

The Gloves Are Off



Tension: Senator David Cullinane and Minister Paudie Coffey.

Coffey and Cullinane trade verbal blows as election campaign drum starts beating

The first unofficial blows of the general election campaign have been struck between sitting TD, Minister of State Paudie Coffey and Sinn Féin candidate, Senator David Cullinane in the wake of the sexual abuse revelations made by Paudie McGahon.

In a statement, Minister Coffey called on Sinn Féin to clarify “if any sex offenders known to them were moved to Waterford” in the wake of what he described as Sinn Féin’s “continued refusal to notify authorities about the whereabouts of child sex offenders”.

In response last weekend, Senator Cullinane condemned Minister Coffey’s claims, labelling his statement as both “despicable and disgraceful”.

Minister Coffey stated: “We know that the republican movement operated Kangaroo courts in the Republic of Ireland in 2002.

“We know that their elected representatives were aware of child sexual abuse, but did not notify the Gardaí. We know that the republican movement have moved child sex abusers into different communities in an attempt to cover up a most heinous situation.”

He continued: £This practice appears to have gone on for many years and we don’t where these predators are located. This is putting children in danger right across this island. Sinn Fein and its leadership, who have described in the past the attackers of young children as ‘decent people’, need now to state where these people are located.

“Parents of children in Waterford need to know if these predators were moved to our city or county. It is simply not good enough for Sinn Féin to ignore this issue; children in this country are currently at risk because of the actions of Sinn Féin.”

Minister Coffey then referred to a statement made in July 2011 by Senator Cullinane in relation to the Catholic Church’s covering up of child sex abuse.

“No Member of the House (Seanad) would choose to have to again discuss a report on child sex abuse in the State; sex abuse carried out by members of the Catholic Church; and the complicity of the institution of the church in what was the rape of children and the cover-up and protecting of paedophiles over and above the children of the State....

“Priests, who were essentially paedophiles, were transferred from one village to another village. A paedophile priest is no different to any other paedophile.”

Paudie Coffey continued: “Senator Cullinane is correct; we can’t have institutions of any kind covering up child sex abuse. If this had occurred in any other political party, Sinn Féin would be the first people to call for resignations.

“I am not calling for this, as this is not a priority; as the protection and safety of our children is paramount. Silence on this issue is not an option; Sinn Féin must use their network so that Gardaí can be notified about these people’s whereabouts immediately to ensure our children are safe.”

Responding to Minister Coffey’s statement on his Facebook page on Saturday last, Senator Cullinane posted that he felt he needed to respond “to a despicable press statement issued locally by Paudie Coffey regarding the courageous move by abuse victim Paudie McGahon to come forward and speak out”.

According to Senator Cullinane: “Paudie Coffey’s disgraceful attempt to link these terrible instances of abuse to Waterford is a new low even for him. He poses questions already knowing the answers but in an attempt to throw mud.

“It was also an attempt to tarnish the Sinn Fein party in Waterford and a desperate attempt to undermine me personally and politically.

“I have no problem debating and discussing in a rational way any and all of these issues with Paudie Coffey. However if this press statement is anything to go by we are in for a long and dirty general election campaign as Paudie faces a difficult challenge in holding onto his seat.

“I will not engage in personal and negative campaigning and will challenge parties and other candidates on their policies and policies only regardless of any election outcome.”

Meanwhile, prospective Renua election candidate (in Wexford) Shane Dunphy, who tutors at Waterford’s College of Further Education, has described a Tweet in which he claimed that “sexuality would certainly classify as a lifestyle choice” represented “a stupid mistake” on his behalf.

When asked by The Journal if he felt that sexuality was a lifestyle choice, Mr Dunphy replied: “I don’t believe that. Sexuality is something that you are born with. People are born gay, people are born straight. That is the mistake I made. I sent it out without reading it properly. It wasn’t what I meant and I clarified that.” The controversial Tweet was subsequently deleted by Mr Dunphy.