

SEANAD NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2021

LABOUR

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Welcome to the Spring 2021 Newsletter from Senator Ivana Bacik.

I was honoured to be re-elected in March 2020 to represent Dublin University graduates in Seanad Éireann. I will make sure to keep you up to date with the work that I am doing in the Seanad, and would be happy to raise issues there on your behalf.

Email: ivana.bacik@oireachtas.ie or 01 618 3136.

Dear Graduate,

Welcome to my latest Newsletter from the Seanad. I am honoured to have been re-elected to the Seanad on the Dublin University panel. I am also delighted to have been appointed Labour Spokesperson for Children, Disability, Equality and Integration, and to have been reappointed leader of the Labour group in the Seanad. I look forward to telling you more about my plans for this coming term. We all know it is going to be a difficult time for the country, with the global COVID-19 pandemic affecting countries everywhere. The most important priority is to support the national public health effort. I will do all I can to help with this, as I know we all will.

Do keep in touch on ivana.bacik@oireachtas.ie – and thanks again for your support.

Stay safe.

Ivana



Handing in my nomination papers for the 2020 Seanad Elections in Trinity College.



With US President Joe Biden at Dublin Castle in 2016.



With newly elected Labour Senators outside the Convention Centre in June.

Due to current restrictions on gatherings due to COVID-19, tours of Leinster House have been suspended indefinitely. Once these restrictions have been lifted, I would be happy to welcome you to Leinster House for a tour – just contact my office. In the meantime, I am delighted to invite graduates to join me online and I would encourage people to get involved! I update my website and social media regularly and have transcripts of my Seanad contributions made available every week so that you can keep up with the work that I am doing on your behalf in the Seanad.

BORN HERE BELONG HERE CAMPAIGN

In memory of our great friend and former Labour Youth Chairperson, Cormac Ó Braonáin, who died tragically in 2019, the Labour Party and Labour Youth launched the 'Born Here Belong Here' campaign in November. This campaign seeks to achieve greater generosity in Irish citizenship law and support for Labour's Irish Nationality and Citizenship (Naturalisation of Minors Born in Ireland) Bill 2018 which returned to the Seanad for 'Committee Stage' on Wed 2 December 2020, having passed Second Stage in November 2018. The debate adjourned after an hour following an agreement with Minister for Justice Helen McEntee to work with her and her officials on the Bill, which will return for resumed 'Committee Stage' in 2021. I look forward to meeting with Minister McEntee to progress this Bill to provide greater security for undocumented children born in Ireland.



At a socially-distant protest against the closure of St. Mary's nursing home Merrion in August.

GENDER PAY GAP LEGISLATION

Women in Ireland earn on average 14.4% less than men; laws that require wage transparency have reduced the gender pay gap in other countries, and it is time to tackle the gap here. In 2017, I introduced our Labour Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (Gender Pay Gap Information) Bill; it subsequently passed all stages in the Seanad and Second Stage in the Dáil in 2018. My bill would require all companies with 50 or more staff to publish anonymised data showing pay levels and gender breakdown in their organisations, in order to see if a gender pay gap exists. The bill would then enable action to be taken against companies which pay men more than women. We in Labour have now restored the bill to the Order Paper of the Dáil - I will work with the new government to ensure that we have effective law in place soon to deal with this vital equality issue.

KEY PRIORITIES FOR THE COMING TERM

CHILDREN AND CHILDCARE – The lack of a cohesive national childcare policy has resulted in the emergence of a piecemeal, laissez-faire system in Ireland, with high costs and the highest proportion of private providers in the OECD. I have called for the introduction of a pilot scheme for affordable high-quality childcare, which could be expanded to universal public childcare in Ireland.

I have also sought the introduction of a 'bike to school' scheme to promote cycling as a mode of environmentally friendly and healthy transport for school pupils.

DISABILITY – I am a member of the Oireachtas Disability Matters Committee, responsible for monitoring the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

I have been advocating for greater rights for persons with disabilities; accessible transport; decongregation, and a move away from institutional settings; and full enactment of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015, among other issues.

WORKERS' RIGHTS – I introduced the Competition (Amendment) Act 2017, which provides collective bargaining rights to vulnerable self-employed workers like freelance journalists, actors and musicians.

My bill prohibiting discrimination against LGBT teachers and hospital workers became law in 2015. In September 2020, Labour tabled a bill to introduce statutory paid sick leave in Ireland, which, while not initially supported by government, may lead to the introduction of paid sick leave in 2021.

I will continue to work on workers' rights over the coming term, particularly in the context of the terrible unemployment rates as a result of COVID-19.

EQUALITY – I have campaigned tirelessly for marriage equality; equality in education; recognition of Traveller ethnicity and the rights of migrant communities. I pioneered the establishment of a multi-denominational school in my area, and my bills to legalise Humanist weddings, prohibit Female Genital Mutilation and ensure pension equality for same-sex couples, have all become law. I authored a ground-breaking 2013 report on Penal Reform, have led on changes to prostitution law, and have had substantial input into justice-related law reform. I will continue to push for greater equality and to ensure that new laws required to deal with COVID-19 do not impact adversely on the most disadvantaged in our society.

WOMEN'S CAUCUS – Over the previous Seanad term, I was proud to serve on the Executive of the Oireachtas Women's Caucus, established in 2016. Among other achievements, we held a very successful international conference of women's caucuses in Dublin Castle in September 2018, attended by women parliamentarians from across the world. In March 2019, we put forward a cross-party motion in both Dáil and Seanad on Period Poverty, drawing attention to the very serious implications of period poverty for girls and women, both in Ireland and internationally.

CLIMATE ACTION – I brought forward the first Climate Protection private members' bill in 2007 and served on the board of Friends of the Earth when it was first set up in Ireland. As a committed cyclist, I chair the Oireachtas All-Party Cyclists group which works with the Dublin Cycling Campaign in promoting greater safety and improved infrastructure for cyclists. I will continue to work for greater investment in cycling infrastructure, and on environmental policies to tackle the climate crisis, particularly as more people make the switch to cycling during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For more on my work in the Seanad, see www.ivanabacik.com