

## **Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice and Equality**

### **Opening Address**

#### **Stay-At-Home Parents Association Ireland**

**Date: 26.09.2018**

**Spokespersons: Pauline O'Reilly and Catherine Walsh**

We want to thank the Committee for the invitation to speak here today. Being seen goes to the heart of what we will say and therefore it was an important step for us to receive that recognition.

When we mark an X beside a Yes or a No on a referendum ballot paper, each person is attempting to assert their values. It is not a piece of legislation; it is something more visceral and it is important to remember that the constitution is a document that represents the people's voice.

#### **We call for**

Today we are calling for an amendment to Article 41.2 that is compassionate, including a removal of the paternalistic and sexist language that we can all agree is offensive but the inclusion of a recognition that nurturing and caring is important to who we are.

We would respectfully question the idea that deletion is simpler. Life is not always simple and it exists in the margins of economic activity far too often. This is a unique opportunity to express ourselves as a people and if further examination is required in order to do this then this is important work.

#### **Equality**

We want to touch firstly on the argument that removing this provision demonstrates equality for women, because this seems to have been key to the Minister's motion.

We firmly believe that liberation of women is being conflated with economic activity for women rather than looking at equality within the home and the workforce. Sometimes as a society we think of care work as something that holds us back, but in fact it is the lack of support and recognition that holds us back. Whether we work outside of the home full-time, part-time or not at all, caring still happens and we know that currently women carry out most of the care. We would like to see a more equal contribution from all genders and believe that by elevating the status of care work, including within our Constitution, this can be achieved. Even within the paid workforce women carry out the majority of care work, such as in creches, and these roles are amongst the lowest paid. We ask 'Who are we that we do not see the value of being with children and vulnerable adults?'

When we voted yes on May 25<sup>th</sup>, we were voting not only for the choice to end pregnancies, but also to being supported with the continuation of pregnancies and for parenthood.

#### **Practical considerations**

We do not want to set ourselves against anyone and are fearful that a referendum that offers deletion versus retention would do this.

With tax individualisation in 2000 and the reduction in supports for lone parents who care at home we have seen inroads into the support for families. Although Article 41.2 has never been challenged, even as it stands, it could be argued that certain minimal supports such as Child Benefit and Home Carer's Tax Credit could be dented more easily if it were removed without amendment and this will weigh heavily on our members when it comes time to vote.

### **Who are we**

We are a relatively new organisation formed out of a common feeling of isolation and a lack of a voice. There are no trade unions for those who work in the home and no statutory bodies that have been established to support our unpaid labour but we are a huge section of the population, past and present.

What does caring mean? There is the physical and mental labour that it entails, but there is also the time away from paid employment. It always means providing for those that do not earn an income and therefore financially it is a very difficult position for most. We don't have time to go in to a discussion on childcare, but we were formed to ensure that we receive support as the state moves forward to provide for greater access to childcare outside of the home.

From the outset we have been firm in our belief that all families should be supported equally, whether engaged in paid or unpaid work, whether headed by lone parents, married or cohabiting couples, including the LGBT+ community. We are secular and want to be recognised for our diversity in an ever changing society.

You may have heard that more women would work outside of the home if childcare was affordable and this article is often linked to this issue. The fact that we need more childcare is true and is a discussion for another day but paid employment is almost never the cheaper option and yet the [CSO report on Childcare from 2016](#) shows that only 38% use non parental childcare, therefore the majority in Ireland do not use any form of childcare outside of the home. They were also asked if they were content with the form of childcare used and 83% said yes.

Add to this figure of 62% all of those who are cared for and those who care on a non-full time basis, on maternity leave and every single waking moment outside of paid employment.

While we seek to put forward the position of parents caring for children, we believe that the care of older persons and vulnerable adults is equally important and in many cases is carried out by the same people. We also want to recognise the valuable contribution socially and culturally that the children and adults who are being cared make to society.

### **Closing remarks**

The reason that we do not believe that this can be dealt with solely outside of the Constitution is that governments are often concerned with short-term economic activity and fundamentally we want the government to take note that paid labour market activation is not the only goal of our society. We all want time with our families first and foremost, whatever their shape.