



**Seanad Éireann  
Leinster House  
Dublin 2**

*Dear Fellow NUI Graduate*

I was first elected to Seanad Éireann by NUI graduates when the late Feargal Quinn invited me to become a candidate in 2016 on his retirement from elected office.

Since then, I have served in the Seanad as an independent member pursuing sensible policies and reforming agendas.

As a former Attorney General, Minister for Justice and Tánaiste, I have a strong track record in initiating civil and criminal law reform including land law, defamation laws, reform of An Garda Síochána (including the establishment of the Garda Reserve), licensing laws as well as strong advocacy of parliamentary accountability.

I firmly believe that the true vocation of all who, like me, are Irish republicans is to foster reconciliation and mutual respect between the divided communities in Northern Ireland and I have always stood by these values in my public life.

I have taken a leading role in our national debate on the Constitution, not least in the recent defeat of the badly worded and damaging Care and Family referendum proposals.

Along with my independent colleagues in the Seanad, I played a major role in preventing badly drafted hate speech legislation from being passed which would have radically curtailed the freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by the Constitution.

I have been a consistent and fair minded voice calling for the proper implementation of immigration policy and the control of bogus asylum seeking.

I currently have a Bill before the Seanad awaiting its Committee Stage to reform the manner in which the House is elected – a Bill which gives every Irish citizen the right to vote for all of the elected panels in the same way as graduates now have a vote.

I believe that my work and record in public life as a liberal republican, reformer, legislator and commentator at national level contributes to the important role of Seanad Éireann as part of the Oireachtas and the legislative processes of the Irish State.

In order to continue this important work, I am asking for your Number 1 preference when you cast your postal ballot in this Seanad election.

Sincerely,

Senator Michael McDowell

For further information please visit [www.michaelmcdowell.ie](http://www.michaelmcdowell.ie)



Senator

# Michael McDowell

## Family and care referendums

Last March, the Irish people overwhelmingly voted No to the Government's proposals to amend Bunreacht na hÉireann by altering the definition and status of the Family and removing the constitutional recognition of mothers in the care and upbringing of children in the Family and Care referendums.

The Yes campaign was supported by all three of the then government parties as well all of the main "opposition" parties and by state-funded activist NGOs. Despite this, the Irish people listened to the arguments and voted No to both propositions by a huge majority.

The Government rushed the amendment proposals through the Dáil and Seanad using the party whip and guillotine procedure to ensure that the Bills were never properly considered and were only given a few rushed hours of debate.

Michael McDowell played a leading role in the national debate and worked hard to convey nationwide the message that the people should reject these amendments to our Constitution. He published in print and online a number of papers and information leaflets which can be accessed here (I will add link)

He effectively countered the disgraceful campaign of active concealment by some Government ministers of the advice they had received about the true implications of the proposed amendments.

This result illustrates the value of truly independent opposition in holding the government to account and the value of the Seanad in scrutinising legislation carefully and free of the whip system.

## Key Bills Sponsored by Senator Michael McDowell

- Seanad Bill 2020
- Licensing (Amendment) Bill 2xxx
- Children (Amendment) Bill 2022
- Costs in Probate Matters Bill 2021
- Online Age Verification Bill 2023
- Scoliosis Bill 2024

## Development challenges in a housing crisis

### • Planning and Development Bill

The Government's Planning and Development Bill 2023 which runs to over 700 pages was guillotined at Committee Stage in the Seanad prior to the 2024 general election. This means that the majority of tabled amendments were never reached at all and most of the sections in the Bill were given no parliamentary consideration which is an affront to parliamentary democracy.

### • Urban Renewal

Michael McDowell has consistently argued for a major change in our approach to planning our towns and cities. The present laissez faire system of planning law is completely inadequate to bring about decent liveable cities. We need a radically different approach to urban renewal including reformed regulation of housing density, prevention of dereliction, and positive redevelopment planning for underdeveloped land in and surrounding our larger towns and cities.

### • Reform of Compulsory Purchase law

The State's legal procedures for compulsory purchase of land needed for homebuilding, infrastructure, and other vital public projects is hopelessly outdated.

The Law Reform Commission has published draft legislation to modernise compulsory purchase law.

Michael McDowell has published a Bill to give effect to the law Reform Commission's proposals and to create a new procedure under which major public projects and land acquisition can avail of fast-track parliamentary approval giving them the force of law.

### • Rural housing

Not everyone wishes to live in a town or city. Rural life faces huge challenges by reason of declining rural population. From GAA clubs to smaller local schools, from closure of Garda stations, banks and post offices, many areas of rural Ireland face population decline at a time when national population is rising. Families are effectively divided by the present policy prohibiting one-off housing development in rural Ireland.

People who wish to build one off housing on family land have been held back by successive governments. At a time when our cities are suffering a crisis of overpopulation and housing shortage, we now have a new opportunity for a reasonable approach to allow rural families to continue a tradition of building on their own land, where the next generation can live, work, pursue remote employment and service provision online and raise families, ultimately keeping rural Ireland alive.



## Seanad reform

**For more than a decade I have continually campaigned for democratic reform of the Seanad electoral system.**

The people voted for retention when I and others in the **Democracy Matters** group campaigned for retention of the Seanad and successfully appealed to the people of Ireland to vote to **“Open it don’t close it”**.

I have continued that campaign since my election to the Seanad and drafted the Seanad Bill which would extend the franchise to every citizen who wished to vote in a Seanad election.

**Since then, each successive government has cynically promised but utterly failed to deliver any electoral reform. Recently, the Irish Times has reported that one government party intends only to support Seanad candidates who are likely to be elected to Dáil Eireann at the next general election. Such an approach to Seanad membership is wholly contrary to the constitutional understanding of the Seanad which is meant to bring into the legislative process voices that are different from those elected to the Dáil in multi-seat PR constituencies.**

A Government Bill has now been passed that would enable all university degree graduates to vote – **but only in the second next** Seanad election for six university seats.

Depending on definitions, the six university seats would be elected by those among about one million Irish graduates who register for the new Higher Education Constituency, **but 43 panel senators will continue to be elected by a political party-dominated electorate of just 1,283 people** – 234 Oireachtas members and 949 local councillors. The great majority of Irish citizens will have no vote including those who have pursued life paths without a university education and those holding degrees from universities outside the State including graduates of Northern Ireland and British universities.

This unfair, deeply discriminatory and cynical election system is stacked in favour of Dáil political parties and **must not be allowed to continue**. I am determined to continue the Seanad reform campaign for all citizens from inside the House.

## EU Migration Pact

- In the summer of 2024 the government used the party whip to push resolutions through each House of the Oireachtas to allow Ireland to opt in to the EU migration pact.
- Michael McDowell opposed the EU migration pact. Uncontrolled asylum seeking acting as a cover for economic mass migration needs a much more radical response than the EU institutions have ever attempted.
- The current unworkable EU system of asylum seeking is embedded in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms. All across Europe there is a growing realisation at member state level that the 1951 Refugee Convention and subsequent Protocol are no longer fit for purpose or sustainable, and need urgent reform.
- The entirely new element of the migration pact is the creation of mandatory obligations on EU member states to share migration flows coupled with financial penalties which can be increased by qualified majority decisions.
- Failure to address these issues will seriously damage the EU’s cohesion, and will play increasingly into the hands of fringe right-wing groupings.

## Scoliosis Bill

### • Health (Scoliosis Treatment) Bill 2024

Michael McDowell recently introduced the Health (Scoliosis Treatment) Bill 2024 which passed Second stage unopposed.

The Bill aims to achieve accountability and performance standards in the provision of scoliosis treatment and provides that:

*“The Health Service Executive shall establish and maintain a national treatment service for the timely and effective inpatient and outpatient treatment of scoliosis within the State at such hospitals and other clinics and centres as it may designate for the timely detection, assessment and remedial treatment of scoliosis for all children and adults normally resident in the State.”*

**Michael McDowell intends to progress this Bill into law if returned to the Seanad.**



# About Michael McDowell

- Graduate of NUI in Economics, Politics, Roman Law and Jurisprudence (UCD 1972)
- Called to the Bar 1974. Made a Senior Counsel in 1987
- Member of Seanad Éireann (2016-) and Whip, Seanad Independent Group (2016-)
- Adjunct Professor in the Sutherland School of Law, UCD (2009 -present)
- Member of the Development Council of the Sutherland School of Law, UCD
- Attorney General (1999-2002)
- Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2002-2007)
- Tánaiste (2006-2007)
- President, EU Justice and Home Affairs Council (2004)
- Member, Council of State (1999-2002, 2006-2007)
- Chairman, Seanad Reform Implementation Group (2017-2018)
- Member, Seanad Select Committee on the Decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union (Brexit Committee) (2016-2018)
- Member, Seanad Committee on Members Interests (2016-present)
- Member of Joint Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment (2016-2020)
- Member, Seanad Special Committee on Scrutiny of EU Statutory Instruments
- Member, Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice (2020 – 2024)
- Member, Joint Oireachtas Committee on EU Affairs (2020 – 2024)
- Member, Seanad Committee on Procedure Privilege and Oversight

## Some legislative initiatives sponsored by Senator Michael McDowell

- Seanad Bill 2020
- Licensing (Amendment) Bill 2016 (check)
- Children (Amendment) Bill 2022 (check)
- Costs in Probate Matters Bill 2021 (check)
- Online Age Verification Bill 2023
- Scoliosis Bill 2024

Senator Michael McDowell lives in Dublin and is married to Professor Niamh Brennan and they have three sons. He is the youngest grandson of Eoin Mac Neill, co-founder of Conradh na Gaeilge, of the National University of Ireland, and of the Irish Volunteers.

A strong advocate for the retention of the Upper House, Michael McDowell actively and successfully campaigned in 2013 along with Senator Feargal Quinn, the late Noel Whelan and others to save the Seanad in the referendum of that year.

Senator McDowell has, since his election to Seanad Éireann in 2016 continued to campaign from the inside to give a Seanad vote to all citizens in panel elections, instead of multiple votes being held by a narrow electorate of Oireachtas members and Councillors. This approach has been resisted by government to date but the campaign for reform has broad support and will resume when a new administration is in place following the general election.

## Reconciliation and Peace in Northern Ireland

Michael McDowell was Attorney General when the Good Friday Agreement was implemented. He attended all of the major conferences dealing with decommissioning of weapons, agreed policing structures for Northern Ireland and played a leading role at the St. Andrews Conference which finally brought about power sharing at Stormont.

Between 1999 and 2007, Michael McDowell took a strong stance against paramilitary activity and criminal activity on both

sides of the border and insisted on explicit commitment by all parties to upholding the rule of law, ending criminality, and supporting the PSNI as the legitimate police force in the North.

Michael McDowell has always emphasised that reconciliation between the two communities in Northern Ireland is the primary vocation and duty of all Irish republicans and that mutual respect between Orange and Green must lie at the heart of any proposal for Irish unity.

**VOTE  
NUMBER**  
[www.michaelmcdowell.ie](http://www.michaelmcdowell.ie)

