

## Labour Party Submission to Taskforce on Safe Participation in Political Life

*September 2023*

### Introduction

The Labour Party is strongly committed to supporting the work of the Taskforce on Safe Participation in Political Life. Indeed, the concept of a Taskforce was first raised in the Dáil by Labour Leader Ivana Bacik TD and Deputy Bacik serves as a member of the Taskforce, appointed by the Ceann Comhairle.

A key legislative mechanism for combating abuse, Coco's Law, was proposed and introduced by Brendan Howlin TD.

Thus, the Party will actively contribute to the work of the Taskforce and looks forward to implementing the recommendations that it will develop.

Through participation in the work of the Taskforce, the Party will ensure that any recommendations include not only political representatives but also political staff, who are on the frontline for receipt of abuse in person, on the phone and on email.

### Civility in Political Debate, Online and Offline

Labour is committed to ensuring that its representatives and members engage in civil discourse at all times, including online. Such an approach to online civility is stipulated in the Party's Internal Social Media Guidelines.<sup>1</sup> The Labour Party undertakes to adopt and implement the recommendations contained in the NWCi Toolkit on Social Media Use.<sup>2</sup>

For Oireachtas members, the SIPO Code of Conduct should be amended to refer explicitly to online conduct, given the proliferation of the use of email and social media as a means of communication in political life.<sup>3</sup> The Oireachtas Dignity and Respect Statement of Principles and Policy may be instructive in the drafting of such amendments.

The Dáil Business Committee and Seanad Committee on Parliamentary Privileges should issue guidance to members on conduct of debates in the Houses to ensure debate is conducted civilly at all times.

The Labour Party reiterates its call for the establishment of a dedicated office in Leinster House, which will work with An Garda Síochána, the Association of Irish Local Government, and other relevant bodies and services, to provide wrap-around supports to public representatives who experience intimidation in the course of their work. We in Labour believe that this service must maintain clear and official lines of communication with social media providers, and with services which can provide pastoral support to public representatives and, importantly, to their families and staff. It is of utmost importance that City and County Councillors are included in such an initiative due to reports of increased threats of violence against them in recent years.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [201002\\_social\\_media\\_guidelines.pdf \(labour.ie\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWC Toolkit SocialMediaAbuse 2022FINAL.pdf](https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWC_Toolkit_SocialMediaAbuse_2022FINAL.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sipo.ie/documents/english/Code-of-Conduct-for-Members-of-Dail-Eireann-other-than-Office-Holders.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [AILG-CMG REPORT HIGHLIGHTS LEVEL OF THREATS AND HARASSMENT EXPERIENCED BY COUNCILLORS » AILG - Association of Irish Local Government 2023](#)

### Gendered Aspect of Abuse – Impact Upon Women’s Participation in Politics

The gendered nature of abuse has been well established, through the work of experts like Prof Maura Conway, Dr Tom Felle and Dr Ian Richardson.

The Labour Party notes the research conducted by Women for Election on the widespread and particular difficulties experienced by women in politics, both during election campaigns and upon taking office as a TD, Senator or Councillor.<sup>5</sup>

Labour endorses the action plan developed by the Oireachtas Special Committee on Gender Equality as to how to implement the recommendations Citizens’ Assembly.<sup>6</sup> The Taskforce should develop recommendations in harmony with those set out by the Oireachtas Special Committee on Gender Equality in relation to *Leadership in Politics, Public Life & the Workplace and Pay and Workplace Conditions*.<sup>7</sup>

### Employees of Oireachtas Members

The Labour Party notes the vulnerability of political staff who represent their employers at constituency clinics as part of their roles. Anecdotal reports indicate that incidences of inappropriate behaviour and harassment occur during clinic hours, with women staff disproportionately affected. The Taskforce should address these concerns of staff in consultation with SIPTU, which represents political staff in the Oireachtas.

### Entrance to and Egress from Leinster House

Labour unequivocally supports and seeks to protect the freedom of assembly and of protest, including outside and around Leinster House. Founded as the political wing of the trade union movement, Labour also strongly supports workers’ rights to a safe workplace, and to have access to unencumbered attendance and presentation at their jobs, free from intimidation, harassment, and threats of violence.

Crucial to the protection of these rights is the introduction of measures to ensure that Oireachtas members and staff are safe from violence and intimidation. The Taskforce should review existing protocols in place where a large protest is taking place on Kildare Street or on Merrion Square to ensure that nobody is hindered from entering the workplace. Such a review should examine international comparators, as well as the immediate introduction of a more detailed notification system of upcoming protests; the names of protest groups and the purpose of their gathering should be supplied, in addition to the time and date of their event. Moreover, more robust measures to ensure that entrances to the Leinster House campus are kept clear should be formalised.

Submitted by Ivana Bacik TD, Leader of the Labour Party, Leinster House, Dublin 2 (on behalf of the Labour Party).

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<sup>5</sup> [WFE-More-Women-Changing-the-Face-of-Politics-small.pdf \(womenforelection.ie\)](#) at 15.

<sup>6</sup> [Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality \(oireachtas.ie\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid* at 117-118.