



## ERA Guidelines for Visiting Your TD

**IT ONLY TAKES A CALL:** You can protect your equality and rights starting with just one phone-call.

Equality & Rights Alliance believes that combining five equality and rights bodies into one large super-body – even if it is an independent super-body – will mean more confusion for us all. Just think HSE and question the sense of amalgamation in the name of efficiency.

Your equality and rights protection will be weakened and tied up with red tape if this merger goes ahead. Moreover, it won't save any money. The five independent bodies currently provide an excellent service at a good price. So why fix what isn't broken?

### **Make that call and protect your equality and rights.**

1. Find out who your local TDs or Senators are on the [Oireachtas website](#). Make a phone call to make an appointment to visit them. Concentrate on the Government TDs (Fianna Fáil, Green Party, Progressive Democrats and Independents). If you have time contact the opposition TDs (Fine Gael, Labour, Sinn Féin and Independents) too so that all parties know that this merger is bad for your equality and rights.
2. Contact us beforehand on [www.eracampaign.org](http://www.eracampaign.org) for support and info about what you might say and the likely views of the politicians you are visiting.
3. Visit TDs. Tell your stories about how your equality and rights is best protected by the independent bodies that are currently in existence. You may be pregnant and afraid to tell your boss in a time of economic change. You may be overlooked for a job because of age. You may be unable to access a building. You may be asked to leave a bar because of your sexual orientation. Without independent and accessible equality and rights bodies, you may have nowhere to turn with these everyday issues of discrimination.

Ask the TD these questions:

- Do you believe in equality and rights protection for all?
- Do you believe a rights and equality super-body will save money and be more efficient? How?
- Do you believe it is OK to dismantle an internationally renowned equality and rights structure that has served people well and is still in its infancy (less than 10 years old)?
- Will you bring this up with your party members and support the continuation of equality and rights bodies which are independent and independent of one another?

4. Encourage friends and family to do the same.
5. [Contact us](#) and let us know what they said so we can keep track of their attitudes and/or support.

**Alternatively, write a letter to your TD in your own words, or using the sample letter below:**

Dear Deputy \_\_\_\_\_,

I would like the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the important matter of the Government's proposed merger of five equality and human rights bodies.

I believe that my equality and rights protection will be weakened if this merger goes ahead. A large super-body will be more bureaucratic, less accessible and less transparent. Moreover, it won't save any money. The five independent bodies currently provide an excellent service at a good price to the tax payer. So why fix what isn't broken?

A recent survey shows that 67% of Irish people, including myself, believe issues to do with equality and social justice are the most important factors in measuring a country's performance.

I will ring to make an appointment. As a constituent of yours, I look forward to discussing this with you soon.

Yours sincerely,

## **A Question of Equality and Rights - Your Checklist**

### *What's on the table?*

The Government is proposing to merge five equality and rights bodies – the Equality Authority, the Equality Tribunal, the Irish Human Rights Commission, the Data Protection Commissioner and the National Disability Authority. With a combined budget of just over €18 million they account for less than 4% of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform's budget.

### *Ensuring enhanced equality and rights protection*

Equality and Rights Alliance (ERA) is a coalition of 54 civil society groups representing over 2.5 million people. It wants to ensure enhanced equality and human rights protection. The proposed merger will do the opposite.

### *Yes to effective and planned change.*

ERA is in favour of planned rationalization and integration. The equality and rights bodies were carefully planned and legislated for. Therefore, any changes to this carefully constructed equality and rights infrastructure must be dealt with in a planned way. Arbitrary and immediate amalgamation of incompatible bodies does not constitute good planning.

### *Wait for the taskforce action plan for public service reform.*

An Taoiseach set up a taskforce to develop an action plan for public service reform only last May following an OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) review. This proposal to merge the equality and rights bodies pre-empts the findings of this taskforce. It would make more sense, and would save money, to wait until the taskforce completes its work.

### *Don't fix what isn't broken.*

The health boards were amalgamated into the HSE in the name of efficiency and better service delivery. Decentralization was proposed as a way of making public service more efficient and cheaper to run. Years later, countless enquiries, reports and much wasted money, it is evident that neither proposal did what it promised. The equality and rights agencies under review already do a good job at a good price.

### *Merging bodies requires more resources, not less.*

Experience from the UK and other jurisdictions shows that a merged equality and human rights body requires more resources, not less, to serve both equality and human rights effectively. A merged body can also lead to confusion, conflicts of interest and tension between the often different views and objectives of equality and rights bodies.

*The majority of people favour equality and social justice*

A survey launched on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2008 shows that 67% of Irish people believe issues to do with equality and social justice are the most important factor in measuring a country's performance (Behaviour Attitudes survey on behalf of Tasc, an independent think-tank on social change in Ireland).

*Five into one won't go*

The five organisations are very different in type, function and statutory remit. The Equality Authority provides advice and support to people taking cases on grounds of discrimination. The Equality Tribunal hears and decides on these very same cases. The Data Protection Commissioner regulates information and personal data held by organisations, including the other four agencies with which it is to be merged. The Irish Human Rights Commission was established under the Good Friday Agreement which sets out that it must have exactly the same mandate as the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. If it is merged with any other body, its mandate will be changed. Finally, the National Disability Authority advises the Government on disability only.