

January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2017.

The Secretary  
Constituency Commission  
Room 1.65,  
Customs House,  
Dublin 1  
W6X0

Re: Submission relating to Counties Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal, Cavan & Monaghan

Dear Secretary,

I wish to write to you to make the following submission for consideration by the Constituencies Commission in their review specifically with regard to the current Sligo Leitrim Constituency which currently incorporates a significant portion of both County Donegal and County Cavan.

1. The existing constituency incorporating County Sligo, County Leitrim, South County Donegal and West County Cavan serves to exasperate the alienation of rural Ireland and undermines the constitutional entitlement of equal representation of all citizens in a practical, workable and cohesive way in Dail Eireann.
2. The current arrangements are totally contrary to the literal and spirit of the terms of reference in particular section 1(c) of the Constituency Commission public notice where it states that 'breaching of County Boundaries shall be avoided as far as practicable'. I would respectfully submit that sufficient practicable considerations were not applied in the division of Counties and therefore county boundaries were recklessly dissected rather than proactively and thoughtfully maintained.
3. Section 1(e) of the Constituency Commission Public Notice is also not represented in the current arrangements where geographic considerations and physical features were clearly not given due regard. The existence of mountains, rivers, difficult terrain and the blatant absence of adequate physical connectivity infrastructure in terms of Road, Rail and Public Transport would seem to have been completely ignored.
4. Section 1(d) of the Constituency Commission Public Notice states that "each constituency shall be composed of contiguous areas". The composition of the current Sligo Leitrim South Donegal West Cavan constituency clearly stretches both the literal meaning and spirit of this term of reference. Bordering, adjoining, abutting and adjacent seem to denote the literal meaning of this term of reference however by any definition areas such as Gowna Co Cavan and Cashelard Co Donegal can hardly be considered 'contiguous' with Easkey Co Sligo or Drumsna Co Leitrim to give but one example. Equally the necessity to have equal representation in the legislature for each of these areas is undermined by the variance of needs of and challenges facing very different locations which in many cases require very different types of solutions to be represented on their behalf in the national legislature. Notwithstanding the genuine intention and wish of all representatives to do the best possible job in providing effective representation to constituents the sprawling and

haphazard makeup of the current arrangements in Sligo Leitrim West Cavan & South Donegal totally undermines the true potential for effective representation.

5. The depopulation of parts of the current constituency and the continuing demise of rural and regional Ireland that this clearly proves demands that County Boundaries in less populated Counties such as Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal and Cavan be respected and maintained at all costs. A critical mass of Dail Representation will exist in the higher populated urban areas where the needs and challenges of those areas will not vary to the same extent as those cross county boundaries as exemplified in the current makeup of the so called Sligo Leitrim Constituency which currently incorporates all or a significant part of four counties. The reduction in TDs to between 153 and 160 and their distribution should be weighted entirely in favour of guaranteeing that each county or 2 entire counties collectively which make up a constituency ought to have a minimum of 1 TD each representing their interests in Dail Eireann.
  
6. I would like to submit that if the Constituency Commission feel the terms of reference are in effect inadequate to cater for the constitutional right of all people to equal representation then the Constituency Commission seek more time to facilitate the introduction of a new Electoral Amendment Act underpinned if necessary by a constitutional referendum to amend article 16.2.2 to provide for a variance in representative population thresholds which more accurately reflect the potential to cater for the new reality of population decline, rural alienation and isolationism and the proliferation of growth on the East Coast. Notwithstanding this I would submit that the current Terms of Reference and provisions of Article 16.2.2 do allow for the following 4 constituencies to be permitted and I am therefore respectfully submitting that the Constituency Commission recommend the following constituencies be established:

	Constituency	Population*	No. of Dail Seats	Population:Dail Seat
(a)	Donegal 1**	158755	3	26459.16
(b)	Donegal 2**		3	26459.16
(c)	Sligo/Leitrim	97365	4	24341.25
(d)	Cavan/Monaghan	137365	5	27473.00

\*- Population statistics are taken from the CSO Census 2016 Provisional Results July 2016.

\*\*- Donegal can be split into two 3 seat constituencies as best determined by the population distribution of the county as can be considered by the Commission in line with the final CSO 2016 Census.

This will in effect mean that County Boundaries are maintained and that all people in the reference areas will have representation in Dail Eireann consistent with the needs and challenges of these areas and the people's constitutional right to have adequate voice for such needs and challenges within the formation of legislation and debate at national level. The reduction in representation in the North West region must not be allowed to continue as it undermines the very fabric of our nation and it's cultural and socio economic make up. If it is allowed to continue it will inevitably lead within a few decades to a totally disproportionate level of representation in larger urban centres which could not have been envisaged at the time the constitution was being written nor would it be in keeping with the explicit ambitions of the constitution when considered in its entirety.

I thank you for taking the time to consider this submission and very much hope that you will include this proposal as one of your final recommendations. I look forward in earnest to the publication of the Constituency Commission's recommendations and wish you well with your deliberations.

Yours sincerely

Marc Mac Sharry TD