

Submission to Minister Charlie Flanagan TD on the Terms of Reference of the Commission of Investigation into Irish Mother & Baby Homes

Background:

One Family is Ireland's leading and longest established organisation for one-parent families having been established in 1972 as Cherish by a group of brave unmarried mothers who wished to keep and parent their children themselves. The first President of Cherish was former Irish president Mary Robinson and our founders were pioneering voices in calling for social, legal and policy changes and recognition of one-parent families.

One Family understands the social and legal context in which our organisation was founded. Members of our Board have direct experience of mother and baby homes, as well as the support of unmarried mothers in their own families over five decades. We have worked for 42 years to improve the lives of one-parent families with children at the centre of our work.

Recommendations:

- 1. Establish facts:** We recommend that the Commission of Investigation establishes the facts about how many, and in what circumstances, children and their mothers lived and died in all mother and baby homes. We also recommend that facts are established about whom these children and mothers were and that full support is given to family members wishing to trace living or deceased relatives (see recommendation 6). We recommend that the Commission strenuously seeks the release of all medical information in relation to children subjected to medical trials who were residents of mother and baby homes.
- 2. Hear voices:** We recommend that the voices and experiences of former residents of mother and baby homes are heard on a voluntary basis and in respectful and appropriate ways, so that we as a society can learn fully what they experienced and the impacts of these experiences on the rest of their lives. We argue that the experiences of wider family members including fathers (as appropriate) of children born in mother and baby homes are also extremely relevant to hear.
- 3. Consult widely:** As part of the consultation process written submissions should be encouraged from a wide range of stakeholders. This should include those involved on a historical basis and those of us who still support people directly and indirectly affected by mother and baby homes.

4. **Compel evidence:** We recommend that relevant persons and organisations with responsibility for the referral into, the funding of, and the management of mother and baby homes be invited and compelled if necessary to provide evidence in order to develop the full range of facts. We recommend that all persons and organisations with relevant documentation be compelled to share these with the Commission of Investigation.
5. **Establish context:** We recommend that relevant individuals and organisations such as the founders of One Family (formerly Cherish), historians and journalists provide evidence to the Commission on the social, political and legal context in which the mother and baby homes were established, condoned and run.
6. **Adoption:** We recommend that the Commission examines issues related to adoption from mother and baby homes including the forced adoption of infants and children, the destruction of relevant records, obstructive communication in relation to adoption information and the effects of forced adoption on parents and children.
7. **Respectful communication:** We acknowledge that great distress, pain, shame and fear still exists for many former residents of mother and baby homes and their wider family members. Therefore the greatest care needs to be taken by the Commission, by media commentators and media outlets in their communications about individuals involved in mother and baby homes. We recommend that the Commission develop an appropriate communication system with former residents of mother and baby homes to assist with this.
8. **Society now:** We recommend that the Commission of Investigation makes recommendations for policy makers, service providers and contemporary society based on their findings. We recommend that appropriate practical supports and services are provided to former residents of mother and baby homes (both parents and children) as well as their wider family as required. We believe that a strong link still exists between our treatment of unmarried mothers in the not so distant past and current attitudes and beliefs about one-parent families in Ireland today.

Ends.