

OPENING STATEMENT

by

ADOPTION LOSS/NATURAL PARENTS NETWORK OF IRELAND

Thank you for providing the opportunity for us to give you our views on the forthcoming legislation on adoption information and tracing.

This Bill has been a long time coming, and we have made Submissions on previous information and tracing Bills over the past twenty years - none of which were enacted.

Our first observation is the very title of the Bill - which betrays its presumptions upfront: the supposition that it is primarily adopted people who are the seekers. The Heads of the Bill, when closely examined, show that it is of very little relevance to the many thousands of mothers, fathers and other relatives who have phoned our Helpline throughout the past decades, or attended our Support Meetings seeking our advice and assistance in contacting their adult children.

We are familiar with the complexities involved - having sat on the Advisory Committee appointed by the then Minister Brian Lenihan which led to the National Information and Tracing Service by The Adoption Board in 2007. The Information Leaflet about this service, containing our Helpline number, was sent to every address in the State. The calls over the following years have uncovered the harsh treatment, illegal practices and social pressures which led to the separation of mothers from their children. We have provided you with one of our previous Submissions which illustrates this well.

But, specific to the proposed present Bill, we ask you to consider the following:

- 1: Hold a Referendum on the primacy of information rights over privacy where adoption, fostering or residential care settings have separated mothers, fathers and other relatives from their children
- 2: Re-name the Bill The Family Information and Tracing Bill. Many people were not legally adopted but still require a tracing and information service. This is about families after all - not about "birth"
- 3: In all the Heads when drafting the legislation, please grant EQUALITY to mothers and fathers in relation to the service - provide the Adoption Certificate to the mothers as well as the Birth Certificate to their adult children. (We understand that the names and address of the adopting parents would be redacted.
- 4: Provide a comprehensive Information Leaflet to all regarding the law/s on adoption and what papers may be contained within the file. The present Tusla leaflet is a lesson in obfuscation.
- 5: As the only true witness to the circumstances surrounding the separation of the child from the mother (most of the social workers will have retired), she should be facilitated to read her file in the presence of a social worker - who should explain the significance of particular documents - and be helped to write a Statement to correct or add to the information before it is given to her adult son or daughter. She would not be allowed to remove anything from the file.
- 6: Provision should be made for counselling assistance to the mother if the adopted person refuses to provide information to her.
- 7: The Adoption Authority should immediately trace and write to all people registered as adopted to inform them of the fact of their adoption. At present, the laws on privacy are interpreted in such a way that apparently prevents this.

We look forward to answering all your questions!