

Briefing note on Digital Safety Commissioner Bill 2017

This Sinn Féin Bill would establish an Office of the Digital Safety Commissioner. The Bill builds on a proposal contained in a Law Reform Commissioner paper from 2016, with some additions, which we are seeking to put firmly on to the agenda.

The office will have the responsibility for promoting digital safety online, reviewing and regulating harmful digital communications on the internet as well as other digital platforms with the intention of establishing safer and healthier attitudes for all users of digital platforms.

The intention of this Bill is to improve active online citizenship and promote a positive online culture in a way that makes the internet, apps, and other related technologies and platforms increasingly hospitable for all users; and provide a safer experience, particularly for more vulnerable categories of person and children.

However, it is not intended as an office solely responsible for child protection functions, but could deal with issues such as online abuse, harassment, hate speech, and so on as well.

The remit of the Commissioner has been defined in a broad enough manner that the scope of its work and the subject matter can evolve over time.

The Primary Proposed functions of the Commissioner are (among others) —

- To promote digital safety for all,
- Support and encourage the implementation of measures to improve digital safety, ensuring the oversight and regulation, a timely and efficient procedure for removal of harmful digital communications.
- Ensure that take down (removal of material) procedures are made available to all affected individuals by digital service providers free of charge.
- Develop a code of practice of safe and responsible internet usage, to develop National Digital Safety Standards and ensure compliance with them, and powers to revoke a certificate of compliance with same
- To collect, analyse, interpret and disseminate information relating to digital safety,
- To advise the government of the day in relation to policies which may be implementable to ensure all users of digital platforms are protected in a way that keeps up to speed with the ever changing nature of digital technology.
- To work with the Ombudsman for Children in publishing guidance material, including guidance material for schools, relevant to digital safety of children and to harmful digital communications. (Online bullying etc)

We are also proposing to establish an advisory committee on a statutory basis. The Advisory Committee would have 20 members plus the chair members, 50% of the committee should be from civil society organisations, 25% from Industry groups and 25% from relevant government departments or statutory bodies. In addition, the Minister shall ensure there is representation on the Committee from Representatives of Children and Youth Organisations with at least three youth members.

This Advisory Committee would allow regular feedback to the Commissioner on changes in online platforms and technology, to inform on how best to tackle this, and could also itself, be responsible organising engagements with wider groups of civil society and the public, including, but not limited to, young people.

Sinn Féin will be seeking the support of other parties with a view to ensuring that such an office is established.