

Meeting of the Joint Committee on Health
19th December 19th December 2018

Opening Statement by Ms. Emma O’Friel (M.Psych.Sc.)

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. In recent years during and after my Masters in Psychological Science I have researched the practice of DAHR.

I have found no evidence that this practice prioritises the best interest of the child or places them on equal ground with other children. They are the only group of the four groups who not only do not benefit but are harmed. Our parentage is a straightforward, unaltered relationship. DC people’s parentage is altered at the hands of a third party before they are even conceived. All State practices acknowledge the primacy of a child only being removed from genetic kin as a last resort, yet we do not apply this protection to DC children. We ratify the UNCRC including the right to be known and cared for by our natural parents yet we do not apply it equally to DC children. We teach our secondary school children that every human being without exception comes from one man and one woman. We expect DC children to have no knowledge of this man or woman. We talk about family likenesses, cousins, heritage, ancestry, and we deny DC people this essential part of our belonging.

We give them the burden of missing out spending formative years with one or both parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, while we would not be without our families. We give them the burden as an adult of trying to engage with a biological family, complete strangers who have grown up with each other and without them. We make them very, very unequal and try to convince them that they are not.

This Bill if it goes ahead will consolidate the disadvantaged position of DC people who will now be bound by law to accept inequality and injustices.

I know the pain of longing for a child. But there is an equally primal desire to this desire and it is the need to know the two people from whom you have come. We need to see beyond the immediate, beyond the cooing donor-conceived baby or child in the arms of happy adults. These children grow up. To say that the donor-conceived child playing today in the playground, going to school, reading bed-time stories is doing fine is an inaccurate measure. Adoptees of the last century as children would have shown little or no signs of the pain to come. The impact of injustices done in our childhood can only be dealt with in adulthood. We know that that there are thousands of DC people world-wide who testify to the long-term harm. Where is the assessment of this harm?

There are what Susan Lohan of the Adoption Rights Alliance calls “layers and layers of parallels” with past adoption practices and those of DAHR; vast amounts of money passing hands, power differences, exploitation of the vulnerable, children displaced for an ideology who become adults left to pick up the pieces.

We know that psychological well-being is bound with a solid sense of self. Our identities are formed by integrating all the elements of who we are. Our genetic identity provides us with a sense of belonging. It grounds us in space and time. It answers the question ‘to whom am I related?’

I am very concerned by the commercial nature of this child-making industry, by the misuse of language and concept, by the process of dehumanising a person, by separating the inseparable who we are from our genes, brochures that describe gametes as property. I too am just one egg, one sperm. I am not property. I am concerned at the exploitation of young university students recruited on facebook to father or mother children, young vulnerable Ukranian and Czech mothers needing cash. I am concerned that in a town called Brno, close to Repromeda the partner clinic of Sims, live 350 young Czech women, whose biological children live now in Ireland with false birth certificates, not allowed to ever know them (see TV3 documentary 'The Babymakers'). I am concerned that their partner clinic in Ukraine speaks of 'expanding into new markets in India' and sends weekly publicity e-mails to potential clients offering egg and embryo discounts, even cruelly Mother's day specials. I am concerned that this industry has no regard or expertise in child welfare calling a child's right to their identity "utterly meaningless". It is of grave concern that these clinics today continue to argue in favour of, and practice up to the last minute, donor anonymity when we have acknowledged that it is harmful.

DAHR is presented as a 'treatment' when it does not treat infertility. The infertile partner remains infertile. This practice simply transfers another person's child, a young man or woman who will agree to have a child remotely and sign away all contact with that child. That child, no different from you or I is still the child of that student.

I am concerned that there is no mention of the thousands of children born in Ireland through anonymous parentage living today with false birth certificates lies, secrecy, the majority of whom are still minors, 95% of whom, one clinic tells us, will never be told the truth..

If none of us in this room were donor-conceived or illegally adopted then none of us can describe their pain and despair at the powerlessness to stop the pre-meditated removal from family. All of us, doctors, clients, friends, even the DC babies are smiling. The only person not smiling has been harmed by this practice and by our complicity.

Can we take the time to pause this Bill, to peel back the layers to question two core issues that fuel this industry? 1. That it is adult-centric, run by adults for adults, and not in a child's best interest. 2. Money; as motivation and incentivization.