Dear Minister Phelan,

I believe the biggest reform needed in the Irish electoral system is relating to Irish people living abroad. Ireland is one of only three countries in Europe that does not allow its citizens access to votes while living abroad. Most have some form of access through postal voting, proxy voting or voting at the relevant embassy.

The current system may have made sense in the past but today's modern technology means that expats do not lose touch with Ireland and the issues the country is facing. I read Irish newspapers every day, I visit home regularly. As an Irish citizen, why should I be excluded from voting rights when I do not have voting rights anywhere else?

I am not asking for no barriers at all to access voting. It is understandable that there should be some given the number of people in the world that are entitled to Irish passports but Ireland is not the only country with high levels of emigration. Some countries demand that you have lived there for 5 years before accessing voting rights; others state that you lose them 10-20 years after moving away. Italy for example has an electoral list specifically for expats to vote on and the representative would then stand for their interests in Parliament. A combination of criteria could be introduced to ensure that the system is not taken advantage of.

The combination of losing voting rights 18 months after emigrating with having to be in the country to vote is unreasonable in a modern democracy. It is time to modernise.

Yours sincerely,

Jennifer Fitzsimons

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