

Submission to Joint Committee on Children, Disability, Equality and Integration

Dear Chairperson and Members,

Following the publication of the final report into Mother and Baby Homes in the State, I have received a number of communications from survivors of the Tuam Mother and Baby Home itself, as well as those with a family connection to the former home, and campaigners acting on their respective behalves.

All of those communications have expressed a desire to see the expedient progression of the excavation, exhumation and re-interment of remains at the former Tuam Mother and Baby Home site and indeed, I note that our Chief Executive, in the delivery of his statement at the January 2021 plenary meeting of Galway County Council, expressed the local authorities commitment to assisting in that process in whatever way possible following the enactment of the *Certain Institutional Burials (Authorised Interventions) Bill*.

While I note the final report dealt with a number of former homes across the State, the position of the Tuam Mother and Baby Home is somewhat unique in that a formal consultation process has already taken place at the behest of the former Minister for Children and Youth Affairs on the options and appropriate course of action available to Government in respect of the site in Tuam. That process was carried out at the express request of the Minister following the formulation of five options by a separate Expert Technical Group also commissioned by the then Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the Minister herself published the report of that consultation process as far back as the 6th July 2018.

While I acknowledge that there were a variety of preferences expressed in response to that consultation process, and indeed a divergence of opinion which the report recognised between different respondents, it is however the case that following same, the previous Government announced its intention to introduce a legal basis for the process of excavation, exhumation and re-interment of remains at the former Tuam Mother and Baby Home site on the 3rd October 2018.

The then Minister subsequently announced on the 10th December 2019 that legislation to enable this process to commence had been approved by the Cabinet and it is in this context that the first draft of the Bill came into being.

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Clearly, a considerable time has since elapsed and while I welcome the commitment of the Joint Oireachtas Committee to ensure the passage of legislation before year end, I would point out that such a timeframe will mark over two years since the last Government announced an intention to introduce legislation which would enable excavation works at Tuam to proceed.

In the intervening period, some survivors and family members have unfortunately passed away themselves without having had the opportunity to see this process brought to its conclusion. Others still have doubts that they will see the process of excavation, exhumation and re-interment commence and be completed during the remainder of their own natural lives and this appears to me to compound the injustice of the situation and aggravate the wrongs of the past that were clearly and evidently visited upon these families.

It is evident to me that given the commitment to introduce a legal basis for the process of excavation, exhumation and re-interment of remains in October 2018, it is now necessary to ensure an expedient passage of legislation pertaining to the Tuam site. I would urge the committee to ensure this happens as soon as possible and if it is necessary to advance Tuam on an initial stand-alone basis in order to ensure a more timely passage of the applicable legislation, it is my belief this should be done without any further delay.

Many thanks for considering the contents of the enclosed.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr. James Charity

Cathaoirleach

Galway County Council