

# **“Historic Advancement for Irish language community but proposed legislation falls very much short of 2006 St Andrew’s promise”**

**Proposed legislation will face huge tests in coming hours, days and weeks**

**Dr Niall Comer, President of Conradh na Gaeilge, said:**

This legislation is undoubtedly an historic advancement for our community, and for those who wish to use the language, by providing historic official status, legal protection and an Irish language Commissioner for the first time in the history of the state.

This has only come about as the result of a tireless, inspirational and bottom up campaign which has transformed how people here now view the language and ultimately how the state will interact with our community and shared language moving forward.

**Ciarán Mac Giolla Bhéin, commented:**

This protection comes in the form of an Irish language Bill being pasted into the GFA, independent from the other language legislation, as new, separate parts of that agreement. If passed, we will hold any new power-sharing executive fully to account on the full implementation of these proposals and will tirelessly test and expose the weaknesses and glaring omissions in the coming days, weeks and months.

There are some huge question marks here. These proposals fall far short of the commitments made in the 2006 St Andrew’s Agreement, which promised an Irish language Act based on the Welsh legislation and does not contain provisions that are made for language in Wales or in the south, as was explicitly committed to by both Governments.

The complete omission of visibility and signage is hugely frustrating and will undoubtedly be a source of tension and will expose major fault-lines on contested cases of signage in the coming period. However, the possibility of the delivery of signage through language standards will be rigorously and immediately tested by our community.

The role and remit of the commissioner being left to the sign-off of OFMDFM leaves us at the whim of a veto being used against core components of the legislation and drafting and delivery of services. The use of any veto to limit, obstruct or frustrate delivery of services and rights would undoubtedly erode trust and could be potentially catastrophic for any incoming Executive.

We welcome the adoption of recommendations included in our consultation document for the centuries long overdue repeal of the final remaining 1737 Penal Law, that will now facilitate the use of Irish in Courts; the new central translations hub; the right to use Irish in the Assembly, where it was previously sneered at and belittled, which includes a provision for simultaneous translation. Finally, the commitment to an Irish language Strategy has the potential to transform our community in the coming years.

We will now work diligently towards testing the glaring gaps in the legislation that prevent us from playing a fair and equal role in our society. Legal advice is being sought on several of the provisions, including the ‘official status’ provision. The devil is not only in the detail of the legislation, but in the implementation of that legislation.