

ALLIANCE OF RETIRED PUBLIC SERVANTS LOBBYING TOOLKIT

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Pay Talks To Get Underway Shortly

The Public Sector Pay Commission is due to report back to Government in late April or early May with talks between the Government and unions due to begin soon after that.

It's vital to make sure that the Government and all political parties are aware that retired public servants are eager to see a clear path forward on pension restoration and. Based on the timescale outlined above we have four to five weeks to get that message out there to policy makers and that's why the Alliance is looking for a nationwide lobby of Oireachtas members after Easter and during May.

To be effective we need your active involvement and those of your members, family and friends. This Toolkit will help you do that job as effectively as possible.

What To Do Now

TDs and Senators very much welcome contact from their constituents – that's why they have clinics. In particular, they like to know what's happening on the ground, what issues are affecting people – indeed, they know this contact helps them to make better policies.

Of course, it also helps to get them elected and, in this context, older people are vital as this part of the population votes more than anyone else (and all politicians know this too). While those aged over 65 in our society make up around 12 to 13% of the population, they comprise nearly one quarter of those who actually vote.

So, what we need you to do now is to:

- Write to or phone your local Oireachtas members and make an appointment for after Easter.
- Explain why you're doing it – you want to talk to them about restoring your pension.



Lobbying Options

The best and most effective way to lobby politicians is to talk to them face-to-face by visiting their clinics or their constituency offices – that’s what they are there to do, meet their public. If you can’t meet them directly on a personal basis – or are nervous about doing it:

- Call their office and speak to them by phone;
- Write a personal letter.

It’s really important that you:

- Contact all Oireachtas members in your constituency in April – all parties and Independents – giving them all an equal chance to support the Alliance’s campaign.
- Contact them again during May – to confirm their support.
- Remember to thank them for their time and attention – courtesy is a long-term investment.

What To Say

Here are some things that you need to say when you meet, phone or write to your local Oireachtas members:

- Thank the Oireachtas member for meeting you or talking to you.
- Explain that you are concerned about pensions being restored well before 2021.
- Set out how the pension cuts have affected you and your family.
- Explain that this will be made worse if pensions aren’t restored due to rising costs.
- Also point out that there’s a real justice issue here as tens of thousands of pensioners have died and will die before their pensions are restored.
- Be clear on what you want – you want them to commit to ensuring the Government agrees to restoring pensions before 2021 through the pay talks process.
- Ask them directly for that commitment.
- Remind them that you will be back in touch before the talks are concluded and afterwards.
- Thank them for their time and for listening.

Some Key Points

Some key points to remember when you're engaging with politicians – it's important not to blind them with too much detail:

- The Programme for Government says it may be 2021 before your pension is fully restored – that would mean a full 10 years of deductions from your pension!
- Low paid pensioners – those on pensions of €12,000 or less – haven't had an increase in their pensions in 10 years, with no prospect of one until, at least, 2021 (see the Programme for Government).
- Prices have been rising over recent years – particularly fuel and energy costs – so our reduced pensions are worth even less now.
- Over 4,000 public service pensioners die every year, so that means that over 24,000 retired public servants have died without getting their pensions back with a further 16,000 to follow if the Government sticks to 2021 for restoration.
- The average public service pension is approximately €20,000 – this is not the gravy train that is often portrayed.
- As a retired public sector worker, I have paid for my pension – this is why it's protected as a property right under the Constitution – and the Government had to use emergency legislation (FEMPI) to cut our pensions.
- Unlike public sector workers, public sector pensioners have no negotiating rights, so the cuts were unilaterally imposed on us without our say so or involvement.
- Now and into the future, retired public servants want a mechanism agreed – like public sector workers – whereby Government engages with us about our pensions rather than imposes changes on us without agreement.
- We all agree that the Emergency is over and things have been getting back to normal for a few years now – in fact, Ireland is the fastest growing economy in Europe for the third year in a row. It's time to end the emergency (FEMPI) cuts to our pensions.
- Public sector pensioners have helped the State's recovery to the tune of approximately €750 million through their pension deductions.
- Fairness demands that pensions should be restored well before 2021.

Advance Preparation

Some other things to be aware of as you're preparing for your encounters with your local politicians:

- Nobody's expecting you to be an expert on retired people's incomes and economics.
- They are interested in how you are doing – you are one of their constituents.
- Prepare by thinking about how the pension cuts have impacted on you, your friends and neighbours – give practical examples.



- Think in advance about the difficulties that a failure to restore pensions might make for you particularly with rising prices.

Dealing with Politicians

Many politicians may try to evade giving a straight answer – *“I’ll do the best I can for you”*.

So what do you do then?

- Repeat that you are looking for a clear commitment that they will support pensions being restored well before 2021.
- They may say we must be careful because of Brexit and Trump and economic uncertainty.
- Tell them that the Government’s needs to be fair and equitable – you’ve paid for your pension and you don’t have an eternity to wait for restoration.
- Also, costs are rising again and you need your income restored so you can deal with that.

Persuade Not Threaten

Remember that the Alliance is not the only group campaigning around the public pay talks and so there are multiple demands on the system. We need you to persuade politicians that we’re worth supporting. In this context, it’s really important to remember that:

- Threats may only work once – but relationships may be destroyed after that.
- Using threats is a very high risk approach – most politicians respond badly to being threatened.
- As a result, they may not support us now or in the future.
- Threats depend on force of numbers not on the justice of the case.
- We have a strong case so let’s use it!

Ends.