

An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar
Dept of An Taoiseach
Government Buildings
Merrion St Upper
Dublin 2

20 December 2018

Taoiseach,

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are essential for our democracy to function. However in Ireland we are facing increasing restrictions that limit our ability to engage in democratic activities and to raise funds.

The Electoral Act limits the size of Irish donations for 'political' purposes and bans donations from international donors. The initial purpose of the law was to prevent foreign interference in elections and referendums – something we all agree with.

However, by defining 'political' so broadly as to cover any comment on any issue of public policy, the law is now being used to effectively silence the work of civil society organisations and urgently needs to be amended.

The gagging effect of the Electoral Act means many important voices are not being heard by decision makers and politicians. There's a risk that increasingly only the wealthy and those who do not need to seek donations to make their views known will get to have their voices heard.

Ireland has been a proud advocate for the role civil society plays defending and promoting democracy and human rights on the international stage. We respectfully call on you to address the problems with the Electoral Act so that civil society in Ireland is free to carry out its own work in defending human rights, deepening democracy and advocating for social justice and equality.

Please find here: a) [a link to a petition](#) signed by 1226 individual signatories to this letter and b) [link to a list](#) of 63 organisations which support Electoral Act reform. Please also find a [statement](#) from the Coalition for Civil Society Freedom on why reform is necessary.



Liam Herrick
Executive Director, Irish Council for Civil Liberties