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Pray and take action

The news is full of issues of concern to Christians.

The intention to ban so-called 'conversion therapy' is very dangerous unless it is limited to abusive and coercive practices not already covered by the law.

Left unchecked, it risks criminalising loving parents, dedicated teachers and faithful church leaders.

The social contagion of transgender ideology, the devaluing of life through assisted suicide and the restrictions on free speech and religious liberty seen elsewhere in

the world are also all very present in Ireland today.

Christians must play their part in ensuring that legislation and media opposition do not drive biblical beliefs from the public square. There is a desperate need to pray and take action to defend religious liberty, as the Bible expects us to do (1 Timothy 2:1-4; Acts 16:36-40).

God's Word encourages us to actively engage in politics – we should urge our leaders to pass laws which restrain evil and promote good.

Government seeks to fast-track a ban on 'conversion therapy'

The Government has vowed to bring a Bill before the Dáil to ban so-called conversion therapy.

In January, the Equalities and Integration Minister, Roderic O'Gorman, said he will push to get the legislation through by the end of the year despite admitting that 'conversion therapy' rarely takes place.

The Christian Institute's Deputy Director, Ciarán Kelly, said any such ban had to be limited to "abusive and coercive practices".

"People should be protected from physical

and verbal abuse, so if any genuine loopholes exist in the current law these should be closed. But Ireland can still avoid the sort of totalitarian ban that criminalises parents and the ordinary work of churches."

In February, a report commissioned by the Irish Government and published by academics from Trinity College Dublin found little or no evidence for 'conversion therapy' in the Republic.

However, the Government claimed it provided "an insight into how conversion therapy practices operate in



Ireland" and would "inform legislation".

Legal opinions by two top human rights lawyers, Jason Coppel and Aidan O'Neill, warn that outlawing 'the wrong kind of prayer' would breach freedoms under the European Convention on Human Rights.

UK-based LGBT activist Jayne Ozanne said that she was "thrilled" to hear of O'Gorman's pledge. Ozanne, Chair of the 'Ban Conversion Therapy' campaign, has previously called for "gentle, non-coercive prayer" to be made illegal.

Parents challenge promotion of gender ideology in schools

Parents across Ireland say teenagers should not be exposed to controversial teaching about 'gender identities'.

Responding to the draft Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum for 12 to 15-year-olds, parents raised strong objections to content which denies the reality of biological sex.

The document, backed by the Government, teaches that 'gender identity' is a "core" part of being human, and that it may or may not correspond with 'sex assigned at birth'.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment acknowledged that some parents had "expressed strong criticism" of the proposals. It noted concerns that it was "seeking to promote 'gender ideology'



by refusing to acknowledge the binary nature of gender".

The Institute's Ciarán Kelly welcomed the strong response from parents. "It's very simple, we're male or female, there's nothing in between, and to teach anything else is utterly misleading."

Doctors in the National Gender Service have expressed fears that children have been rushed onto 'sex-swap' drugs at a children's hospital in Crumlin, Dublin, despite being 'very unwell, depressed or self-harming'. Dr Paul Moran and

Prof Donald O'Shea said the youngsters are likely to suffer "significant regret".

Prof O'Shea described "the idea that you would just jump in with hormones and start treating, without social work input, without liaising with the school, the key worker" as "potty".

He told BBC journalist Hannah Barnes: "It is likely we will encounter significant levels of regret and other adverse outcomes in the Crumlin legacy group which will be difficult to defend."

Micheál Martin challenges fresh push to legalise assisted suicide

Micheál Martin has expressed his concerns about Gino Kenny TD's Bill, which seeks to liberalise the law on euthanasia and assisted suicide.

In an interview in December while still Taoiseach, Martin said he had concerns that

legislation will create "pressure on older people", particularly "people who are coming to the end of their lives".

Noting that improvements in palliative care had made the end of life more comfortable for both patients and their families, he warned that the repercussions of removing safeguards would be felt "far and wide".

Kerry TD Michael



Healy-Rae is to chair an Oireachtas Special Committee to discuss the practical, legal and ethical issues of legalising assisted suicide.

Euthanasia and assisted suicide were

legalised in Canada in 2016. Recent evidence shows that people there are now seeking help from medics to die for reasons such as poverty, depression and lack of care from the health service.



👤 Micheál Martin

Scottish 'sex-swap' Bill blocked

Last year, the Scottish Parliament backed a 'choose your own sex' plan to allow 16-year-olds to change their legal sex by self-declaration without a medical diagnosis.

Westminster has now stopped the controversial Bill from becoming law, saying it conflicts with GB equality law.



Look out for our new briefings on assisted suicide and conversion therapy



Church of England votes to bless same-sex partners



The Church of England has voted to welcome plans to allow churches to bless those in a same-sex partnership, but claims its doctrine of marriage remains unchanged.

In February, the General Synod supported a bishops' report recommending that "prayers of dedication, thanksgiving and for God's blessing" may be offered for

those who have been through a same-sex civil ceremony. Same-sex weddings will still not be allowed in churches.

The Institute's Ciarán Kelly responded: "It's terribly sad. No amount of dancing on pinheads can hide the fact that the truth of Scripture has been ditched in favour of the culture of the day."

The Church of Ireland does not permit same-sex marriage.

Justice Minister vows to end gambling 'Wild West'

The Minister for Law Reform has pledged to rein in gambling-related harms.

James Browne TD plans to impose strict limits on betting adverts and introduce robust safeguards to protect children from gambling. Those who fail to comply could face eight years in prison.

The Gambling Regulation Bill was approved by the Cabinet in November and began its passage through the Oireachtas before Christmas.



Other provisions include ending the use of credit cards to gamble, and the creation of a powerful new industry regulator.

Gamblers in Ireland lost approximately €1.36 billion in 2020. Browne said: "It really is a Wild West out there. Our



legislation dates from the 1930s and the 1950s. It's simply not fit for purpose at all."

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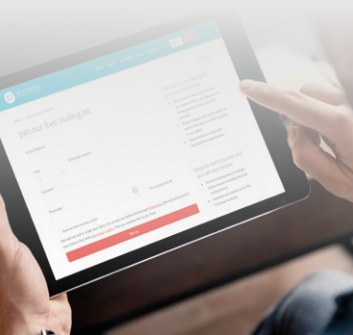


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Young people in danger from liberal drugs laws



Ireland's first 'shooting gallery', where addicts can take drugs without the risk of prosecution, has received permission to open in central Dublin for a trial period of 18 months.

The go-ahead was given despite fears of increased drug dealing, anti-social behaviour and its proximity to St Audoen's National School.

A report by planning inspectors flagged "the absence of adequate police resources to control such a facility in the city centre" but still approved the application.

A Private Member's Bill to legalise the possession of

cannabis for personal use has also been brought before the Dáil by People Before Profit TD Gino Kenny.

But while still Taoiseach, Micheál Martin responded by cautioning against 'glamorising' such a dangerous drug. He highlighted "real concerns within the health community and the medical community about what cannabis can do to young people".

Gardaí who catch people with cannabis can already issue just a caution. Since December 2020 more than 1,600 adults have escaped a possible criminal conviction.

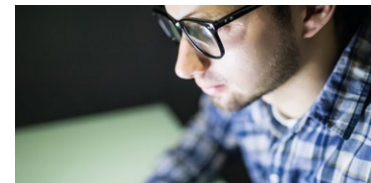
Number of porn addicts seeking help surges

Demand for help to deal with pornography addiction has rocketed over the last two years at a Munster clinic.

The Cork Sexual Health Centre has seen a 360 per cent rise in attendees at its programme addressing "problematic sexualised behaviour". It now has a seven-month waiting list.

Pornography is a factor for about eight in ten attendees, and it is common for men to admit to first being exposed to it as young as eight years old.

Donal Clifford, a psychotherapist at the centre, said: "The tsunami of pornography infiltrating our children's lives has arrived, but we're not going to recognise the consequences for the next couple of years."

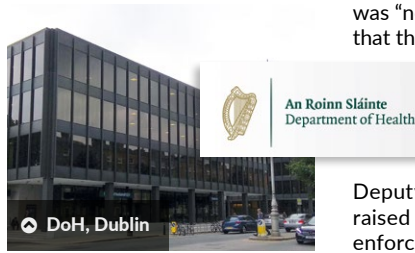


Department of Health presses ahead with censorship zones

The Department of Health (DoH) has re-emphasised its intention to impose censorship zones around abortion centres, despite concerns from the Gardaí.

In January, Muiris O'Connor, an Assistant Secretary in the DoH, told the Health Committee that the Minister, Stephen Donnelly, was committed to accessible abortion "without unwarranted interference or influence". He also clarified that the Department intended to include private property as well as public spaces in the scope of the so-called Safe Access Zones Bill.

In response, the Institute's Ciarán Kelly said: "Laws prohibiting harassment and intimidation already exist and



outlawing free speech as well as access to prayer and advice will not help women."

In 2019, Garda Commissioner Drew Harris wrote to the then Minister for Health Simon Harris to tell him censorship zones were unnecessary.

The Commissioner said any issues could be covered under existing law and "no incidence of criminality has been reported or observed". He added that there

was "no evidence to suggest that there is threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour directed towards persons utilising such services".

Late last year his Deputy, Anne Marie McMahon, raised concerns around enforcing the draconian rules and said the right to protest 'had to be respected'.

In December, the Director of March for Life UK, Isabel Vaughan-Spruce, was arrested for praying silently within a censorship zone in Birmingham, England. The clinic was closed at the time.

At her February court hearing, the Crown Prosecution Service failed to offer any evidence of unlawful activity and dropped the charges.

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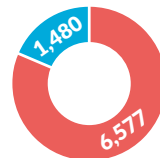


Medics: 'Don't fail mothers by ditching abortion safeguards'

More than a hundred medics have urged the Government to reject pressure to remove one of the few remaining legal protections for the unborn.

The medics told Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly there is "no medical basis" for scrapping the three-day reflection period for an abortion.

They said activists ignore "the very real conflict and difficulties women can often face when society fails to offer the real support needed for an unexpected pregnancy".



The Health Service Executive reported that 8,057 abortion consultations were conducted in 2020, but 6,577 abortions were performed. This suggests that almost one in five women decided not to proceed with an abortion during the reflection period.

In February, a spokesperson for the Department of Health said the report on the operation of the 2018 abortion Act is "nearing completion".

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