

Response from the Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann

11 November 2025

1. Introduction

The principle of parliamentary privilege, which is established under the [Constitution of Ireland](#), provides that Members “shall not, in respect of any utterance in either House, be amenable to any court or any authority other than the House itself.” This means that anything that is said on the floor of the House to another Member (which could hypothetically include verbal attacks or threats) can only be dealt with by the House itself, or a Committee of the House, and not, for example, by the Garda (police) or the courts, or by an administrative unit of Parliament such as Human Resources.

As such, each Member is answerable only to their own House with regard to their verbal conduct in the Chamber. However, within this restriction, there are several ways in which behaviour in the Seanad may be regulated, or dealt with after the fact.

In this response I will deal with approaches to addressing disrespectful behaviour in the Chamber, firstly setting out the framework for regulating conduct during proceedings (Standing Orders), but also mentioning the guidance available for Chairs (Salient Rulings of the Chair), methods of addressing complaints retrospectively, codes of behaviour, and training for Chairs.

2. Standing Orders

The [Standing Orders of Seanad Éireann](#) regulate conduct during parliamentary proceedings.

The Committee on Parliamentary Privileges and Oversight (CPPO) of the Seanad has a general oversight role in relation to parliamentary procedure. It is open to any Member to write to CPPO on any matter relating to parliamentary procedure, but the CPPO cannot make a determination in relation to the conduct of any individual Member. However, it is always open to CPPO to recommend to the Seanad any changes to Standing Orders that CPPO considers necessary.

2.1 Standing Order 55

Standing Order 55 sets out the Chair’s role in maintaining order. The Chair is the Speaker of the House, and in Seanad Éireann is known as the Cathaoirleach. The Deputy Speaker is the Leas-Chathaoirleach. For the purposes of this Standing Order, the Chair may refer to the Cathaoirleach, the Leas-Chathaoirleach, or any Senator who has taken the Chair temporarily.

Under Standing Order 55(2), the Chair is the sole judge of order in the proceedings and has authority to suppress disorder, and to enforce prompt obedience to his or her ruling.

Under Standing Order 55(3), the Chair has the authority to rule on matters which are not expressly covered in Standing Orders.

2.2 Standing Orders 56-59

Under Standing Order 56, the Chair shall order a Senator whose conduct is grossly disorderly to withdraw immediately from the Seanad for the remainder of that day’s sitting. If the Chair feels that this is inadequate to deal with the offence, he or she may name the Senator for

misconduct, resulting in suspension of the Senator from the service of the Seanad and its Committees. This can be done when, in the opinion of the Chair, the conduct of the Senator in the Chamber is grossly disorderly. The naming of a Senator may be decided by a vote in the Seanad.

Although any Chairperson may order a Senator to withdraw for disorderly conduct, only the Cathaoirleach (Speaker) may name a Senator for misconduct. These provisions are rarely exercised.

The suspension of a Senator from the Chamber on the first occasion lasts for two sitting days, on the second occasion for four sitting days, and on the third or any subsequent occasion for eight sitting days.

If the Chair receives a written expression of regret from a suspended Senator, and approves this, the question is put to the House the next sitting day on whether to end the Senator's suspension. If the House agrees, the suspension is ended and the Senator is re-admitted.

Under Standing Order 59, in cases of great disorder, the Chair may immediately adjourn the House to the next sitting day without putting the question, or suspend the sitting.

3. Changes to Standing Orders

The last time Seanad Standing Orders regarding dealing with disorder were changed was in 2020. These changes were introduced as a result of the judgment of the Irish Supreme Court in [Kerins v McGuinness and Others](#). Standing Orders were amended to address the following key areas which were highlighted by the Supreme Court as requiring a response by the Houses of the Oireachtas:

- Oversight of Committee remit
- Role of the Committee Chair and the conduct of Committee meetings
- Remedies for persons adversely affected by parliamentary utterances
- Sanctions for disorder and breach of privilege.

The Standing Orders were amended to strengthen the role of the Chair; this includes the Cathaoirleach and Leas-Chathaoirleach of the Seanad as well as Committee Chairs. The Standing Orders regarding remedies for utterances having an adverse effect (see **Section 5.2**) were also added at this time.

The role and responsibilities of the Chair are now underpinned by clear guidelines.

The full report in response to the Kerins judgment and the resulting amendments to Standing Orders can be viewed [here](#).

No other changes have been made to Standing Orders dealing with disorder as far back as 2016.

4. Salient Rulings

Under Standing Order 55(3), the Chair has the authority to rule on matters which are not expressly covered in Standing Orders. In making such rulings, including rulings on the behaviour of Senators, the Chair may consult the [Salient Rulings of the Chair of Dáil Éireann](#). Although

rulings made in the Dáil are not transferable to the Seanad, and each House maintains autonomy over its internal procedures, the Chair may consider Dáil precedents informally when deciding on how to rule in the Seanad. The Salient Rulings contain several references to dealing with disrespectful behaviour in the House.

If the Chair rules that a Member or their remark is disorderly, they may be dealt with by the Chair under Standing Orders as detailed in **Section 2**.

It is one of the Salient Rulings of the Chair that the Chair does not rule on remarks that they have not heard.

Although the Chair may decide not to rule on an incident, not having heard the remark in question, this does not rule out other interventions after the fact (such as a complaint to the CPPO or the Committee on Members' Interests).

5. Retrospective Complaints

5.1 Committee on Members' Interests

Under the Ethics in Public Office Act 1995 and the Standards in Public Office Act 2001, a Member may complain if they believe another Member has engaged in conduct that is inconsistent with the proper performance of their duties or with the maintenance of confidence in such performance by the general public. The complaint must be made in writing to the Committee on Members' Interests of the relevant House, which may choose to investigate the complaint. If the Committee finds that a breach occurred, it may report the matter to the relevant House and/or recommend sanctions, such as censure or suspension of a Member.

5.2 Complaints regarding utterances in the Chamber

Under Standing Orders 52 and 53, persons (which includes other Senators) can make a submission to the Chair if they consider that they have been adversely affected by an utterance made by a Senator. This applies only to remarks made by a Senator during the course of Seanad proceedings or in a committee of the Seanad.

"Adversely affected by an utterance" is defined to mean that a person has been referred to by name or in such a way as to be readily identifiable, and that there is a significant likelihood they have been adversely affected in reputation or have had their privacy unreasonably invaded.

Such a submission may be made up to six weeks after the remarks are made. Submissions may only be received with regard to verbal utterances; this provision does not apply to other types of misconduct.

The Chair may deal with a submission themselves, or refer it to the CPPO. If the CPPO considers that the utterance in question constitutes an abuse of parliamentary privilege, then the Senator who made the utterance is required to withdraw it. If the Senator does not withdraw the utterance, the question is put that the member be suspended from the service of the Seanad.

6. Codes of Behaviour

There is a [Code of Conduct](#) for Members of both Houses (Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann) which sets out expected standards with regard to ethics, rather than behaviour. However, under the Code, “Members must [...] ensure that their conduct does not bring the integrity of their office or the Seanad into disrepute.”

Senators are asked to adhere to the [Memorandum on Decorum](#) while in the Chamber, which deals with respectful behaviour from the point of view of interruptions, noisy conversations, and phone use. The Memorandum on Decorum is circulated to Senators at the start of each Seanad term.

All Members are asked to adhere to the [Dignity and Respect Statement of Principles](#) while in the parliamentary precincts. These principles aim to prevent bullying, harassment and sexual harassment. (A Dignity and Respect Policy also exists, and is detailed in the same document as above, with procedures for dealing with complaints. However, this Policy does not apply to Members’ complaints against other Members, only to Members’ interactions with staff. Members’ interactions with Members can be dealt with only by the Committee on Members’ Interests, as explained in **section 5.1.**)

Training is offered to Members on the Dignity and Respect Statement of Principles and on the prevention of bullying, harassment and sexual harassment. A variety of training interventions are offered, including live training sessions (one was offered to Members of the new Dáil and Seanad in early 2025, after the last general election), a 15-minute recorded training session, and an e-learning course on bullying, harassment and sexual harassment incorporating quizzes and links to further information. Members are invited to complete training along with staff and other members of the parliamentary community, but it is not compulsory.

With regard to the Codes of Conduct mentioned in section 1, the 2024 report of the [Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life](#), a group which included Senators and other Members as well as non-Members, recommended that the Houses of the Oireachtas:

review existing codes of conduct on appropriate behaviour for Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas and set out clear sanctions for breaches of these codes;

and

review and update the existing Codes of Conduct under the Standards in Public Office Act for [Dáil Members] and Senators to include provisions to address abuse, including online abuse, and discriminatory behaviours[.]

This report is currently under review by the Houses of the Oireachtas with a view to addressing its recommendations.

7. Training for Chairs

The Cathaoirleach and Leas-Chathaoirleach (Deputy Speaker) receive informal training from the Clerk before they take up their roles. Training is not currently provided to temporary Chairs, but this is currently under consideration.