consumers.

I might use the time available to make the clear point that we might be at a very early part of this discussion. Indeed, when we move forward, we may look back and say that the Senator was the person who really started this discussion. That is the opportunity that lies before us and across these Houses, to look at the legislative timetables there across Government but also how this can fit into the promised review, as stated by the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan. Indeed, in anything that we can do to move that along, I would be more than happy to be at the Senator's disposal.

**Senator Linda Nelson Murray:** I thank the Minister of State. I really appreciate his comments. It is definitely something that I am going to continue working on, so the Minister of State will hear a lot more of me talking about this. As I said, this matter has resonated with me. It is not just something that I am bringing up today and I am not going to talk about again.

It is all very well having some laws there, but they do not particularly apply to these apps and whatever. It is something that we need to work on. We have to ask ourselves whether the convenience of alcohol delivery is now moving ahead of our responsibility to protect public health. I am not suggesting that we prohibit people from purchasing alcohol legally. However, I believe we need to look seriously at how easily alcohol can now be ordered through an app and delivered directly to someone's home. We would not allow somebody who is visibly intoxicated to continue being serviced in a pub or restaurant - we are quite good at that now. Why should the same principle not apply when alcohol is being delivered to their front door?

Other countries are beginning to recognise that the rules governing alcohol sales must keep pace with technology and it is all about how fast technology is moving at present. Ireland needs to examine those safeguards now rather than waiting until we see the consequences.

**Deputy Neale Richmond:** There is widespread interest in this topic. Although the updating of the licensing laws has not been included in the autumn legislative programme, the relevant officials in the Department of justice have taken note of the issue around the availability of alcohol on third-party delivery platforms. As with any area of retail activity involving the sale of alcohol, it is important that appropriate safeguards be in place and that existing legal requirements be fully observed.

The issues raised by the Senator touch on matters relating to enforcement, public safety and responsible consumption, all of which must be carefully considered. While the Department cannot pre-empt the outcome of any future policy development, the Senator can be assured that these considerations will form part of the broader examination of licensing law reform as this work progresses and the Government is extremely grateful for her raising it today.

*Cuireadh an Seanad ar fionraí ar 10.15 a.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 10.32 a.m.*

*Sitting suspended at 10.15 a.m. and resumed at 10.32 a.m.*

## An tOrd Gnó - Order of Business

**Senator Garret Ahearn:** The Order of Business is No. 1, motion *re* the Protection of Young Persons (Employment in Food and Beverage Services Sector) Regulations 2026, back from committee, to be taken on the conclusion of the Order of Business without debate; and No. 1*a*, the Short-Term Letting and Tourism Bill 2026 – Second Stage, to be taken at 11.45 a.m., with the time allocated for the opening remarks of the Minister not to exceed ten minutes, group spokespersons not to exceed eight minutes, all other Senators not to exceed five minutes and the Minister to be given no less than ten minutes to reply to the debate.

**Senator Mary Fitzpatrick:** I attended yesterday evening the first public meeting of the Dublin Central Community Safety Partnership. Community safety partnerships were set up under legislation in the last Oireachtas. I supported that legislation, and that is why I went along to the meeting to see how the partnership is being run. The community safety partnerships are intended to increase community safety and they are meant to engage all of the statutory agencies to work with residents and businesses, the Garda and the local authority to improve safety. Last night, we had Dublin City Council and the Garda. Senator McAdam was there with me but there were no other representatives of statutory agencies present. I did not see anyone from the HSE or Tusla and I did not see anybody from education and from welfare. I did not see any of the four local TDs, many of whom have been on social media this week complaining about the Garda arrangements in Dublin Central. None of them was interested enough in community safety in Dublin Central to attend the community safety partnership meeting.

The Garda gave a very comprehensive presentation. It talked about high-visibility policing, community policing, drones, body cams, Tasers and helicopters. It gave a very fine presentation on Garda operations. Every single resident raised antisocial behaviour of all descriptions. I am not going to get into the details here, but there are genuine concerns.

It is interesting that Senator McDowell is here now because of the statistics that were put up. The Senator was the Minister for justice 20 years ago who introduced antisocial behaviour orders, ASBOs. In the 20 years since then, fewer than 50 of them have been issued right around the country. In Dublin Central, my constituency, my home, where there is now a proposal to put private security on the streets to deal with antisocial behaviour, there have been zero antisocial behaviour orders issued. How can that be? I cannot understand it and it is not good enough.

I want a debate with the Minister for justice on what the purpose of the legislation is if it is not being used. Why is it not being used? Is it a policing matter? Is it a courts matter? Is it an evidence matter? What is it? This House needs to debate why there are zero antisocial behaviour orders in Dublin Central. Communities deserve to know that when we pass laws, those laws are going to be used and are going to be effective. I would appreciate it if the Leader could arrange the debate.

**Senator Ray McAdam:** I echo and second the calls by my learned colleague, Senator Fitzpatrick, for a debate on community safety. I reiterate the calls in this regard that I made to the Leader yesterday. I understand the relevant Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, will be in the Chamber next week for a considerable period, so he might afford us a couple of hours to discuss community safety and the national strategy that he launched last week.

I ask the Leader today to arrange for a debate with the Minister of State with responsibility for mental health, Deputy Butler, to discuss access to specialist mental health services. I am calling for this debate because of the huge impact of suicide that we are seeing now on the streets and across the communities of the north inner city. We have had too many families grieving. There are too many people struggling and there is a growing fear that those who reach out for help cannot access the help and support they need. We are seeing a growing potential for an epidemic of suicide, particularly among young men in the north inner city.

We are seeing reports of people experiencing serious mental health difficulties being turned away from key services despite having referral letters from their GPs. These are reports that need to be examined. We need to have clear answers about the referral process, how people are being assessed and what support is available when a service cannot accept them. We all know that for someone experiencing a mental health crisis, asking for help takes enormous courage. That moment must be met with compassion and a service that is capable of responding.

I want the communities of the north inner city to have a co-ordinated response, a response that reflects the needs of our communities and one that listens to the personal experiences on the ground. I ask the Leader to liaise with the Minister of State to arrange for an early debate so we can examine these concerns, establish where exactly the gaps lie and secure practical action to ensure people receive the help they need when they need it and when it matters most.

**Senator Michael McDowell:** I empathise completely regarding the points made by the last two speakers. On ASBOs, which Senator Fitzpatrick raised, it has always amazed me that the careful legislation that was put in place when I was Minister for justice has never, in fact, been operated effectively throughout the country. I know there were safeguards attached to it that made it slightly more difficult to obtain an ASBO than was the case in Britain. In England and Wales, ASBOs were effectively dropped because they were being used excessively and impractically.

The suggestion that there should be private security guards on the streets is wholly unacceptable. Whereas whoever made it was probably motivated by the best of intentions, the simple fact is that if we need more gardaí on the streets, we have to ask what has happened to the Garda Reserve. It had around 1,100 or 1,200 members but this number has gone down to around 300 or fewer now. The Government has said on a number of occasions that it would increase the size of the reserve to 2,000, but nothing has been done on that front.

I support the suggestion that we should have a debate on justice policy as well because it is now well over 20 years since the decision was made to build a new prison at Thornton Hall to replace Mountjoy. It was not just my project. A later Minister, Alan Shatter, seemed to suggest that he was in favour of doing it. Nobody in the Department of justice has ever said that it is off the agenda, but Mountjoy Prison needs to be replaced. Despite the valiant efforts of people like Eddie Mullins to make it as humane as possible when he was the governor of that prison,

it is wholly unsuitable for the purposes for which it is currently used. We have a crisis of accommodation. We have people sleeping on floors. We have multiple occupations of prison cells in squalid circumstances. We have United Nations observers telling us that what is happening in our prison system is wholly unacceptable by international standards. We have the Inspector of Prisons saying the same, yet this Government has not said that it is proceeding with the Thornton Hall project.

If it is ever to happen, the planning for it should be there now. If the planning for it is to be done now, it means that a decision has to be made and the public has to understand that it is happening. Only when that has happened will it be possible to have drug-free areas in our prisons, genuine rehabilitative programmes, reasonable exercise facilities for prisoners and the like. The same applies to the women's prison which is grossly overcrowded. Every time a woman is put into jail, and it is rare enough that it happens, some serious offender is let out to make space for her. All of that is wholly wrong. It is about time that the Government as a whole, and it is not just the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, because his predecessors bear the same responsibility, and all of the parties in Government come to this House to explain what they are going to do about the massive holes that are present in our criminal justice system and ensuring the safety of communities.

This is a matter of life and death. There are people, not merely those who may commit suicide, and families who are in terror of drug gangs extracting money from them and threatening to burn their houses down. We have seen it with our own eyes. Something must be done and it requires a new degree of vigour on the part of the Government.

**Senator Pauline Tully:** At this time of year, self-employed people are making their tax returns. An accountant contacted me to say that on a regular enough basis when he goes to make the tax returns for his client, it mistakenly shows up that they have not paid their property tax. It is in cases where they have paid it but it shows up that they have not, and a 10% surcharge therefore ensues on their income tax. The accountant cannot contact Revenue to ask it to rectify the mistake; it has to be the client. The accountant will ask the client to do so and if they do, it is rectified, no problem. However, if the client does not or is too late doing so, the 10% applies. They will get their tax back, but they have to go through the procedure of applying for that with form-filling and so forth. He says that it is a regular enough occurrence and he has checked with other accountants, who said that it is happening and is really annoying. It is obviously a glitch in the Revenue system. Even though Revenue has been made aware of this, it still has not been rectified.

What he and I are asking for is that the Leader contacts the Minister for Finance and asks him to instruct Revenue to address this glitch in its system. It is something that is coming up every year for different clients and it is totally unnecessary. It puts extra work on the accountant, the client and Revenue personnel because they then have to go and return the tax if it has already been paid.

**Senator Nessa Cosgrove:** I propose an amendment to the Order of Business. In this day and age, the fact that young people under 20 are being paid a sub-minimal rate of pay is archaic. I brought forward legislation last year to try to abolish-----

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** Will the Senator clarify, is it the motion she is talking about?

**Senator Nessa Cosgrove:** I am speaking during the Order of Business on this.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** What number is it on the Order Paper?

**Senator Nessa Cosgrove:** It is No. 1.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** Does the Senator wants to move her amendment before No. 1?

**Senator Nessa Cosgrove:** It is the amendment to item No.1. We tabled an amendment to No. 1 on the Order Paper.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** We are dealing with the Order of Business and not the motion at the moment. It is later on that the motion comes up.

**Senator Nessa Cosgrove:** I am speaking about the motion as part of my Order of Business because I just want to raise it. I will not refer to the motion, but I want to bring up the issue of subminimum rates of pay for young people. We have heard stories. A report was published by the National Youth Council of Ireland this year about how young people are struggling to gain employment, and struggling to live on the employment they have, because they are still being paid subminimum rates of pay. We have 20-year-olds working in exactly the same situation as adults. The 20-year-olds are adults. They can vote, drive and get married, but they are being paid less. It is an archaic system. I know that the Low Pay Commission advised abolishing this in 2024 but nothing has happened towards it. That is why we have put it in the amendment today.

**Senator P. J. Murphy:** I want to take this opportunity to pay a brief tribute to my neighbour, friend and a man who has been an outstanding ambassador for Gaelic football and Gaelic games in Galway. Yesterday, Paul Conroy retired from what has been an outstanding and successful career as a senior footballer with the Galway senior football team. As a father, husband, neighbour and a man who represents the very best of us as Irish people, I wish Paul and his wife, Caroline, all the very best in his retirement from intercounty football. I hope that he enjoys many years to come playing senior football with his club, St James's.

**Senator Evanne Ní Chuilinn:** Hear, hear.

**Senator Sharon Keogan:** I rise this morning to raise an issue that has been brought to my attention by a number of families across the country; namely, the handling of malicious, vexatious and repeated unfounded referrals to Tusla. Genuine concerns about a child's welfare must always be reported and investigated. Child protection must come first but we must also recognise that the system can be abused. At present, there appears to be a gap in how repeated malicious referrals are identified and addressed. While attention is rightly focused on the child who is the subject of the report, it appears that there is no system of procedure for identifying those who repeatedly make allegations that are found to be unfounded. The result is that

innocent families can be subject to repeated investigations and disruptions, while the person making the allegations effectively faces no scrutiny. This places a burden on families and diverts scarce resources away from the children who genuinely need protection.

There is another concern and I want Members to listen to this very carefully. Even where a referral is found to be unfounded, records can remain on file until the child is 24 years old. While these records may not always affect employment, they remain with the child protection system and can be viewed by many other State workers in the future. Human nature being what it is, the reality is that a history of referrals, even unfounded ones, creates an assumption of "where there is smoke, there is fire". Demonstrably false and malicious allegations should be taken off the record and there should be consequences for the accuser. Other jurisdictions, like Canada, America, Australia and the UK, have adopted sophisticated approaches that distinguish between good faith reports that prove unfounded and reports that are malicious and knowingly false. Some have systems for identifying repeat vexatious reporters, while others provide mechanisms for sealing or removing records where allegations are proven false.

I call on the Minister for children to examine and adopt these proposals. It is very concerning for children and their families when false reports are made.

**Senator Margaret Murphy O'Mahony:** I would like to start by welcoming our new colleague Ray McAdam. I have done so privately, but I would like to officially congratulate him and say that I am very much looking forward to working with him. This is a great opportunity for him and a lovely time for him and his family. I wish him well.

A little kindness goes a long way. Tomorrow is World Kindness Day. I would like to encourage everyone here, not just for tomorrow - but maybe especially for tomorrow - to spread a little kindness. If they see someone with a nice jacket, they should tell them that it is nice. It does not matter if the person is a stranger. Maybe they should pick up the phone. If they have been meaning to call a friend for the past few months and they have not got around to it, they should do it tomorrow. They should ask someone if they are okay, and not only ask them but listen to what they say. We all have a habit of saying "How are you" and going off. They could say "Oh, I feel like blowing up". Sometimes people do not listen. We should spread a little kindness here and everywhere else and be very conscious of doing so, and not just tomorrow. We should smile or say hello to a stranger. As a society, we have become very judgmental. We never know what someone is going through, so we should scatter a bit of gold dust tomorrow and every day.

**Senator Manus Boyle:** I want to raise the issue of staffing shortages in public health and community nursing. I have serious concerns about the failure to replace public health nurses and community registered nurses who are on maternity leave or long-term sick leave or who are retiring or moving to other posts. This is putting huge pressure on existing staff, increasing the workload and leading to longer waiting lists and delays relating to patient care in our community. In one local network that has five vacancies or absences, it has been left to two public health nurses to manage a caseload of approximately 1,000 children alongside their other duties. This is simply not sustainable. Children, vulnerable people and families are at risk of not receiving the timely care and support they need. Staff are struggling to access annual leave or other leave entitlements. We cannot continue to expect fewer nurses to deliver the same level of service. Urgent action is needed to fill these vacancies, support staff and protect

essential community nursing services. What I am afraid of due to what I have heard in Donegal is that there are so few community my concerns up the line, because this is an urgent matter that we need to look at.

**Senator Chris Andrews:** In the past week, two shocking eviction cases in south Dublin were brought to my attention. The first, as Senator Clonan outlined yesterday, involves a mother of three children, two of whom have serious disabilities. The family is about to be thrown out on the street, through no real fault of their own, as a result of a very unpleasant legal dispute involving an ex-partner and a vulture fund. They are being thrown out of a home that has been specially adapted to the needs of the children. This will deprive them of their critical disability support overnight. Tragically, there is a real likelihood that the children will have to go into State care because they cannot receive the care they need in emergency accommodation. The other case involves an 82-year old woman who was suddenly evicted from the home she has lived in for decades, despite co-operating fully with the sales process. The sheriff appointed seven men to enter her home. They did so while she was in the bath. She was removed without being given an opportunity to collect any of her belongings beyond the clothes on her back. Three months later, she has still not been able to access her belongings. The financial institution responsible for her eviction has ceased all contact with her and has not given her any clarity regarding the six-figure settlement from the sale of the house that she is due.

In both these cases, the evictions were pushed by vulture funds, with no regard for the people living in the properties those funds are profiting from. It is really sickening that financial institutions can have such power over vulnerable people, particularly in circumstances where children and elderly people are involved. Vulture funds and big developers are given every favour and advantage by the State, yet vulnerable people are left to sort out their own issue. There is no regard had for the catastrophic consequences. Evictions like these need to be addressed by the Minister for justice. The Minister needs to intervene because these evictions have ruined people's lives. He needs to show what side he is on and stand up for ordinary people over the vulture funds.

**Senator Anne Rabbitte:** I welcome the announcement from the Minister for Health, Deputy Carroll MacNeill, yesterday evening that 184 student nurses will be offered the opportunity of permanent contracts in the west and north west. That is an absolutely fantastic intervention by the Minister. It is the mature thing to do here because, ultimately, all of the students have graduated in the west. They are from all over the country; they are not just Galway kids. It is absolutely brilliant to think that good practice is going to prevail here in order that when we train young people and if they so wish, they can be kept on in the hospitals where they have trained. It should be standard practice right around the country that when students graduate, they are offered the opportunity to hold on to their permanent contracts. I applaud the Minister on that.

In the same way, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and speech and language therapists should also be given the opportunity to stay in their regions. Unfortunately, we do not have the same level of opportunity for those who graduate in the west at the moment. Perhaps we are over budget in our region, in the mid-west and in the south, so the only opportunities are on the east coast. Occupational therapists, physiotherapists and speech and language therapists are getting opportunities to work in the HSE in the midlands and in north-

west Dublin. When young people graduate, if they choose to stay in a region, we should offer them the opportunity to do so. They learnt how to work in those places. Let us not be constrained by budgets. While I understand that is the case, there is a huge need for therapists to be retained. I have no doubt that the Minister will take that on board. It is a practical intervention that would make a seismic difference.

**Senator Evanne Ní Chuilinn:** I have two guests in the Public Gallery this morning who I want to mention and welcome. The first is Ella Fitzsimons, my husband's niece, but I claim her as my own. Ella is with me on work experience today. She is from Templeogue and goes to the High School in Rathgar. I have Tiernan Simonieu as well, who is an older brother of my daughter's gymnastics buddies Ava and Ben. Tiernan is from Crumlin, which is beside where I live, and goes to Templeogue College. They are with me for the week and they have been a wonderful addition to my office.

I want to talk about Kristian Jubani. He is going to do, and already has done, something significant. We have only ever won seven Youth Olympic Games medals. Kristian will arrive home to Dublin tomorrow. The colour of the medal is still up in the air but he will have an Olympic medal when he comes home. He will arrive into Dublin Airport at 1 o'clock. He fights for gold at 12.30 p.m. Irish time today. He will bring home silver anyway, but it could be gold. The final fight is today. Kristian is a 17-year old from Crumlin. He has been boxing his whole life. He is amazing. His speed and power are frightening. He says himself that he is going for gold today, and I would back him 100% to do that. He has done something extraordinary. We do not send many young people to the Youth Olympic Games. We do not send a huge team. We send a very select few. We sent three athletes across all our sports to the Youth Olympic Games in Dakar this week, and Kristian is one of them. He is bringing home a medal. That is a huge deal. I will read a short quote before I finish up. He said, "I am just a young fella from Crumlin. I'm at the big stage, and I'm putting Crumlin on the map, so I'm happy about that." Everybody in Crumlin is so happy about that. He has done an amazing thing in his career so far.

*11 o'clock*

He has been an amazing boxer. His parents have supported him the whole way, his club in Crumlin has supported him the whole way, but he has made this happen. He is bringing home at least a silver and maybe a gold tomorrow. I would encourage anybody who is available at 12.30 p.m. to watch the live feed of the fight. He deserves all the support he can get.

**Senator Laura Harmon:** I want to talk about rent increases. We have seen some very worrying statistics published recently. Just yesterday, the Central Statistics Office showed that rents have increased by 36% in the last five years, and this is the highest that rents have ever been in this country since they were first recorded in 1996. What we are dealing with here is poverty and an increased risk of poverty across the country. In the last year alone, on average, in the private rental sector and across the board, rents have increased by 7%. When it comes to local authority housing, rents have increased by 12.7% in the last year, which is the highest increase in local authority rents that we have seen in ten years.

We also know that one in four people living in rented accommodation in Ireland is at risk of poverty. We know that 40.6% of those living in social housing are at risk of poverty after

rent is taken into account. For those who are on social support payments, such as HAP, when we take rent out of their deductions, they are at risk of poverty at a rate of 58%, which is higher again. At a time when 5,830 children are living in emergency accommodation in Ireland, we should have a debate with the Minister for housing on how the housing crisis is impacting people in terms of poverty in this country. I looked on yesterday as I saw Spain having a national strike, which included housing because of the cost of housing and rents in that country. This is one of the biggest issues of our time in Ireland and we need to address it.

**Senator Aubrey McCarthy:** I would like to mention a report that is about to be published by Tiglin. My colleague, Senator McDowell, has already spoken about drug-related intimidation this morning. Tiglin is about to publish its report on Tuesday, when its representatives will be in the audiovisual room in Leinster House. What they are finding is that over half of the people now presenting to Tiglin do so due to cocaine. There is a huge cocaine crisis in Ireland. Cocaine, both powder and crack cocaine, now accounts for 50.4% of all the people who come in through the rehab centres at Tiglin. The last few weeks have shown us, in the hardest way, how addiction affects not only the individual who takes the drugs, but also families, parents, partners and whole communities. We have also seen how it can take lives.

I have mentioned many times my work in the Lighthouse on Pearse Street. Behind every person and behind every statistic that Tiglin has in its annual report, there are talents, gifts and abilities that seem to be lost sight of. That is why Tiglin works with the whole person. It works with their physical and mental health, but also their relationships, family supports, housing and so on, because addiction hits the whole family and the whole community. The report that is being published shows that 112,000 meals have been served in the last year at the Lighthouse, but also that 388 family support sessions have taken place. Some 111 third level certificates up to degree level have been given out through SETU. The numbers that have been fed and the families supported, and the people finding their way back into society, show that it actually works. However, services are being stretched and the crisis is pushing them to the limit.

It is not a problem for somebody else. It is not a problem just for NGOs. It is a problem for the whole society. We need a national response. I ask the Leader to bring to the House the Minister with responsibility for the national drugs strategy to discuss it. Behind every addiction, there is a person and a family, and the ability to change their lives.

**Senator Eileen Lynch:** I rise to speak about a very important organisation across rural Ireland, the Irish Countrywomens Association, ICA. I ask that we arrange a debate with the Minister for rural and community affairs on funding and support for the ICA. I have received correspondence and been in contact with the Boherbue guild in my constituency of Cork North-West. It is raising what I think is a very fair question: are long-established organisations such as the ICA receiving recognition and support that reflects the work they do in our communities? As I mentioned in the House last week, I recently attended the 90th anniversary of the Cork federation of the ICA. For many years, ICA guilds have given women opportunities to learn, to develop skills, to build friendships and to take an active role in their communities. In rural areas in particular, that regular meeting can be an important source of company and support for somebody who may otherwise suffer from rural isolation. The ICA also preserves skills and

protects heritage and native crafts, such as lace making and felt making. It supports local causes and provides a strong voice for women.

Behind that work are volunteers who are giving their time, paying membership fees and fundraising to keep their guilds going. We cannot afford to take that commitment and their role in our communities for granted. Those in the Boherbue guild make an important distinction in that being eligible to apply for a competitive grant does not by itself provide sustainable support. Meeting room hire, heating, insurance, transport and materials are recurring bills, and they have to be paid whether the guild succeeds or fails in a grant application. I believe their request is constructive. They want fair consideration for funding. They also want a voice in consultation and recognition of the community networks they have maintained over decades. They also see opportunities to work with newer organisations and to share knowledge, facilities and experience.

I ask the Minister to engage directly with the ICA, examine access to funding for core running costs and consider how greater certainty can be provided for local guilds. The ICA's contribution is undoubtedly still needed today, and our support and funding should reflect that.

**Senator Sarah O'Reilly:** I want to raise the issue of trying to secure a residential placement for one of my constituents with a disability. Over the last few weeks, my office has tried to contact the HSE every single day on behalf of this constituent. We have called and left messages, but we have not received one callback or response to the case. I find it completely unacceptable for a public body to just let the phone ring or to pass the buck and not have the decency to explain if a placement for this person is available. The person has a severe disability and is being cared for by their elderly parent, who is unable to continue with care. The family was told over a year ago by the HSE that a placement was in the pipeline, yet the case was only logged in September of this year. Members can imagine the shock when the family heard this latest update. Now, they have discovered through RTÉ that the HSE has no plans to offer any new residential placements for the remainder of this year.

Some 2,000 children and adults are awaiting residential care nationwide, which is heartbreaking. The HSE will not fund alternative respite, offer jobs to graduate nurses or provide residential care for people with disabilities. Our health service is not fit for purpose, in my opinion. Money is being flittered away through layers and layers of management and outsourcing. There is an unexplained €784 million overspend this year, yet there is apparently no more money for residential care. All the disability action plans in the world sound great, but the reality is that elderly parents are trying to provide care for children with severe disabilities until their deathbed. It is a disgrace. Disabled people need to know where they will live and who will support them when a parent dies or is no longer able to provide care. This is not happening. We need the Minister in here to answer questions.

**Senator Garret Kelleher:** I wish to speak about the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person (Amendment) (Spiking) Bill 2023, which will progress through Second Stage in the Dáil this evening. I commend Young Fine Gael in particular on bringing this forward, as well as the Senators of the 26th Seanad, including the now Deputy Barry Ward but also the Ceannaire and the Leas-Chathaoirleach, on listening and taking this important legislation through every Stage in this House.

This Bill is about recognising spiking as the serious crime that it is and ensuring those who are responsible are held to account. Spiking is defined as administering a substance to someone without their knowledge or consent. This can include putting a substance into somebody's drink, injecting them with a drug using a needle or giving someone a larger quantity of alcohol than they were aware of. The intention is to overpower or sedate a person, cause harm, facilitate rape or sexual assault or to commit another offence. It is an act of abusing power over another person. It can leave a devastating and long-lasting impact on victims. Spiking is not currently a stand-alone criminal offence in Ireland and while existing offences such as poisoning can apply, they do not provide the specific legal recognition that the crime of spiking requires.

Between 2021 and the end of 2025, An Garda Síochána received 339 reports of spiking. This amounted to an average of one incident every six days, but we know that many incidents go unreported and it is fair to say that this number equates to only a very small fraction of what is actually happening. We have become accustomed to taking our own precautions against spiking. Parents warn their children to be careful of their drinks while they are out and friends keep an eye on each other's drinks. We have the responsibility to protect ourselves but we must also ensure that legislatively the law protects people from the offence of spiking. This is why this Bill matters. It creates a specific criminal offence for spiking and recognises the danger in its own right, sending out a clear message.

This is a very strong example of how youth political organisations can bring about meaningful change in public policy. I commend all of those involved in this positive and effective campaign to date.

**Senator Mike Kennelly:** I wish to again raise the Ballyheige water supply line that has been affecting over 3,500 customers since 7 October with a do-not-consume notice. This is still ongoing. I have raised this and have asked the Ministers concerned for updates. I have asked Uisce Éireann to come and sort out the issue as soon as possible. While I respect the work that has been done on the ground, we are over five and a half weeks into this do-not-consume notice. Some of the 3,500 customers have had a temporary supply and 200 customers are on the Listowel line now. There is a Glenderry issue that Uisce Éireann has taken five and a half weeks to check. This would supply another 180 of the 3,500 customers but it still has not been done.

I understood from the Minister's office that €5 million was set aside to connect the line from Ardfert to Ballyheige. It is a long-term solution. I brought that solution to them three weeks ago and, as of today, nothing has happened in relation to starting the works to complete that project. The money is there. We have been told that the boreholes have been dug in the last three weeks and that samples have been taken. This is total disrespect for the people in Ballyheige and north Kerry. Uisce Éireann is refusing to meet the community in a public meeting to express where this issue is currently at, what Uisce Éireann has done, what the cause is and what the solutions are. What Uisce Éireann is getting away with down there is totally unacceptable. It is pitting councillors, Deputies and Senators who are bringing back information. I brought that information back three weeks ago and nothing has been done about it. I ask that the Minister for housing and local government visit Ballyheigue and the area and to give us the work we were promised three weeks ago to solve this issue for the people of north Kerry.

**Senator Dee Ryan:** I wish to raise a very serious and important issue that is ongoing in Limerick. That is the matter of the CCTV centre at Moyross. In Limerick, we have a very unique system. We have the largest network of community CCTV in the country. We have almost 400 cameras across our city and county. That is unparalleled anywhere else in the country. It emerged from a huge need we had for enhanced community safety in areas that were suffering really badly from feuds and criminality 15 years ago. It has been funded through regeneration in Limerick. Regeneration funding is being wound down and all the schemes that are currently funded through it are being mainstreamed into their home Departments. Unfortunately, this particular project, which is of vital importance to people living in the city and county, has kind of fallen between two stools. There is no clear and definable area or funding stream where it can move to.

Last year, the Mayor of Limerick stepped in and bridged the gap in funding as it was being reduced but this year, regrettably, he says he is unable to do so. I wish to thank the Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Services, Reform and Digitalisation, Deputy Chambers, and the Taoiseach for their responses to calls for intervention that have been made across the House and by me and my colleagues in Fianna Fáil in recent weeks. They have acknowledged the importance of these community cameras and have indicated their willingness to try to help resolve the issue. I also urge the Mayor of Limerick, and the Departments of justice and housing, to meet in the subgroup the Minister for justice, Deputy O'Callaghan, and the Minister for housing, Deputy Browne, agreed to commit to in order to find a sustainable ongoing solution for funding for this important service in Limerick. Regrettably, that subgroup has not convened in the last 12 months. However, I urge all parties to get together to find a sustainable solution to this funding, so the workers in the community centre who operate this CCTV scheme and the communities that benefit from it are not faced with the uncertainty and precipice we are now at.

**Senator Cathal Byrne:** I join with colleagues in speaking about the importance of the spiking Bill that passed this Chamber. It is important for young people who are becoming interested in politics to know that if they do join a political party, whatever that party might be, there are opportunities to put forward ideas. In this particular instance, this was an idea that came from Young Fine Gael. As Senator Kelleher mentioned, it was supported and passed in this House. It is important, as the Bill is now making its way through the Dáil this afternoon, to recognise that achievement and to thank the members of Young Fine Gael who presented the idea in recognition of a serious problem that is happening up and down the country.

I acknowledge the decision of the board of the HSE to give approval for the New Ross primary care centre. This is a very significant milestone in the journey to ensuring that New Ross town, a town of 9,000 people, has its own primary healthcare centre, as exists in other places like Enniscorthy and Wexford town.

**Senator Paraic Brady:** I wish to also congratulate Young Fine Gael, Regina Doherty and everybody associated with the spiking Bill going through the other House today. I speak as a father, but I also had a family member who had their drink spiked a number of years ago. It is very worrying to see it take so long to get to this stage today. It is an offence and should always be treated as an offence for anybody to spike the drink or inject anybody in order to take advantage of them on a night out or at a social occasion.

I want to raise an issue about the live exports of cattle in this country. We have seen live exports to Algeria cease over the last number of weeks. We have seen our exporters with in excess of 13,000 calves held up in lairages at a huge cost to them. In marts, we saw that type of animal drop in price by almost €300.

When a farmer has 30 cows and they are selling 30 calves and they are losing €300, the maths for the year are very easy to add up. They are into a negative. If it is €300 for any one animal and ten animals are €3,000, then it is €9,000 for anyone who has a small herd of 30 cattle. It is a huge loss. I urge Bord Bia to come out and give us a statement of where it is looking at other markets because we have to keep that market open. Our local farmers and farming economy depend on live exports leaving the country.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** I welcome the school completion programme from St. Catherine's National School in Dublin 8. They are guests of Deputy Cummins. They are all very welcome. I hope that they enjoy their visit to Leinster House.

**Senator Gareth Scahill:** It is fitting that the visitors, who are the guests of Deputy Cummins, are in the House because I would like to call the Minister, Deputy Browne, into the House to have an open debate about commercial rates. It has been raised repeatedly in recent weeks. We are seeing local authority budgets coming up all over the country at the moment. It is about supporting our SMEs. A lot of our rural businesses do an awful lot of planning and forecasting. A lot of what they have been told in recent years has been to the effect that we will make this increase now and then it will be set for the next three or four years for the term of the local authority. Unfortunately, every local authority at this moment in time appears to be looking at getting an increase in rates.

I would like to debate the consistency of the service that is being provided across local authorities. While we all welcome the public realm works that are taking place, including on accessibility and maintenance, and I have to compliment the local authority staff, especially in my own home area of Roscommon, there needs to be a lot more engagement with our businesses. We need to support them. The Minister has acknowledged that a modernisation needs to take place. We could have a very constructive conversation in this House if we were given the opportunity. I would like to call for that, if possible.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** I call the Leader to respond.

**Senator Garret Ahearn:** I thank the, I believe, 20 Senators who made contributions.

Senators Fitzpatrick, McAdam and McDowell touched on community safety, particularly in inner city Dublin and a meeting that was held recently that no agencies attended, which does not seem to make sense. We have the Minister, Deputy O'Callaghan, in next week on community safety, so there will be an opportunity to speak on that. There is a business group, We Are Dublin Town, that is seeking establishing a safety warden scheme, similar to the pilot scheme that the Minister, Deputy McEntee, supported. What is important is that it is not used as a political opportunity, but that all public representatives come together and see this as an opportunity to support the inner city. The Minister will be in next week and there will be an opportunity for a debate on that.

Senator McAdam spoke about mental health and access to services. This is an issue across the country. In fairness to the Minister of State, Deputy Butler, she has done an awful lot of work and increased the amount of funding year on year in mental health. She brought one of the biggest Bills - the Mental Health Bill - through both Houses, but it is not enough and more needs to be done. People need to be supported. It seems strange that people are turned away if they have referral letters. I will take that up with the Minister of State and we will have an opportunity to see what is happening there because that does not seem right.

Senator Tully spoke about self-employed tax returns. I will speak to the Minister. Revenue is normally a very good organisation. In fairness, it is one of the best public bodies to deal with. It is a small issue, but it can be very frustrating for a client when they are dealing with their tax return at this time of year.

Senator Cosgrove spoke about the subminimum wage. This has been there for a period. We as a Government have always tried to support employment and opportunities. The Senator spoke about how it was a challenge for young people in particular to get on the working ladder. One of those issues is the cost for employers to employ people. One of the opportunities to bring someone up from an intern or a young age to get onto the working ladder is that subminimum wage. It is not something that the Senator agrees with, but it is something that has been quite successful. It does employ people. There are a lot of young people who are not on the minimum wage and are on higher wages. However, the Senator is talking about a particular cohort and we are more than happy to have a debate on the matter. As a Government, we are always happy to have a debate on employment. The one thing that the Opposition cannot criticise us for relates to employment and the number of people who are employed in this country, with an increase of 1 million people in the past 15 years taking us from 1.8 million to 2.8 million. The foundation of any family unit or young person is to have a job. Let us talk about the details of it in a debate.

Senator P. J. Murphy spoke about Paul Conroy. What a career Paul has had. It is important to acknowledge it. I hope that even though he has retired, he will continue to inspire young people in his club of St. James's and his parish going forward. I have no doubt that he will.

Senator Keogan spoke about the referrals to Tusla that were unfounded. I am aware that it is likely that it happened, but I am not aware of any particular case. I have no doubt that it happens and that referrals go to Tusla that are found to be not true. I can see why records have to be kept of such cases, but as the Senator said, there needs to be a distinction made between cases that Tusla deals with and situations where referrals are put in that are just not true. It does not seem right that it should be on someone's record for 24 years. Data protection means that people should not be able to see any of that, but I take the Senator's point. I will speak to the Minister about it.

Senator Murphy O'Mahony spoke about World Kindness Day, which is tomorrow. I could not think of a better Senator to raise it. She acts as though it is World Kindness Day every day. It is important that we all be conscious of spreading a little bit more kindness, particularly in this Chamber. Actually, this Chamber is good, but maybe the other Chamber needs to learn that lesson a bit more.

Senator Boyle spoke about the public community nursing challenge. If there are only two nurses dealing with 1,000 kids in Donegal, that is impossible. No matter how good those two

nurses are, they cannot manage that to the requisite a level. I will speak to the Minister about that.

Senator Andrews spoke about two evictions. Senator Clonan spoke about the issue yesterday. In my response, I asked Senator Clonan to send me the information on the single mother with kids. I do know what can be done, but I will see what I can do. If Senator Andrews has the information, I ask him to pass it onto me. I ask him to send the second case on to me as well because an 82-year-old woman should not be evicted and have her belongings taken from her or not given to her, essentially. If the Senator has those details, I would more than happy to put further representatives on his behalf.

Senator Rabbitte spoke about the 184 student nurses who are getting permanent contracts. I agree with her, in that this should be done in other areas in health as well. We should encourage people who go into education in health to remain and work in Ireland, and particularly to give them the opportunity to be able to work outside of Dublin and in the areas they want to live in, whether that is Galway, Limerick, Tipperary or wherever.

Senator Ní Chuilinn spoke about Kristian who is fighting in the Youth Olympic Games in an hour's time. We all support him. He has done incredibly as a 17 year old from Crumlin in Dublin. The Senator told us privately yesterday that the whole community was all behind him. We wish him well in an hour's time.

Senator Harmon spoke about rent increases. Rent increases are a challenge. It is part of the housing challenge that we have. Luckily, our housing numbers are increasing every year. We are looking at 40,000 houses at the end of this year. One of the reasons for that is the increased build in apartments, which helps in terms of rent. It is all about supply. Increasing supply manages rent more. I am more than happy to have a debate on that. The Senator is correct in saying that people who live in rented accommodation have a greater possibility of poverty. We need to be able to support them more. Luckily, a lot of measures have been put forward at the moment. We will see it in the development waiver scheme for developers to try to speed up building.

That scheme was brought in two years ago. It was criticised by pretty much everyone in the Opposition that we were supporting developers, but look at what it is doing now. Developers are trying to finish their builds by the end of the year so that they can avail of the waiver scheme. That is good for people right across the country. They are getting more houses and apartments. Taking that into account, however, I am more than happy to have a debate with the Senator in this regard.

Senator McCarthy raised the report from Tiglin, which will be published on Tuesday in the audiovisual room in Leinster House. I look forward to listening to it. In a way, it is depressing that over half the cases coming forward are cocaine-related. Addiction, as the Senator knows, is a terrible disease. He has asked for a debate on it. The Oireachtas Committee on Drugs Use published a report in this regard. While I am willing to have a debate on that report, we are thinking of giving it a couple of months so that we can see the findings from that report of the committee. Perhaps in the new year – I have spoken to other Senators on this – we can arrange a debate on that report, the issues of addiction and drugs and what can be done going forward. While I am happy to have the debate in two weeks' time, it will be more beneficial if we have it in the new year.

Senator Lynch spoke about the ICA. It does incredible work across the country. It deserves more recognition for the work it does. It has an opportunity to apply for funding through the Department of rural affairs. It does not seem to get its fair share, however, particularly compared with some other organisations. I will speak to the Minister for rural affairs, Deputy Calleary, in this regard. He should be coming into the Chamber to have a debate on rural affairs. I will speak to him on it. Certainly, I do not want to see the ICA losing out on opportunities that other organisations are getting.

Senator Sarah O'Reilly spoke about the need for a residential place for a constituent and how she is not receiving a response from the HSE. There are a number of avenues available to the Senator. We have a HSE contact for Oireachtas representatives. She could use that avenue. Obviously, she has the opportunity to submit a Commencement matter on the issue. She also has colleagues in the Dáil who could put down a parliamentary question, which requires a response. Parliamentary questions mandate a response. I encourage the Senator to do that.

Senator Kelleher raised the issue of the spiking Bill, as did Senators Byrne and Brady. This was initiated by a youth organisation – it happened to be Young Fine Gael – that identified a loophole affecting young people and students in particular across the country. It is the first youth organisation ever to receive cross-party support in the Seanad. I commend every single Senator who supported that Bill a number of years ago. It was introduced by the Leader of the Seanad at the time, former Senator and current MEP Regina Doherty. It received widespread support in the House. I encourage all Members of Dáil Éireann to support the Bill. It will have a huge impact on young people in the future. I thank the Senators for raising the matter.

Senator Kennelly spoke about the water supply at Ballyheigue. On the same day we started, both our areas had do-not-consume notices. That notice was in effect for approximately two weeks in my area. It is back to a boil water notice at the moment. However, the Senator's area has had a do-not-consume notice for five and a half weeks. Oireachtas representatives for Tipperary ended up having a meeting with the CEO of Uisce Éireann in Leinster House. I suggest the Senator, along with the other representatives for the area, requests a meeting in this building with the CEO of Uisce Éireann on this issue in order to have a constructive meeting about what is happening. It is utterly unacceptable that 3,500 households are not able to consume water for almost six weeks. We are only five weeks away from Christmas. Are they getting any indication as to whether they will be able to consume water during Christmas? It seems atrocious. The very least the CEO of Uisce Éireann could do is hold that meeting. I suggest to the Senator – his area has similar representatives to my area – to try to make that meeting constructive because the meeting we had turned into a shouting match. It is quite difficult to do that with a number of the representatives from Tipperary. I hope the same does not happen with the representatives from Kerry.

Senator Dee Ryan spoke about the CCTV centre in Moyross and the 400 cameras that are dotted across the city and county. Subgroups are set up for a reason so that people engage and work together for the betterment of the city and the area. I encourage all people to do that. The Senator has not named anyone, but I suspect there are people who are not engaging in that process. It is there for a good reason. I encourage people to engage with it. Funding should be put in place. If people come together, I am sure a solution can be found to make sure those cameras are in place. They are in place for a good reason, that is, to ensure people, especially young kids and elderly and vulnerable people, are protected. I will speak to the Minister for

justice, Deputy O'Callaghan, on it. It seems to me that there are people – possibly political or non-political people - who do not want to work with each other on it. I encourage them to do so.

Senator Cathal Byrne spoke about the new primary care centre in New Ross. It is hugely welcome in the area. The Senator has been working extremely hard on this over the past number of months to try to get it over the line. Once approval is secured, it is about moving forward. Now that approval is confirmed, we know that, in time, the residents and people of New Ross are going to have their own primary care centre. That is a huge advantage for the area. I see the benefits in Cahir in my area. We do not have to go to Clonmel or Cork anymore. We have our own primary care centre on the doorstep of a small town. New Ross will similarly benefit.

Senator Brady spoke about live exports. Senator Daly also mentioned this issue yesterday. We need to open up more markets. The Senator is aware of areas around the world where we have opportunities to open up new markets, particularly in Asia and other areas. Bord Bia and Enterprise Ireland need to play a role in widening that market for Irish beef. I will speak to the Minister, Deputy Heydon, in this regard. I spoke to Senator Daly about this issue recently. It is a challenging time when we consider that farmers are losing approximately €300 per cow simply because an opportunity in Algeria is not available at the moment.

Senator Scahill raised the issue of commercial rates and the consistency of service. We have not had the Minister, Deputy Browne, into the Chamber for a while. I will try to bring him in. This time of year is always a challenging time. Councillors are put under huge pressure to agree to budgets that lead to a raising of rates or the local property tax, LPT. It is never a case of reducing the budget. It is an opportunity for the Minister to come into the Chamber to speak on the matter. There is inconsistency in the way councils deliver in this regard. I will speak to the Minister, Deputy Browne, on it.

Order of Business agreed to.

## Protection of Young Persons in Employment in the Food and Beverage Services Sector: Motion

**Senator Garret Ahearn:** I move:

That Seanad Éireann approves the following Regulations in draft:

> Protection of Young Persons (Employment in Food and Beverage Services Sector) Regulations 2026,

a copy of which has been laid in draft form before Seanad Éireann on 24th September, 2026.

**Senator Laura Harmon:** I move amendment No.1:

To insert the following after "Seanad Éireann":

> "notes that:

- the draft Regulations will permit employers throughout the food and beverage services sector, and not only in licensed premises, to employ young persons aged 16 and 17 years until 11 p.m.;

- section 15 of the National Minimum Wage Act 2000 provides for employees under the age of 20 years to be paid a prescribed percentage of the national minimum hourly rate of pay, and that the percentages currently prescribed under that section allow employers to pay employees under 18 years of age less than the full national minimum hourly rate of pay;

- the Regulations will therefore extend late-evening working for young persons in a low-paid sector while those young persons may lawfully be paid less than adult colleagues doing the same work at the same hours;

- section 15(4) of that Act sets a minimum, but no maximum, percentage, and the Minister may therefore prescribe a percentage of 100 per cent by order without further legislation;

believes that:

- young persons who do the same work, at the same hours, as adult employees should receive the same rate of pay, and that the national minimum wage should be replaced by a living wage;

calls on the Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment to:

- prescribe, under section 15 of the National Minimum Wage Act 2000, a percentage of 100 per cent in respect of each category of employee referred to in that section, and to bring forward legislation to repeal that section;

-introduce a statutory living wage; and".

**Senator Nessa Cosgrove:** I second the amendment.

Amendment put:

| The Seanad divided: Tá, 10; Níl, 28. | |
|---|---|
| Tá | Níl |
| Andrews, Chris. | Ahearn, Garret. |
| Boyhan, Victor. | Boyle, Manus. |
| Cosgrove, Nessa. | Brady, Paraic. |
| Harmon, Laura. | Byrne, Cathal. |
| McCormack, Maria. | Byrne, Maria. |
| Murphy, Conor. | Clifford-Lee, Lorraine. |
| Noonan, Malcolm. | Comyn, Alison. |
| O'Reilly, Sarah. | Costello, Teresa. |
| Stephenson, Patricia. | Crowe, Ollie. |
| Tully, Pauline. | Curley, Shane. |
| | Davitt, Aidan. |
| | Fitzpatrick, Mary. |
| | Gallagher, Robbie. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Kelleher, Garret. |
| | Kennelly, Mike. |
| | Keogan, Sharon. |
| | Lynch, Eileen. |
| | McAdam, Ray. |
| | McCarthy, Aubrey. |
| | Murphy, P. J. |
| | Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret. |
| | Nelson Murray, Linda. |
| | Ní Chuilinn, Evanne. |
| | O'Donovan, Noel. |
| | O'Loughlin, Fiona. |
| | Rabbitte, Anne. |
| | Ryan, Dee. |
| | Scahill, Gareth. |

Tellers: Tá, Senators Laura Harmon and Nessa Cosgrove; Níl, Senators Cathal Byrne and Mary Fitzpatrick.

Amendment declared lost.

Motion agreed to.

## Short-Term Letting and Tourism Bill 2026: Second Stage

**An Cathaoirleach:** I welcome guests of Senator Evanne Ní Chuilinn, Ella and Tiernan. Ella is the Senator's niece and Tiernan is the Senator's neighbour. They are here on work experience. They are most welcome to Seanad Éireann.

I also welcome Deputy Noel McCarthy and his guest, Gerry Conlon. They are also most welcome to Seanad Éireann. I thank them for being here.

I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Richmond, to the House. He is most welcome to Seanad Éireann. The debate will follow the normal pattern. The Minister of State will contribute for ten minutes, group spokespersons for eight minutes and all other Senators for five minutes. When there are no remaining Senators indicating to speak, I will call the Minister of State to conclude and reply to the debate. He will have ten minutes to do so.

Question proposed: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Neale Richmond):** On behalf of the Minister, Deputy Burke, I am pleased to introduce this important legislation to the House. The publication of this Bill represents a significant milestone in the development of a modern regulatory framework for short-term accommodation rentals in Ireland and the fulfilment of our obligations under the EU short-term rental regulation. That regulation, which came into effect on 20 May, provides for the collection and sharing of data relating to short-term accommodation rental services and aims to enhance transparency and oversight in the sector. At its core, this Bill is about establishing a clear, fair and effective

framework for the regulation of short-term letting in Ireland. It will ensure that hosts and platforms operate within consistent rules, public authorities have access to the information necessary to perform their functions effectively and policymaking is informed by reliable evidence.

Over the past decade, the short-term letting sector has undergone significant expansion. Online platforms have transformed how accommodation is marketed, booked and provided, creating new opportunities for tourism and generating additional income for property owners. Short-term letting now forms an important part of Ireland's tourism accommodation offering. The scale of this activity is considerable. Fáilte Ireland estimates that, as of September 2026, approximately 31,770 short-term letting properties were advertised across two of the largest booking platforms operating in the Irish market. Despite this growth, the State has lacked the tools necessary to obtain a complete and accurate picture of the sector. The absence of a comprehensive national register and consistent market information has created challenges for policymakers and regulators in monitoring the sector and understanding its national and local impact. This Bill addresses that gap by establishing, for the first time, a national registration framework for short-term lettings involving stays of up to 21 consecutive nights and giving effect to the data-sharing arrangements required under European law.

Fáilte Ireland will be the competent authority responsible for administering the framework. It will establish and maintain the national register, operate the single digital entry point required under the EU regulation and oversee the collection and sharing of relevant information. These measures will provide a more comprehensive understanding of short-term letting activity, give hosts clarity and certainty regarding their obligations, establish consistent requirements for online platforms and support informed decision-making in areas such as tourism, housing and regional development. Importantly, the framework also supports the Government's objective of ensuring that long-term residential accommodation is prioritised in areas experiencing housing pressures. The Bill, therefore, supports both tourism and housing policy objectives.

Under the Bill, all hosts providing short-term accommodation rental services will be required to register with Fáilte Ireland. It will issue a unique registration number for each unit. Registration will be straightforward and fully online. The system is designed to minimise administrative burden, while collecting the information necessary for effective regulation. A nominal registration fee of €25 will apply, prescribed by Fáilte Ireland through regulations. Hosts must display their registration number on all advertisements and listings. Fáilte Ireland will verify submitted information to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the register. Online, short-term rental platforms will also play an active role in supporting compliance. They must display registration numbers, conduct random checks on listings, submit specified rental activity data to Fáilte Ireland and remove or disable access to listings where required by law. These obligations reflect the central role of platforms in the market and align with the EU short-term rental regulation.

The Bill also provides Fáilte Ireland with the powers necessary to monitor compliance and investigate suspected breaches. Registration officers and authorised officers may conduct inspections, carry out investigations and require the production of records and information, where necessary. A graduated enforcement regime will apply. For hosts, measures include fixed payment notices and summary offences. For online platforms, an administrative sanction process will apply where legal obligations are breached. Where appropriate, matters may be

referred to an independent panel of adjudication officers, whom the Minister will appoint. The panel will determine whether a breach has occurred and, where warranted, may impose financial sanctions of up to 2% of annual worldwide turnover. This approach ensures proportionate and effective enforcement, accompanied by appropriate procedural safeguards.

A key requirement of registration is that hosts must confirm that their accommodation is planning compliant. The Government recognises the importance of clarity and consistency in this area. On 3 November, the Minister for housing, Deputy Browne, obtained approval to publish the national planning statement for short-term letting activity. This establishes a clear and consistent planning framework, providing certainty for hosts, local authorities and communities. The statement restricts the approval of new planning permissions for short-term letting in cities and larger towns with populations in excess of 20,000. At the same time, it provides a pathway for existing operators to regularise their position through a presumption in favour of retention permission in specified circumstances where properties have operated continuously as short-term lets for at least seven years and no enforcement action has been taken. A simplified administrative application process for retention was introduced on 29 September 2026.

The Bill does not alter existing arrangements for genuine home-sharing. Letting rooms in a person's principal private residence will remain exempt from planning requirements. A home-sharer may also continue to let their entire principal private residence for up to 90 cumulative days per year while temporarily absent. Beyond that threshold, planning permission for change of use will continue to be required. Existing hosts in locations with populations of fewer than 20,000 people will have a two-year period to regularise their planning position, providing a proportionate pathway to compliance and supporting an orderly transition to the new framework.

*12 o'clock*

The legislation also strengthens co-operation between Fáilte Ireland, public authorities and other competent bodies in carrying out their functions under national and European legislation, including the short-term regulation and the Digital Services Act.

Another important provision establishes a dedicated registration framework for limited visitor stays in purpose-built student-specific accommodation. This is not a new activity, as many providers already accommodate visitors outside academic term time, making productive use of otherwise vacant capacity. Since 2017, 16,704 purpose-built student accommodation beds have been delivered, bringing total stock to more than 49,700. Current projections indicate a need for approximately 42,000 additional student beds over the coming decade. These provisions place existing practice on a clear statutory footing through a proportionate registration framework. Registration will operate on a three-year cycle and complement, rather than duplicate, existing Residential Tenancies Board requirements, which focus on the landlord-tenant relationship. The framework will provide greater transparency and regulatory oversight while supporting the continued use of otherwise vacant student accommodation during holiday periods. This increases accommodation capacity at times of peak demand, improves the efficient use of existing assets and contributes to a more resilient and sustainable tourism sector, while preserving the primary role of these developments as student accommodation.

The Bill also modernises Ireland's wider tourist accommodation regulatory framework. It updates provisions governing hotels, guest houses, hostels, holiday camps, caravan sites and camping sites to reflect contemporary operational, administrative and regulatory requirements, while repealing outdated provisions relating to accommodation categories that no longer reflect current tourism practices. A key reform is the introduction of an independent appeals process for decisions relating to statutory registers established under tourism legislation. The original legislative framework, dating back to the Tourist Traffic Act 1939, did not provide for such a mechanism. The new process will ensure that registered accommodation providers have access to an independent review of registration and grading decisions, strengthening confidence in the administration of the registers and bringing the framework into line with modern standards of transparency, accountability and procedural fairness.

This Bill represents a practical and proportionate response to a rapidly evolving sector. It establishes, for the first time, a comprehensive national framework governing short-term letting, strengthens regulatory oversight, improves the quality of information available to public authorities and ensures that Ireland fully implements its obligations under EU law. Through the establishment and modernisation of statutory registers, public authorities will have access to more complete, accurate and up-to-date information on accommodation providers and accommodation capacity. This will support better policy-making, more effective enforcement and a stronger evidence base for decisions affecting tourism, housing and regional development.

Beyond short-term letting, this Bill delivers the most significant modernisation of Ireland's tourism accommodation registration framework in decades, updating legislative provisions, strengthening governance arrangements and introducing independent appeals processes across a range of statutory registers. Most importantly, it reflects the Government's determination to address the impact that the growth of short-term letting can have on housing availability in areas facing significant housing pressures, while continuing to support a vibrant and sustainable tourism sector. By bringing greater transparency and oversight to the sector, this Bill will help ensure that homes are used for their intended purpose, provide policymakers with the information needed to respond to emerging pressures and support a more balanced approach to the use of accommodation across the State. In doing so, it will contribute to protecting housing supply for local communities while maintaining the important role that tourism plays in our economy and regions.

Senators should note that a number of Government amendments will also be brought forward to support the effective implementation of the Bill. I look forward to engaging constructively with colleagues across the House as this Bill progresses through the legislative process. I am grateful to Senators for their contributions to the debate to come.

**Senator Linda Nelson Murray:** I thank the Minister of State for being here. I liked the last couple of lines of the speech, particularly the reference to amendments being looked at. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Bill. There has been a lot of conversation about it. In the joint committee on enterprise, we worked extensively to understand this in terms of tourism in Ireland and of housing. We produced a good report on this last week.

I recognise the need to address our housing challenges. We need to ensure that family homes, particularly in our towns and cities, are not being taken out of the long-term housing

rental market and used exclusively for short-term letting. However, it is important that we do not confuse large-scale commercial operators with ordinary people providing much-needed tourist accommodation in rural Ireland.

As I mentioned, the Joint Committee on Enterprise, Tourism and Employment has spent considerable time on this. Our report recognises both sides of the argument: the need to return housing to the long-term market and the importance of short-term letting to rural tourism. In many coastal towns and villages, particularly along the west coast, there is simply no hotel down the road. Small self-catering properties, converted buildings and family-run accommodation are often the only option available to visitors. In my home town of Navan, we have only two hotels and a massive population. We are close to the Hill of Tara and the beautiful Newgrange monument, and there are oodles of activity centres, including our own. We have horse racing, golf courses and Emerald Park, and we do not have enough accommodation. Those visitors spend money in the local shop, pub, restaurant and café. They support jobs and sustain local communities. If we remove that accommodation without providing an alternative, we risk damaging the very tourism businesses and communities we should be supporting.

I have some concerns. It is important that we distinguish between the corporate operator and the small host. Someone who owns and operates dozens of properties is in a completely different position from a family renting out one or two properties, perhaps earning a modest supplementary income. I wonder whether we should be looking at requiring all marketing agencies to be based in Ireland or the EU, or to have an Irish office. Should we also be looking at housing marketing agents who would normally advertise houses but who, in many instances, also advertise short-term lets? Will this all apply to them as it does to Fáilte Ireland?

We also need clarity around planning requirements, particularly in towns and villages with populations below 20,000. The Minister has indicated that short-term lets will require commercial planning but what exactly does that mean for an existing property? Does it mean a complete change of use from residential to commercial or can an existing planning permission remain in place with an additional permitted use for short-term tourist accommodation? That distinction is hugely important. For many existing operators, the cost of a full commercial change of use, including building and fire regulation requirements, could make their businesses completely unviable.

I was given some figures this morning that indicate that in 2025, 1.4 million bed nights were booked, with income to rural areas of €13 million. They are massive figures. We need to recognise that for many of these hosts, short-term letting is not a full-time, year-round commercial activity; it is supplementary income. We must ensure that regulation is proportionate to the nature and scale of the activity. I read that 75.5% of guest nights occur outside Dublin and that 50% of annual short-term let guest nights in southern, northern and western Ireland occur in just a three-month period, the summer. In the joint Oireachtas committee, we had officials from four county councils in from different parts of the country. The question I asked them was about what impact this will have on their housing stock and what impact will it have on tourism in their county. It startled me that they did not know.

I am concerned about the implementation timeline. The Minister intends to open the register on 1 December, with existing hosts expected to register within a month, but we have been told by operators that this is simply not enough time. We are introducing two new systems, the

register and the single digital entry point. Fáilte Ireland has yet to fully communicate the registration fees, which are around €25, the registration number format, the renewal process and the practical guidance hosts will need. How can we expect people to comply with a system when they have not yet been properly told how it works? December is also one of the busiest periods for tourism accommodation. It may not be reasonable to expect thousands of small operators, Fáilte Ireland and local authorities to navigate a completely new system over Christmas. In our business, we are in hospitality and leisure, and at Christmas you make your wages for the year. It is such a busy time. Should we seriously consider moving the commencement date to January or February?

It could be argued that we have been talking about this long enough and people should have been ready but, in fairness, premises and businesses are not going to act until they are fully sure of dates and particulars. The Minister of State was going through this in the Dáil yesterday and in the Seanad today. That is fast, and I do not want these operators to panic, especially not at this time of year.

I emphasise that our focus must remain on returning genuine residential homes, housing estates and apartment blocks to the long-term market, regardless of the population of the area. We need to protect housing supply, but we also need to protect rural tourism. Those objectives are not mutually exclusive. I want this Bill to work. I want a properly regulated sector, clear standards, reliable data and effective enforcement. However, I also want the small, genuine tourism provider to have a future. Last weekend in Cork, we had our own Ard-Fheis. Hotels were full, and I know quite a few people would not have been able to stay over if there had not been different rental options. We should be making it easier for people to do the right thing, not making it impossible for them to continue. I urge the Minister to take these concerns on board as the Bill progresses and to ensure that we get the balance right, which I am sure the Minister of State will let him know about.

Will consideration be given to a specific exemption or a lighter regulatory regime for small operators with four or fewer properties, while maintaining stronger controls on larger commercial operators? Could we extend the one-month registration period to three months and consider delaying commencement until January or February? What about pre-1963 vernacular structures? The report also highlights the risk of losing rural accommodation and the knock-on consequences for local businesses. Will this register bring homes back onto the housing market? Has any economic analysis been done by the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment on the job losses, the loss to revenue, the tourism loss and the cost to towns all over Ireland?

If there are fewer holiday lets in Ireland, fewer tourists will come here with families, which is the fear. The sector will also be less viable and the existing stock will not expand or develop. We cannot spend years trying to attract tourists to rural Ireland and then introduce a regulatory system that leaves them with nowhere to stay. It is very important there are constant reviews of how this legislation is working. I ask the Minister of State to review it three months after we introduce it, and again after six months and then to keep reviewing it. We all want to see the short-term letting Bill work but, as legislators, we need to make sure it works for everyone.

**Senator Aubrey McCarthy:** I thank the Minister of State and welcome him to the House to discuss this short-term letting Bill. Like my colleague, I sit on the enterprise committee. We

have had many witnesses come in to discuss the Bill, along with county councillors. One thing that shocked me, like my colleague, is that nobody seems to know how many houses will be released into the market. The Minister of State knows I have been working in the homeless sector for 20 years. In that time, I have seen what happens when there are no real rental options available. People who are working and families with children end up in emergency accommodation because there is nowhere for them to go, especially in major cities. When a Bill like this comes before the House and the enterprise committee, it is something I pay close attention to.

As my colleague summarised, the Bill does something that has never been done before, in setting up a register for short-term lets for stays of up to 21 nights. Fáilte Ireland will oversee the operation of the register. Every host has to have a registration number and that registration number then gets logged on the platform with any advertisement the host makes. The platforms will have to show those numbers and random checks will be carried out to make everybody has that data and complies. Serious breaches result in a 2% fine, which is the new element in the legislation, that is charged to the platform on its annual turnover worldwide. That is what will make a difference here.

For years, we have been talking about enforcement in respect of Airbnb, etc., but it seems it has not been carried out. This Bill gives responsibility back to the platforms and they have the power to act. I welcome that.

I fully support the Bill but that does not mean we should skip scrutinising it. It is happening very fast. The timetable was published on 23 October. The Committee, Report and Final Stages in the Dáil were all scheduled for a single afternoon, yesterday. Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh, who sits on the committee with us, said the committee report on pre-legislative scrutiny was not fully finalised before the Bill was introduced. That is a bit of an issue.

As my colleague mentioned, it is planned that hosts will start to register on 1 December and that has to be completed by 31 December. It is a tight window and it is happening very fast. My fear is if that we pass law in a hurry, we usually end up not giving it the scrutiny it deserves. The Seanad exists to do exactly that.

My other concern is about who the Bill will hit hardest. I received a lot of emails from hosts all over Ireland, not many of whom are in major cities. They are mainly from rural towns that have been home to self-catering cottages for more than 20 years. Now, owners have to prove they are compliant with planning before they can register. I know hosts in towns of 20,000 people or more have two years to get their planning in order, and that is fair. The Irish Tourism Industry Confederation has warned that these rules could reduce the number of short-term lets in rural areas. Many of those areas already do not have enough beds for tourism, as we found on the enterprise committee. As I mentioned, a lot of people have contacted me from rural areas and it seems there is potential to do damage to the tourism industry by not releasing any further beds.

Another concern I have relates to how we will know the law has worked. In 2023, Fáilte Ireland estimated there were 30,000 short-term letting properties advertised online. The purpose and whole point of this Bill is to bring as much of that housing stock as possible back into the housing market for people to have as homes. How many homes does the Government expect to return to the long-term rental market as a result of this Bill? I know Indecon estimates

it will be between 3,100 and 5,000 homes. There has also been a higher estimate of 9,000. All of that will depend on enforcement.

On its own, the register will not give houses to anyone. What it will do, I hope, is give us, for the first time, accurate information about where the homes have gone. I ask the Minister of State to commit to bringing that data back to the House within 12 month of the register opening. We will then be able to judge whether this law is working and bringing houses back into the market.

All unregulated short-term lets in high pressure zones should not be tolerated. From the Lighthouse, the homeless café I run, that every one of these lets is a home that is not available to a family, who are then placed in emergency accommodation. I see how that all works. I welcome the register but I will say it will only work if it is enforced. I want to make sure this does not impact and annihilate rural tourism.

**Senator Ollie Crowe:** I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Richmond, and his official to the Chamber. I welcome the discussion of the Bill to establish a new regulatory framework for short-term accommodation rentals in Ireland and give effect to the relevant EU regulation. This is a sector which has seen enormous growth in recent years and it is clear we need legislation to address it. I have concerns, such as those my two colleagues have raised, and there are certainly issues and challenges, but I am confident the Minister of State will deal with them. Fáilte Ireland has been designated the competent authority responsible for implementing the new framework, including the establishment and operation of a national register of short-term lettings, covering stays of up to 21 nights, for the first time ever.

The Bill has the competing demands of housing and enterprise to balance. The Bill recognises that we need to treat urban areas, where the housing challenges are particularly concentrated, differently from small, rural towns, which often depend largely on tourism for economic activity. County of Galway might be the best example in the country of that. We have significant challenges with housing in the city and housing needs but, equally, there are towns and villages in Connemara, east Galway and the Aran Islands that depend on short-term lets. The local economy runs on the spending of visitors to the area, who spend in restaurants, bars, shops, etc.

Last year, a record 8.4 million guest nights were booked in Ireland through online platforms. Most were outside of Dublin. In rural and coastal towns across the country, these visitors are essential to small businesses in those communities and tens of thousands of people who work in them. The Bill allows for hosts in locations with a population of under 20,000 to have two years to regularise their planning. It gives them time to do so while they keep trading and welcoming visitors to towns and villages across this country. People in Galway have told me this is a positive and sensible option to balance the competing demands this Bill seeks to meet.

The need for more transparency in the short-term letting sector has been highlighted in recent years and the Bill addresses that. It is designed to improve transparency in the sector by introducing a comprehensive registration system and strengthening the availability of reliable data on tourism accommodation across the State. It will support evidence-based policymaking, sustainable tourism development and effective enforcement, while ensuring compliance with Ireland's obligations under EU law.

It is welcome that hosts and the platforms they operate on will both have responsibilities under the Bill. The legislation will require hosts offering short-term accommodation rental services to obtain and maintain a valid registration number and display that number on advertisements and listings. Online short-term rental platforms will be subject to a range of obligations, including displaying registration numbers, conducting random checks on listings, submitting the required data on short-term rental activity and removing or disabling access to non-compliant listings, where appropriate.

Fáilte Ireland is the right choice as the competent authority responsible for compliance and enforcement.

These powers include the appointment of registration officers and authorised officers to conduct inspections and investigations, to require the production of information and records and to investigate suspect breaches of the Act and the EU regulation. Fáilte Ireland has the understanding of the sector required to undertake this role. Of course, it will need to work closely with other public bodies, which the Bill recognises because it strengthens co-operation between Fáilte Ireland and other competent authorities and relevant public bodies and provides for the collection, retention, processing and sharing of short-term rental data to support regulatory oversight and policy development.

I fully support the Bill, but, naturally, there are issues. The Bill takes an important step in delivering a modern regulatory framework for short-term letting in Ireland. By establishing the register, we will improve the quality of data on tourist accommodation and strengthen transparency across the sector. The framework will provide greater clarity for hosts and platforms, while helping public bodies to understand accommodation supply, and support the sustainable development of tourism throughout the country. It will also ensure that long-term rental accommodation will be prioritised, particularly in urban areas. I hope that will be able to keep the red tape to a minimum. I am sure that Fáilte Ireland will also want this outcome. From speaking to operators of short-term lets, I know that genuine hosts will want to comply. Let us make it as straightforward as possible for them to do so.

It is particularly important that the Bill is balanced and recognises the important role of short-term lets and the challenges relating to relate to urban areas. This is vital with regard to our housing needs. The legislation must also play a role in supporting the local economies of towns and villages throughout the country. Visitors to these areas support thousands of jobs that are not easily replaced. It is essential that account is taken of all of this. I hope the Bill will strike the right balance overall, and I am happy to support it.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I welcome guests of Deputy Jennifer Whitmore from Coláiste Chraobh Abhann in Kilcoole, County Wicklow. I thank them for being here.

**Senator Conor Murphy:** I welcome the Minister of State, who is here to speak on behalf of the Minister, Deputy Burke. I am also a member of the Joint Committee on Enterprise, Tourism and Employment. I reiterate some of the concerns expressed by colleagues on the committee. I hope the Government is in listening mode regarding some of the concerns that have genuinely been raised. The Minister of State said that the Government intends to table amendments to improve the Bill. I look forward to seeing them. I am sure that amendments will also be tabled by the Opposition.

There is no dispute about the fact that short-term letting needs appropriate regulation. However, regulation must be introduced carefully with proper consultation and full understanding of the consequences. Unfortunately, that is not what we have seen to date. The Minister had two and a half years to prepare the legislation, but we are now dealing with it by means of a rushed legislative process. I am particularly concerned about the disregard for organisations and individuals who contributed to the pre-legislative scrutiny process. Our committee heard from accommodation providers, tourism representatives, housing organisations and local authorities. These people took time away from their businesses to assist the legislative process. However, the Minister proceeded to publish the Bill on budget day before the committee had completed its work or issued its report.

There were also significant gaps in the information available to the committee. The national planning statement was not published until 3 November. How could stakeholders assess legislation when such an important part of the framework was not provided? Additionally, the Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage should have been involved in the pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill, given the significant housing and planning implications involved.

Short-term letting providers throughout the State, particularly those in rural and Border areas, are struggling to establish exactly what the new rules will mean for them. Many are small family businesses that have invested their own money in providing accommodation and supporting local tourism. They want to comply with the law but they need to know what is expected of them. The Fáilte Ireland register is, as others have said, due to open on 1 December, with a registration deadline of 31 December. The Government is placing considerable pressure on businesses during the Christmas period. The Government must recognise that these are real people and real business and not simply entries on a register.

I am also concerned about the wider economic consequences, particularly for rural and Border communities. Tourism is a major source of employment and economic activity in Border areas. Accommodation providers support a much wider network of local businesses, from restaurants and pubs to shops, transport services and visitor attractions. Short-term and self-catering accommodation plays an important role in making cross-Border tourism possible. In many rural locations, traditional family homes, converted farm buildings and small, family-run accommodation units offer options that simply cannot be replaced by hotels. If these properties are forced out of the market, the impact will be felt across the local economy. The Minister needs to explain what assessment has been carried out in respect of the potential loss of tourism accommodation and what consequences this could have for employment, visitor numbers and local businesses.

Sinn Féin has always recognised the importance of regulating short-term letting, particularly in areas experiencing serious housing pressures. We want to see homes return to the long-term residential market where they are needed by local people. However, there is an important difference between large-scale commercial property investment and genuine tourism accommodation operated by local families. A traditional holiday cottage in a rural community is not necessarily a property that would otherwise become a permanent home. Removing it from the tourism sector could simply mean losing valuable accommodation, visitor spending and local employment without making any meaningful difference to the housing shortage.

We need a regulatory system that recognises these differences and takes account of the circumstances in individual communities. We support the establishment of a national register, appropriate standards and proper enforcement but these measures must be backed by adequate resources and a workable implementation plan. The Minister must explain how local authorities will manage an additional workload associated with planning applications and how Fáilte Ireland will be equipped to administer and enforce the new system. Ultimately, this legislation is going to have a lasting impact on our communities, businesses and tourism industry. It should not be rushed through the Oireachtas simply because the Government has left itself under pressure to meet the deadline. I look forward to the Government's response and to its amendments. I also look forward to the opportunity to submit Committee Stage amendments.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I call Senator Stephenson who proposes to share time. Is that agreed? Agreed.

**Senator Patricia Stephenson:** I welcome the Minister of State. This legislation feels like it is designed to fail. We are all trying to get more accommodation onto the long-term let market. The goal of returning tens of thousands of homes to the rental market for individuals, couples and families is noble and important but we are not going to see this level of increase in homes because of how this legislation has been drafted. There are questions about how local councils are expected to grant planning permission for tens of thousands of properties in the space of one month over the Christmas period. These concerns have already been raised by several Senators.

Previous speakers referred to the fact that we have had two years to plan adequately for this legislation and have waited until the last minute to rush it through. This has happened a number of times with EU directives, whereby we are then told the EU states that we have to do it by this point. I recognise a huge amount of work is done by officials to prepare it but, at the same time, as legislators we deserve and should have substantial and significant time to review legislation, which will not be the case in this instance and certainly was not the case in the Dáil.

The original plan was to require property owners to register and get planning permission in towns of 10,000 people or more. Earlier this year, the threshold was increased to populations of 20,000. We will exclude a huge number of places and towns. It seems this was a Healy-Rae deal. This is my understanding of it and how it was reported at the time, in relation to agreements being made. The Healy-Raes are no longer in government, so it is even more frustrating that we are left with this much weaker form of legislation as a consequence.

One of the amendments my colleague Deputy Hearne tabled yesterday is quite basic in nature. It would require a property owner, when registering with Fáilte Ireland, to submit confirmation of compliance from the local authority in relation to planning permission. This is not even in the original legislation, so we have to ask what is the point. It seems like a massive loophole that the Bill is to make hosts or property owners register and get planning permission from the council but they are not required to prove it.

There is an issue with the 20,000 threshold. It is problematic because of how the policy decision was made but it is also problematic because in high tourist areas we need accommodation for workers and that seems to be completely missing from any analysis of this

matter. We have towns that heavily rely on tourism which need cafes, retail workers and restaurants.

The effect of unregulated short-term lets is that workers will have nowhere to live. We will not have anyone to sustain all of the economic benefits we need from tourism. We are shooting ourselves in the foot by stymieing the tourism industry in many ways. In rural areas, many of which rely on tourism, permanent populations are dwindling because people cannot find anywhere to live. I do not know how small businesses will function if no one is there to staff them.

We believe that everywhere should have these regulations. It should not be 20,000 or 10,000 but everywhere. My local town, with a population of 1,500, for example, has 247 accommodation properties on Airbnb and zero on Daft. There are more than 2,500 people living in Callan, another place in County Kilkenny. There are 721 properties on Airbnb and zero on Daft. What do young people have to look forward to if they cannot live near their families in the towns where they are from? Many of the reasons and driving factors behind that relate to the lack of long-term rental accommodation.

We have a serious concern around the grandfathering-in clause as well, because tens of thousands of short-term lets have been in operation for years without planning permission. If they are going to be grandfathered in, there will be tens of thousands of properties which will not even fall under this. That is hugely concerning. That is why it does not feel like this legislation has been thought out as a genuine attempt to bring back properties into the long-term rental market; it seems like a reaction. There is an obligation to do it because of the directive. We have been told we have to do it. This feels like a reaction to that, rather than something that we are actively trying to do for the betterment of the housing crisis we are seeing.

I have a few other questions about the enforcement mechanisms under the Bill and what sanctions and penalties will be in place when hosts are not compliant. The Bill has no mention of potential financial penalties or if the property will be removed from the online platform. It would be good to understand exactly how we are going to sanction this because people will just do what suits them. What we need is a proper assessment of housing need versus tourism need. Owners of multiple properties renting short-term lets because it is more profitable is not really acceptable when we have the scale of the housing crisis that we have. We need to support tourism accommodation around hotels and bed and breakfasts but if we have a whole swathe of houses which families and young people could live in but are excluded from because property owners are making much more money on short-term lets, that cannot go on when we have the emergency that we do.

**Senator Nessa Cosgrove:** Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire Stáit. I also welcome this debate. I am glad the Government is finally moving to regulate short-term lets.

It is almost a decade since my Labour Party colleague, the former Minister of State of State Kevin Humphreys, introduced a Private Members' Bill to ensure short-term lets would be classified as commercial enterprise and require planning commission. In 2019, the then Minister, Eoghan Murphy, the Minister of State's colleague, tried to promote this but with no sanctions attached. Fáilte Ireland set up the infrastructure for the register four years ago and the previous Government said it intended to do this in 2023. It is now four years on. In the

meantime, Threshold has reported the unchecked growth of short-term rental and the impact it is having on communities, not least Gaeltacht communities. The fact that the Government has continued to propose exempting towns of fewer than 20,000 is really disappointing. We look at Gaeltacht communities which are being completely robbed of people, not only with regard to protecting the Irish language itself, but of young people who want to start their families in the communities they grew up in and maintain speaking Irish on an everyday basis. This is a complete hindrance. There are many groups like BÁNÚ and Community Action Tenants Union, CATU, and Conradh na Gaeilge is a very big advocate for this. There have to be special exemptions for Gaeltacht areas. With existing operators, where we fall short is the two-year transition period for areas with a population of 20,000. That is far too long. If an operator is knowingly operating a short-term let that is not compliant, they do not deserve two years to rectify that. The operators know it is wrong. This allows those who ultimately fail to obtain planning permission to continue trading in breach of planning until 2029. Exempting operators to run short-term lets for seven years contradicts the entire purpose of the Bill, which must be to return homes back into the long-term rental or purchase market during a severe housing crisis. We are not talking about small providers. We are looking at big multinational corporation lobbies taking over and having de facto hotels, really. We welcome this debate on it, but particular attention needs to be paid to the figure of 20,000, and particularly to the Gaeltacht areas.

**Senator Frances Black:** I welcome the Minister of State to the House. I welcome this Bill because it is overdue. We have been promised a register of short-term lets, as others have said, since at least 2022. In that time families have been priced out of their homes in every city and town in this country, while the same homes have been advertised to tourists by the night. Fáilte Ireland estimates that there are approximately 32,000 short-term lets advertised online. The Government hopes this Bill will return approximately 10,000 homes to long-term renting. It would be great if it was more, but that is a positive. However, it will only be won if the Bill has real teeth, and if the platforms that profit from this market are held to account, and not just the individual hosts. My contribution is very simple. I support the Bill and want it to be stronger. I raise the question of who we are regulating and I will say a few words about how I see the Bill could be a little bit stronger.

The register opens on 1 December, and every host must be registered by 31 December. That timeline only means something if the platforms act on it. I want to raise four areas with the Minister of State and I will consider the amendments on Committee Stage in light of his response. First, on the take-down, a platform told that a listing is unregistered should have to remove it within a fixed number of days and if it does not, a penalty should apply for every day the listing stays up. A fine at the end of a long process is not enough. Second, on the level of sanction, a fine of up to 2% of turnover sounds large but for a company of this size, it risks becoming a cost of doing business. I wish to look at fines per listing and at higher penalties for repeat breaches. Third, on data, the Bill requires platforms to share data and I welcome that. That data should go to local authorities in full at address level and often enough to be useful. Late or incomplete data should itself be a breach. Fourth, on the seven-year presumption, I note that under the new planning statement a property let short-term for seven years gets a presumption in favour of permission. In a rent pressure zone that risks rewarding the people who ignored the rules the longest. I ask the Minister of State to look again at how that applies in those areas. I would also like to see the register made public and searchable,

with a definition of income ring-fenced for housing. I ask the Minister of State to report back to this House within 18 months on how many homes have actually come back into long-term use.

I want to touch a little bit on who we are regulating. This is the important piece for me. Airbnb's European and Middle Eastern headquarters are here in Dublin. This Bill says rightly that a platform is responsible for what it lists and if a property in Ireland has no registration number, the platform should not be taking money for it. I ask the House to hold that principle up against another set of listings. Airbnb lists well over 300 properties in Israel's illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank. In 2018, the company said it would remove them. In 2019, it reversed that decision. In August 2023, Sadaka and the Global Legal Action Network made a criminal complaint to the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau about Airbnb's Irish subsidiary in which they alleged complicity in the war crimes that underpinned the settlements and related money laundering offences. The Garda declined to investigate in October 2025. That refusal was quashed in our High Court after An Garda Síochána conceded the case, and as I understand it, the complaint is still being reconsidered. I make no comment on the outcome of that process but I make the point that we are about to tell this company it must answer for whether an apartment in Dublin has planning permission. It cannot be right that the same company faces no clear rule in Irish law when it profits from homes built on land taken from Palestinian families. The Oireachtas has passed a ban on settlement goods. Services are still not covered. That is the gap that the occupied territories Bill was written to close and Airbnb is exactly why it matters. I ask the Minister of State to bring that message back to the Government. I want to be fair to the genuine self-catering providers in rural and island Ireland as they are not a problem, as others have said.

Many of them feel that this Bill was not written with them in mind. Tough rules for the platforms in our cities should go hand in hand with a fair deal for the family running a holiday cottage on the coast or on an island. I ask the Minister to give the Bill real teeth against the platforms, use the data to get homes back to families, protect the rural operators and recognise that the principle at the heart of this Bill - that a platform answers for what it lists - does not stop at our borders.

**Senator Ray McAdam:** I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Richmond. I commend the Minister, Deputy Burke, on bringing forward a national framework for short-term letting. It is an important step towards better information, clearer responsibilities and more effective enforcement. The Bill gives Ireland a practical way to implement the European rules and to understand a market that has quite clearly grown considerably. In the figures mentioned by the Minister of State, Fáilte Ireland's 2026 estimate, based on the listings from the two largest booking platforms, put the number of advertised properties at just under 32,000, which represents an increase of about 15% from 2022. While this is an estimate of advertised properties, it is not a count of nights actually booked, nor is it proof that every listing represents a home withdrawn from the housing market. That distinction is exactly why I believe we need better data about where these properties are, how they are used and whether they are meeting planning requirements.

This time last year, I had the opportunity to address the European Parliament during regions week. I argued then with other mayors that legislative change was needed in this area and could bring about real benefits. Without shared rules and reliable information, cities and

municipalities have limited tools to manage a fast-growing accommodation market. Clear legislation can give responsible hosts and platforms greater certainty, but they can also help local authorities to enforce planning rules and support fair competition across the tourism sector. As Lord Mayor, and through my work with the EU Mayors for Housing Alliance, we saw housing as a European concern as well as a local one. The message of the then 18 - now 21 - cities that are part of that alliance was that cities need strong rules, access to reliable data and an ability to respond to local housing conditions. That is why a well-regulated short-term letting sector can welcome visitors and support local businesses, as my colleagues have already mentioned, while protecting homes and neighbourhood life.

The case for a stronger framework is clear from our experiences since 2019. Planning controls were introduced in rent pressure zones, but planning authorities, as we know, have found it difficult to identify property owners and prove that the property is being used on a short-term letting basis. As a result, only a small number of prosecutions have been secured. I want to stress that this is not a criticism of local authorities, but it shows how the system needs better information and clearer routes to enforcement.

The Minister of State has indicated that the Minister, Deputy Burke, is looking at Government amendments. I ask him to look at the Bill in three particular areas. First, we need to make local authorities full partners in delivery. While Fáilte Ireland will manage the national register, local authorities at the same time will have to determine whether properties meet planning requirements. Those authorities need timely access to information about the units in their areas, together with clear arrangements for referrals, verification and follow-up. This will require staff and the resources to carry out that work. Those of us who have served in a local authority know that our councils understand the communities they serve. They see where short-term letting is concentrated, where residents and citizens are under pressure and where tourism accommodation supports local activity. The Bill should set out a clear working arrangement between Fáilte Ireland and our local councils in order that information can be acted upon promptly. Responsibility must be matched with capacity to deliver it.

Second, we need to turn data into a clearer picture of what is actually happening locally. The register and platform information should support an annual report from Fáilte Ireland showing, at a local authority level, how many units are active, whether they are whole dwellings or rooms in a home, how many nights they are let and what compliance action has been taken.

Third, we need to build in a route for proportionate local action where evidence shows sustained pressure on housing. Conditions differ from Dublin to provincial or local towns and seasonal visitor destinations. While the national framework is essential, its operation should reflect those differences. I ask the Minister to consider providing for a review after full-year registration data, working with councils and representatives from the housing and tourism sector. If the evidence shows that commercial use of whole homes is reducing the supply of homes for residents in a particular area, councils and the Custom House could have a clear route to seek targeted measures. Any such measure should be evidence-based, proportionate and consistent with European law. With that, I commend the Bill.

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Neale Richmond):** In closing, I thank all Senators for their insightful contributions to this debate and

for the careful consideration they have given to this important legislation. I thank Senator McAdam and congratulate him, like many others have, on his election to the Seanad.

The discussion has reflected both the complexity of the issues involved and the importance of getting this policy right. Members from across the House have highlighted the significant contribution that short-term letting makes to tourism and local economies, while also acknowledging the genuine concerns that exist regarding housing availability in many communities. Those are legitimate perspectives and they are precisely why this legislation seeks to achieve a balanced and proportionate outcome. At its core, this Bill is about ensuring that Ireland has a modern, transparent and effective regulatory framework for a sector that has evolved significantly in recent years. The growth of online booking platforms and the rapid expansion of short-term letting activity have transformed the accommodation landscape, yet the regulatory framework has not kept pace with those changes.

The State does not currently have a complete picture of the scale or distribution of short-term letting activity, nor does it have the comprehensive data required to effectively monitor compliance with planning requirements or to support evidence-based policymaking. This legislation addresses this gap. For the first time, it will establish a comprehensive national register of short-term lets, providing transparency and accountability across the sector. It will create a reliable source of information for policymakers, regulators and the public. It will strengthen oversight, improve compliance and ensure that Ireland meets its obligations under EU law, particularly in relation to the implementation of the EU short-term rental regulation.

A number of concerns have been raised throughout this debate about the potential effects of these measures on tourism. Let me be absolutely clear - this legislation is not designed to undermine tourism, nor is it intended to restrict legitimate tourism accommodation unnecessarily. Tourism remains one of Ireland's most important indigenous industries. It supports employment, investment and economic activity in every region of the country. It sustains livelihoods in rural communities, coastal areas, towns and cities and enriches the social, cultural and economic life of our communities. The Government fully recognises that contribution, and remains committed to supporting a competitive, resilient and sustainable tourism sector.

However, we must also recognise that housing availability and affordability are among the most pressing challenges facing the country. In certain locations, particularly those experiencing sustained housing pressure, the growth of short-term letting activity has contributed to concerns regarding the availability of homes for local residents. While short-term letting is not the sole cause of these pressures, it would be irresponsible to ignore its impact where that impact is evidenced. The challenge for the Government is therefore not to choose between tourism and housing. Both are national priorities. Rather, the challenge is to ensure they can coexist in a way that is sustainable and balanced. This Bill is founded on that principle.

The measures contained in the legislation have been carefully designed to support that balance. The Bill does not impose a blanket prohibition on short-term letting. It does not seek to remove legitimate accommodation from the tourism market. Instead, it seeks to ensure that short-term letting operates within a clear and transparent framework, one that provides certainty for operators, transparency for regulators and confidence for communities. An important element of that framework is planning compliance. The national planning statement

approved by the Government on 3 November provides a clear and consistent national planning policy for short-term letting activity. It establishes certainty for property owners, local authorities and communities. The Minister for housing has introduced a streamlined change of use planning process specifically for short-term letting properties.

The planning and development change of use regulations for short-term letting, which came into operation on 29 September, significantly simplify the retention application process. Applicants are no longer required to submit many of the detailed plans and documentation normally associated with planning applications. A dedicated application form has been introduced specifically for these cases. These changes are intended to reduce administrative burdens and provide a straightforward pathway to compliance for operators who wish to continue their activity within the new framework. The Bill further acknowledges that adjustment will take time. That is why it provides for a two-year transition period for hosts operating in smaller towns in rural areas with a population of less than 20,000 people. This transition period reflects the Government's recognition that circumstances vary across the country, and that a measured approach is necessary. It provides sufficient time for operators to understand the requirements, regularise their position where necessary and adapt to the new system.

Taken together, these measures demonstrate that the Government's approach is not punitive. It is practical, proportionate and phased. It combines clear rules, reasonable transition arrangements and meaningful supports.

Importantly, the Bill goes beyond short-term letting alone. It modernises Ireland's wider tourist accommodation registration framework, strengthens governance arrangements, establishes independent appeals mechanisms and creates a dedicated framework for visitor stays in student-specific accommodation outside term time. These reforms will improve the quality of regulation, strengthen consumer confidence and provide better data and oversight across the accommodation sector as a whole.

Ultimately, this legislation is about ensuring that growth takes place in a managed and transparent way. As the accommodation sector continues to evolve, it is essential that policymakers have access to accurate information and that accommodation being used for tourism purposes is visible, accountable and operating within an appropriate regulatory framework.

This is not an unreasonable objective. It is the minimum that citizens should expect from a modern regulatory system. What would be difficult to justify is maintaining the *status quo* indefinitely. It would be difficult to explain why the State should continue to lack basic information about the scale of activity taking place in the sector, why concerns regarding housing availability should simply be set aside and why Ireland should delay implementing a regulatory framework that provides transparency, accountability and compliance with European requirements.

For these reasons, I firmly believe that this legislation strikes the right balance. It recognises the importance of tourism while acknowledging the need to protect housing supply. It supports legitimate operators while ensuring appropriate oversight. It provides clarity, certainty and transparency while equipping the State with the tools necessary to better understand and manage the sector in the years ahead.

This is a necessary, proportionate and forward looking reform. It reflects the realities of a changing accommodation market, responds to the challenges facing communities and provides a sustainable framework for future growth. I, therefore, commend the Bill to the House and look forward to continuing constructive engagement with Members as it progresses through the remaining Stages in the Oireachtas.

Question put and agreed to.

**An Cathaoirleach:** When is it proposed to take Committee Stage?

**Senator Linda Nelson Murray:** Next Tuesday.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Is that agreed? Agreed.

Committee Stage ordered for Tuesday, 17 November 2026.

**An Cathaoirleach:** When is it proposed to sit again?

**Senator Linda Nelson Murray:** Next Tuesday at 1 p.m.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Is that agreed? Agreed.

Cuireadh an Seanad ar athló ar 12.53 p.m. go dtí 1 p.m., Dé Máirt, an 17 Samhain 2026.

The Seanad adjourned at 12.53 p.m. until 1 p.m. on Tuesday, 17 November 2026.