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SPRING 2018

UNCRPD

Transport

Budget

Census

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Civil  
Engagement  
Group

## A letter from John Dolan

### Greeting Everyone,

Over the past year I have concentrated on getting the UN CRPD ratified. Thankfully this has been done. I have also engaged with our local authority members across all councils to ensure that the benefits of the Convention come to local communities. Motions have been passed across councils calling for ratification and implementation of the Convention.

Having successfully completing the first part of my commitment as a candidate, namely ratification, I now move my focus to implementation.

Despite this success there is no room for complacency. Last November the Central Statistics Office informed us that 643,131 of our citizens, some 13.5% of the population, experience some level of disability. This figure also reflects an increase of 47,796 people with disability over the past five years.

I remain deeply concerned that our modern wealthy society has failed these citizens in many ways, as has successive governments. People still lead austere and excluded lives without the promise of the Republic fulfilled.

I will continue to do everything possible for our disability community during my time in the Seanad.

## RATIFICATION MEANS IMPLEMENTATION

On the 7th March the Dáil agreed to the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). Since then the decision has been registered with the United Nations in New York. It came into effect on 19 April. Ireland will have to give account, on a regular basis, to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on the progress it has made. Ireland's first report will be due in two years' time.

After years of promises that came to nothing it has finally been ratified.



Disability Protest. Bottom right the late John Doyle RIP - a leading disability advocate. Sadly missed.

I wrote to Leo Varadkar last May during the Fine Gael leadership election seeking ratification by the end of 2017. His reply stated "I am determined that we should ratify the convention this year even if it means departing from our normal practice of putting in place all the necessary legal provisions in advance."

This was a strong start for the new Taoiseach. He now needs to drive implementation across all Departments. The Convention aims to ensure that the human rights of citizens with disabilities, rights shared by all people, are fully and routinely present in their everyday lives. These include obvious areas such as employment, education, free and easy movement, public transport, housing, health and social services and income supports. There are other important issues for people with disabilities such as freedom of choice, respecting will and preference, bodily autonomy and dignity to also be delivered.

And let's be clear, the disabled people of Ireland and their families will only experience the benefits if implementation is fully and effectively implemented. Each year there must be real improvements across these areas.

Resources must be made available. Resources already in the system must be reviewed to ensure that people with disabilities are getting fair access and new resources are required.

Finally, there must be a cultural and attitude change across public administration and civil society to honour the expectations of people with disabilities to fully participate in the life of Ireland.

## MEETINGS & ACTIVITIES



*Ice Cream Party in aid of Down Syndrome Ireland*

During the past year I have met with a large number of disability groups, organisations and individuals with disabilities both inside and outside the Oireachtas. I have also held briefings and information days on behalf of disability organisations within the Oireachtas. I find these meetings extremely informative and of great assistance to my daily work.

## Transport

One of the areas of greatest concern and on which I have facilitated change since my appointment to the Seanad is access to public transport for people with disabilities. Last year I was shocked to learn that people with mobility impairments had not been taken into consideration by the NTA when awarding the new licence on the 717 Clonmel to Dublin Airport route, resulting in them no longer having access to wheelchair accessible buses.

In fairness to Minister Ross I have received a very good hearing from him on a range of public transport issues impacting on the disability community. At my urging Minister Ross recently announced that all Boards of public transport bodies will have at least one member who has personal knowledge and experience of the needs and difficulties facing people with disabilities while using public transport.

Minister Ross has also taken on board my demand that people who are deaf and those with visual impairments who live outside the Dublin Bus operational area be offered the same level of assistive technologies be they visual display or audio announcement of the next bus stop.

He has recently implemented my request to increase the fine for people who park in areas specifically designated for people with disabilities.

On a visit to Brussels I met with Commissioner Violeta Bulc's cabinet to discuss a range of transport issues impacting on people with disabilities throughout the EU. In particular, the regulations which discriminate against people who use wheelchairs requiring them to give 48 hours' notice to rail companies and the fact that 36 hours' notice must be given to bus companies.

I was delighted to be able to ensure that people with disabilities were invited in to give a presentation on their lived experience to the Transport Committee.



*Alannah Murray and Padraic Moran presenting to the Transport Committee.*

## Newly elected Lord Mayor's and Cathaoirlioh invited to the Oireachtas for briefing on current disability issues



In July last year I hosted a briefing of newly elected Lord Mayor's, Mayor's and Cathaoirlioh at the Oireachtas. I plan to issue a similar invitation to newly appointed Mayor's and Cathaoirlioh later this year as I felt there was substantial mutual benefit in the inaugural event.

I outlined to the Mayor's and Cathaoirlioh that I viewed them as key representatives of the local authorities and leaders on so many vital issues. I highlighted a key fact that people with disabilities and mental health needs are a minority of the population yet they most need active support to be able to lead full lives.

I explained the unique nature of Local Authorities in responding to disability issues. They are unique in two ways, firstly, they are directly elected by local people and secondly, they represent and support the place where people have their lives. Apart from the range of direct responsibilities which each local authority has it is also a fact that all other public services must be delivered in local areas; from education, policing, transport, income supports, health etc.

As all were well aware; each council area has a key role and a responsibility in providing support for people with disabilities and their families. I asked them to imagine each county and city as one that is known for its accessibility and welcome to people with disabilities and their families. That would bring vibrancy to their community, both social and economic, and most of all it is the right thing to do.

I asked the group to make 'disability inclusion' a priority, and to ensure that local authorities engage with disabled people and their representative organisations on an ongoing basis.

I look forward to continuing this conversation with Mayor's and Cathaoirlioh in 2018 and beyond.

## BUDGET 2018

Like most people in the disability community I was very disappointed in the detail contained in Budget 2018. Yes I accept there were some increases - mostly of €5 - to a wide range of allowances, and these of course will benefit people with disabilities.

I was determined to ensure that the government would recognise the major additional challenges faced by people with disabilities in their day to day lives and it is abundantly clear that additional finance, by way of increased allowances, would aid their inclusion.

I am determined to continue this fight in the coming months as the Government now has a responsibility to introduce specific additional measures on foot of the ratification of the UN CRPD.

I will be pursuing these issues with An Taoiseach and members of the Cabinet as we require a coordinated all Government approach on tackling disability issues which should be led by the Taoiseach himself.

This will be my biggest challenge in the coming months.

## Why has it taken 11 Years to Ratify the UN CRPD?



*Disability advocates protesting to ratify the UN CRPD*

During my time in Seanad Éireann - and previously as an advocate on disability issues - I constantly raised the failure of the government to proceed with ratification of UN

CRPD – all to no avail until March 2018. I sincerely hope that this is not just another indicator of our political establishment paying lip service to the disability community, while ignoring them on the substantial issues.

All in the disability community in Ireland will remember the 13th December 2006, when the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a landmark disability convention, the first human rights treaty of the 21st century and one that the then United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan said represented the “dawn of a new era” for around 650 million people worldwide living with disabilities.

The UN Secretary-General urged all 192 Member States, including Ireland, to quickly ratify the convention, which covers rights to education, health, work and a raft of other protective measures for people with disabilities.

Though Ireland was one of the first countries to sign the UN CRPD when it opened for signature in March 2007 (signing the Convention on the first day it was possible to do so), Ireland was the last EU country to ratify the Convention.

## Civil Engagement Group in Seanad Éireann



*Frances Black, Colette Kelleher, Grace O'Sullivan, Alice Mary Higgins and Lynn Ruane*

For nearly two years I have been a part of the Civil Engagement Group in Seanad Éireann - a technical group of Senators jointly committed to advancing civil society's cause inside Parliament.

Working together, when appropriate, the group has supported my own work, and has played leading roles in scrutinising and improving legislation on everything from the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill to the Heritage Bill.

Using our private members' time we have advanced legislation to reduce harm in drug use, to prohibit the sale of goods produced in illegally settled territory worldwide, to enshrine adult safeguarding in legislation, to ban the use of micro-plastics in consumer goods and to ensure that derelict houses and vacant sites are brought back into the critically strained housing market. We have also received support from the entire Seanad on motions calling for progress to be made for housing for people with disabilities and opposing disturbing elements of the European Union's trade deal with Canada (CETA).

## 643,131 Irish Citizens with a Disability

The Census 2016 Report (CSO) published on the 7th of November made very interesting reading and raises several issues, which simply cannot be ignored by Government or indeed wider society.

We learned that the number of people with a disability in Ireland increased by 47,796 over the past five years and now stands at 643,131, some 13.5% of the population. There was a significant increase in the number of young people with a disability; an increase of 11,828 among those aged under 20 years.

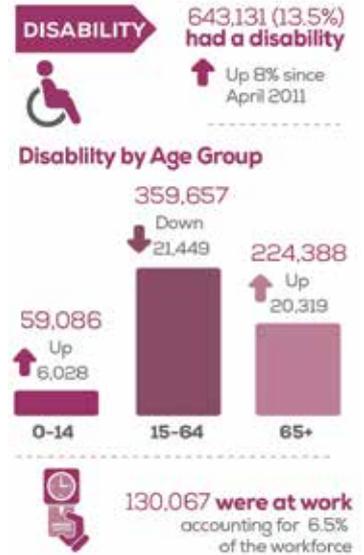
The critical issues of education, employment and living arrangements for people with disabilities were raised in the report.

A total of 112,904 disabled persons (19.3%) live alone in private households in April 2016, and the majority of those are aged 65 and over. The challenge of living alone is immense for many people with a disability. Many people need significant support to live independent lives and yet these supports often fail to meet the needs of the individual due to a lack of resources.

The report shows that disabled people suffer significant disadvantage in terms of education opportunities. Amongst those aged 15 to 50 years, just 13.7% had completed no higher than primary level education, compared with 4.2% of the general population. This imbalance is totally unacceptable.

Just over 30% of persons with a disability are in employment, compared with 61.4% for the population overall. 13.5% of Irish people have a disability yet just 6.5% of those at work had a disability. The unemployment rate amongst persons with a disability was 26.3%, more than double the 12.9% rate for the population as a whole.

I have raised these injustices over the past decades and continue to be deeply concerned that our modern wealthy society and successive governments has failed people with disabilities in many ways. I will continue the fight on behalf of the disability community during my time in the Seanad.



## Storm Ophelia



During the Met Éireann red weather alert at the time of Storm Ophelia I was responsible for securing an Irish Sign Language interpreter to be present, and in vision, at all National Emergency Coordination Group briefings for TV.

The presence of an interpreter had been an oversight by the Office of Emergency Planning when giving vital information regarding the storm. My office contacted the OEP for an ISL interpreter to be present at briefings and contacted the RTÉ news desk to have an ISL interpreter present during storm bulletins. As a result RTÉ transmitted additional ISL news bulletins.

## Secured amendments to the Fine Gael Motion on Services for People with Disabilities



I was very pleased to have amendments, which were not contested, successfully included in the Fine Gael Motion on 'Services for People with Disabilities' in the Seanad on Wednesday 21st February.

My amendments were very much in the spirit of strengthening Senator Martin Conway's motion and I was very pleased that they were all included.

I took the opportunity to make reference and indeed highlight the 'The Make Way day campaign', which involved many organisations, many people with disabilities and others.

The motion called for Minister of State McGrath, who was present for the debate, to give further support to these initiatives as they are vitally important in terms of awareness raising and attitudinal change.

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