



An Coimisiún Toghcháin
The Electoral Commission

AN COIMISIÚN'S RECOMMENDATIONS

ADDRESS OF CANDIDATES ON THE BALLOT PAPER

NOVEMBER 2025



RESEARCH PROGRAMME

STRAND B: ELECTORAL LAW, ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AND ELECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE



RECOMMENDATIONS

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BACKGROUND

Section 64 of the *Electoral Reform Act 2022* provides that An Coimisiún Toghcháin (An Coimisiún) “may commission or conduct research on electoral policy and procedure, including on matters relating to the discharge of its functions...and may, arising from that research, make such recommendations to the Minister and the Government as it considers appropriate.” The recommendations below arise from research conducted internally by An Coimisiún’s research team under that power.

We welcome the analysis in the *Research Report - Ballot Paper Design: Address of candidates on the ballot paper* and acknowledge the very useful submissions and engagement of stakeholders which has informed the research. The Report is the first of a planned series of *An Coimisiún Toghcháin Research Reports* on items in the Research Programme 2024-2026.

This communication sets out An Coimisiún’s recommendations following our deliberation on the Research Report.

THE ISSUE UNDER CONSIDERATION

Under the *Electoral Act 1992* candidates seeking to run for election to Dáil Éireann must provide an address on the nomination paper, which must by law be published on the ballot paper along with the candidate’s name and occupation (if any), and party affiliation (or non-party) and photo (if desired). This address requirement is replicated in legislation providing for other electoral events. It has been a feature of the Irish electoral process since the foundation of the State and was provided for previously under an 1872 Act.

The research was motivated by concern that the inclusion of a full address on the ballot paper can give rise to safety and personal privacy risks for candidates, their families, or others with whom they may reside. This concern was raised in the Report of the Oireachtas Taskforce on Safe Participation in Political Life¹ and in submissions to An

Coimisiún, many of which highlighted an increase in reports of abuse and threats of abuse against political actors.

The Research Report explores the current practice with regards to the ballot paper address (including the rationale for the current practice), evaluates the case for reform and identifies some specific proposals for change.

THE DELIBERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF AN COIMISIÚN

An Coimisiún notes with disquiet the information regarding harassment, abuse or intimidation directed at electoral candidates and public representatives, explored in Part 2 and Appendix 3 of this Research Report. Harassment, intimidation and abuse are an affront to our representative democracy and the fundamental premise on which it rests – that voters elect candidates to represent them in decision-making fora. A multi-pronged response is required to combat this abuse, as is discussed in the Research Report. However, it is imperative that the law and practice on elections – from the process for the nomination of candidates to the conduct of the poll including the contents of the ballot paper – should neither create nor exacerbate safety and privacy concerns and risks for candidates. An Coimisiún therefore supports the case for reform.

When evaluating any proposal to amend legislation and practice on the organisation of elections, An Coimisiún places centre stage the integrity of the electoral process, and the high level of trust in the process currently held by the electorate. An Coimisiún therefore welcomes the Report's thorough and balanced analysis of the legislative provisions and practice, and the focus it places on identifying the policy rationale for, and any continued benefits of, requiring a candidate's address, as well as on the address's connection to safety and privacy concerns.

Two core purposes or perceived benefits to the inclusion of a candidate's address as part of the electoral process are identified.

First, the address is part of the nomination process – it is used by the electoral administration to verify the identity of the proposed candidate, thereby enabling the returning officer to perform a statutory function, namely, to rule on the validity of the nomination papers.

Secondly, once the nomination process is complete a candidate's address is made public and so can help to identify a candidate to voters. It brings transparency by

providing information to voters about a candidate's local connection, a connection which evidence would suggest is important to many Irish voters. And where a ballot paper lists candidates with similar or identical names, a candidate's address may be important identifying information, especially as photos are optional and not all candidates belong to parties.

It is clear to An Coimisiún from the analysis in the Report that the present legislative provisions are less than satisfactory. The research identifies the statutory requirement that the same address should appear on the nomination paper and the ballot paper. It notes that a detailed and specific candidate's address may be needed for verification purposes by the returning officer, and this verification process is essential for the integrity of the electoral process. However, requiring a detailed and specific address at nomination stage makes it difficult to address safety and privacy concerns because the legislation specifies that the address provided for the nomination papers is that which is later used on the ballot papers (publicly displayed).

Reflecting upon this, An Coimisiún is of the opinion that the integrity of the electoral process would benefit from a break in the automatic link between the address provided on the nomination paper for verification purposes and the address to appear on ballot papers. Once this link has been broken it would then be possible to allow different levels of specificity for the address that appears on the nomination paper on the one hand, and that which appears on the ballot paper and in other public places on the other.

Further, given the concerning data regarding risks to candidate safety and privacy, An Coimisiún recommends that the following immediate actions are taken:

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the *Electoral Act 1992* should be amended to remove the requirement that the address of a candidate on the nomination paper be identical to that which is publicly displayed, whether outside the place of nomination (section 53), on the notice of poll (section 87 (b)) or on the ballot paper (section 88(2)(a) and Schedule 4 of the Act).
2. That to facilitate this de-coupling, the nomination paper should require two addresses for the candidate:

- *Address 1* – to be used by the electoral administration exclusively for the nomination process; and,
 - *Address 2* – the address which will appear on the ballot paper and other public notices.
3. That the details of *Address 1* must be adequate for the purpose of the returning officer's ruling on the validity of the candidate's nomination (as is currently the case for an address under section 52 of the *Electoral Act 1992*). Once *Address 1* no longer has to be identical to the address which is displayed publicly (as is recommended at 1 and 2 above), a returning officer can require a full home address if perceived necessary for verification purposes, without compromising or risking the safety or security of the nominated candidate.
 4. That clear, acceptable options for the details to be contained in *Address 2* from which a candidate may choose are set out as follows:
 - a. The address (*Address 1*) used on the nomination paper,²
 - b. A partial version of *Address 1* on the nomination paper which is acceptable to the returning officer, and which will help the voter to identify the candidate, e.g. a street name, village, or town name, or townland, and
 - c. A third address option which discloses neither a full, nor a partial address, but instead indicates the "area" in which the candidate's address is located, with "area" meaning the name of the local electoral area, or the name of the electoral division [see Research Report Figure 4 (map)].³

An Coimisiún urges the Minister and the Government in their careful consideration of this matter to pay particular attention to the rationale for including option c, and for proposing three options overall, for the details of the address to appear publicly and on the ballot paper, which is fully explained in the Research Report (part 4).

5. To ensure that the continued display of a candidate's address on the ballot paper, as is proposed herein, does not raise any safety concerns or in any way act as a deterrent to aspiring candidates, all relevant actors, including political parties, government departments, returning officers and An Coimisiún, raise awareness about candidate choice and about the proposed changes to the process illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 of the Research Report.

An Coimisiún notes the Research Report's argument that once the address on the nomination paper is no longer required by law to be the same address that appears on the ballot paper (as is recommended), it becomes possible to require a full home address for the nomination paper without exacerbating safety and privacy concerns. On this basis, the Report concludes that the legislation should require a full, home address for *Address 1* (the address for verification) and that *Address 2* (on ballot paper) would be a version of this address (at the level of detail chosen by the candidate).

The Report's preference for making a candidate's home address obligatory for *Address 1* is based primarily on the principles of (i) transparency and local connection/representation and (ii) consistency for all candidates, rather than on a candidate's privacy and safety concerns, the main consideration of the research. While noting the Report's preference, An Coimisiún's Recommendation 3 does not recommend requiring a home address at nomination stage, provided that whatever address is submitted by a candidate is sufficient to enable a returning officer to verify a candidate's identity. Moreover, regarding the address displayed on the ballot paper (which will be a version of *Address 1*), the view of what constitutes a candidate's 'local connection' may vary from voter to voter, from election to election and from area to area, as is reflected in debates on models of political representation across political science and philosophy. Therefore, a candidate should be permitted to supply a business or alternative address as per current practice.

Further, An Coimisiún is of the view that once the address for the nomination paper, and for public display, are no longer required to be identical, and the options for *Address 2* introduced, it may no longer be necessary for candidates to use central addresses (such as party headquarters) or work addresses (such as Dáil Éireann, Seanad Éireann or the local council offices) which are not particularly useful for voters and are not in line with the broader benefits of the use of a local address identified by the Report.

It is of course open to the Minister and the Government to take an alternative approach to what we recommend and specify that a full home address be required at nomination stage, as is recommended in the Research Report.

An Coimisiún also welcomes the consideration which the research has given to the overall integrity of the nomination process and to the principles of fairness and consistency in options for all aspiring candidates. Although the rationale for this research was the abuse of candidates, or the risk thereof, arising from ballot paper

address requirements, An Coimisiún considers it opportune to consider the broader context and include measures intended to strengthen the integrity of the validation of the nomination papers. Electoral administrators must have sufficient information to be certain of the authenticity and identity of the nominated candidate. However, it is also important that provisions are not exclusionary of potential candidates experiencing homelessness. It is therefore recommended that:

6. Where a returning officer needs more time to seek proof of a candidate's address, this time should be excluded from the calculation of the one-hour period allowed under section 52 for ruling on the validity of the nomination papers.
7. Provision should be made to facilitate aspiring candidates who are experiencing homelessness during the nomination process, similar to the provisions set out in s.84 of the *Electoral Reform Act 2022*.

Further while also not integral to the safety considerations which was the rationale for this research, the Minister and Government may wish to consider the Research Report's conclusion that to enhance integrity the provision of a photo of the candidate should be compulsory for the nomination process. An Coimisiún makes no formal recommendation in this regard.

In conclusion, threats to the safety, personal privacy and wellbeing of candidates, of their families and others with whom they reside, may act as a deterrent to political participation and over time, if unchecked, undermine the health of Ireland's democracy. An Coimisiún welcomes the analysis in this Research Report and urges the Minister and the Government to give it and these recommendations full consideration.

¹ Houses of the Oireachtas 2024 *Report of the Taskforce on Safe Participation in Political Life*

² For many candidates the address used for nomination purposes is likely to be a home address, but it could be a business or alternative address as per current practice. Options b and c may be more likely to apply in cases where a home address has been supplied.

³ An Coimisiún wishes to acknowledge submissions received as part of the research process which included the suggestion that a more general indicator of residence replace the address on the ballot paper.



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