



CHARLIE FLANAGAN TD

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

Full-Time Constituency Office:
Lismard Court, Portlaoise, Co. Laois,
R32 KT32 Monday - Friday
Tel: 057 8620232

O'Moore Street, Mountmellick,
R32 RH68 Tuesday a.m.

E Mail: charlie.flanagan@oir.ie

Web: www.charlesflanagan.finegael.ie



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Sub 16/271

Re: Dáil Éireann Constituency Commission 2017

Dear Secretary,

I write regarding the Constituency Commission review of Dáil Éireann constituencies, to take place later this year. As a local TD in the Laois constituency, and previously a long-serving TD in the former Laois-Offaly constituency, I wish to make a submission to the commission in respect of this review.

From my direct experience as a member of Dáil Éireann for Laois for many years, I can confirm that people are unhappy when county boundaries are breached within Dáil constituencies. The very important social, cultural, administrative and economic ties which exist within the county boundary in Ireland are of huge significance. I strongly believe that existing county boundaries should be considered firstly by the commission in the context of any potential changes to existing Dáil boundaries, which might be recommended in this regard.

The most recent review of constituency boundaries which took place in 2012 made a major change in dividing the old Laois-Offaly constituency into two separate constituencies for the first time in the history of the Irish state. The new Laois constituency which was created currently also includes six electoral divisions from County Kildare, including the town of Monasterevin which are currently part of my constituency.

Anecdotal evidence from constituents has given me the view that the County Kildare residents who are currently part of the Laois constituency are not happy with the current boundaries. Being separated from County Kildare effectively severs the important link between county councillors and their Dáil representatives, to the detriment of local democracy in the area. There was also some confusion reported during last year's General Election, as many people living in the Kildare part of the Laois constituency were unaware of the boundary changes and that they were no longer eligible to vote in the Kildare South constituency.



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Over the years, since the foundation of the state, there has been a strong affinity and collegiality between Laois and Offaly not only in relation to political engagement, but in the context of numerous public areas in health, education, law, the courts, and the Gardaí. While it has been accepted that a division of constituencies was necessary and appropriate in the context of the population changes, it is evident that the same close relationship and historical connections do not exist between Laois and Kildare, as was enjoyed between Laois and Offaly. Social and economic trends indicate a closer relationship between Kildare and the Greater Dublin area, rather than the people of Kildare moving south and engaging with Laois.

Since the 2012 constituency commission review, according to preliminary census 2016 results, the population of County Laois increased by 4,173 (or 5.2%) since 2011. This makes Laois the third fastest growing county in the country outside of Dublin, behind only Kildare and Meath. I understand that within County Kildare, the six electoral divisions (*Monasterevin, Kilberry, Harristown, Churchtown, Kildangan and Ballybrackan*) which are currently part of the Laois constituency have also shared part of this drastic population increase. This puts the current population of the Laois constituency in excess of 90,000 people, which is required for a 3 seater constituency.

I would recommend that the current Laois county boundary of the Laois constituency should be retained and that the six Kildare electoral divisions which are currently part of this constituency should be moved back into the Kildare South constituency, due to the increased population since 2011 in both counties. This would ensure that county boundaries in both Laois and Kildare are not breached (which they are at present) and equally, that the population per TD in both constituencies is kept in accordance with the national average of 30,000 people.



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It is my considered view that county boundaries be respected and that a new 3 seater constituency be created, comprising solely of the administrative area of County Laois.

I make this submission to the constituency commission from my 30 years experience as a local TD in County Laois, and in accordance with the considerable population increases in the area as indicated by 2016 census results.

I would like to wish you and the members of the commission my very best wishes with your very important work in this regard.

Kind Regards.

Yours sincerely,

CHARLIE FLANAGAN TD
Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade