

EQUALITY & RIGHTS ALLIANCE

Ireland
Can't
Afford
Cutbacks
in Equality
and Rights

Equality and Rights Matter to Real People

Equality & Rights Alliance (ERA) wants to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights, equality and justice for all.

It's wrong to cut rights

But the Government has other thoughts. It wants to merge five human rights and equality agencies into a single body. It plans to bring the Equality Authority, the Equality Tribunal, the Irish Human Rights Commission, the Data Protection Commissioner and the National Disability Authority under one roof.

ERA believes that this move will diminish the ability of these agencies to do the jobs they have been doing well. And this will affect everyone. Not just a few.

You may be worried about telling your boss that you are pregnant. You may have a friend looking for special needs assistance for her six year old. Your father may be refused a bank account because he is over 60. These are the types of discriminatory stories which these bodies deal with everyday.

Five into one won't go

ERA has no problem with change. We agree with the need for efficiency. But, five into one simply won't go. Each of the five agencies has different functions.

Picture the scene. You feel you have been discriminated against at a job interview. The Equality Tribunal will investigate, hear and decide on your claim. But, perhaps in the next room and sharing the same computer network, the Equality Authority will support you in making this very same claim. The fundamental notion of fair trial goes out the window. This is just one of many incompatibilities which would affect your rights if this merger happens.

Take steps to protect your rights

1. Visit your local TDs, Councillors and MEPs as soon as possible. Tell your stories about how your rights will be affected by this merger.
2. Encourage friends and family to do the same.
3. Contact your local media.
4. Tell us how you get on at www.eracampaign.org

A Question of Rights

What is ERA?

Equality & Rights Alliance (ERA) is a new coalition of over 40 civil society groups representing older people, women, families, children, people with disabilities, gay, lesbian and bisexual people, carers, workers, immigrants, Travellers and many more.

What does ERA want?

ERA wants better equality and rights protection in Ireland. We believe that, in its current form, the Government proposed merger of five equality and human rights bodies will do the opposite.

What do these organisations do?

The five organisations are very different in type, function and statutory remit. The Equality Authority promotes equality and assists people in bringing claims of discrimination. The Equality Tribunal is a quasi judicial body which hears and decides upon those very same claims. The Irish Human Rights Commission was set up under the Good Friday Agreement to defend human rights. The National Disability Authority gives advice to the Government on disability policy and the Data Protection Commissioner protects and regulates personal data held by organizations, including information held by the other four bodies.

What do they have to do with me?

Electricity or water are services taken for granted in a modern society. You only miss them when they're gone. Similarly, equality and human rights are often taken for granted. But, what would you do if your insurance company shared your details with an on-line shopping service? Who would you ring if your boss said you were too old to greet customers? Where would you turn if your child was refused membership of the football club because of religious beliefs? The agencies under review advise, protect, hear and act on everyday cases of discrimination like these. You may only miss them when they're gone.

What's wrong with cutting down on agencies? Are we not the quango nation?

ERA has no problem with saving money for the tax payer. But these bodies are already working under severe budget restrictions. A merger would not result in savings or simplify the delivery of services to people. It may well be the case that a larger body doing the same work will cost more and will be more confusing for those seeking to use their services. It is more likely that "delivery simplification" will really mean a reduction in what is being delivered and a silencing of organizations doing a good job.

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