

1st May 2020

Dear TDs and Senators,

One of the great successes of the Oireachtas and successive Governments over the past decade has been the focus they have had on children and young people led by a dedicated Department of Children and Youth Affairs. We are writing to you in relation to the formation of the new Government and to urge you to allow this excellent work to continue.

The Department was created in 2011 as a response to the publication of 17 official reports documenting how Ireland failed children and the failure of the political system to deal with issues facing children. Since its establishment, having a seat at the Cabinet table has transformed how children and young people's issues have been dealt with because the Department of Children and Youth Affairs operates from a genuinely child and youth perspective. It also has a strong track record of working in partnership with other departments, public bodies and the community and voluntary sector.

One of the unique features of the Department is its reach from pre-birth to 24 years representing the lifecycle of the child and young person. During a severe recession the Department ensured that, we as a country, lived up to our commitment "to cherish all the children of the Nation equally", by having a successful Constitutional referendum, addressing our broken child protection system by introducing Children First legislation and establishing the Child and Family Agency (Tusla). It also works towards the redevelopment of our new early years' system and responding to Ireland's damaging legacy towards children, including the establishment of the Mother and Baby Homes Investigation.

All this was achieved because we had a Department exclusively focused on issues facing children and young people and an Oireachtas willing to back and support it.

Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil agreed a historic framework document to facilitate negotiations with other parties on a plan to recover, rebuild and renew Ireland after the Covid-19 emergency. It has 10 key missions including one on 'Supporting Young Ireland'. It is welcome that children and young people are central in this document. However, we are deeply concerned at reports that the Department of Children and Youth Affairs may be carved up. This will be disastrous for children and young people who make up one quarter of the population. It will mean that they will no longer have a strong voice focused on their issues at the Cabinet table. As a consequence they will lose out significantly more to the usual dominant agendas in bigger departments.

In 2020, we are facing major fallout from a global pandemic, with high levels of unemployment, rising child poverty and a sharp increase in serious cases of neglect and abuse. This is not the time to

disband such a crucial Department. In fact, we need to beef up the Department to respond to these serious social issues.

We are pleading with you to ensure that in next Programme for Government your party remembers and keeps a focus on issues affecting children and young people. A first step in 'Supporting Young Ireland' is to make sure they don't lose their seat at the Cabinet table and their Department.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Sheila Gilheany, CEO, Alcohol Action Ireland

Adam Harris, CEO, As I Am

Michael Nugent, Chairperson, Atheist Ireland

Suzanne Connolly, CEO, Barnardos

Larry de Cléir, Project Leader, Bedford Row Family Project

Moninne Griffith, CEO, BeLongTo Youth Services

Nicola Toughey, National Office Coordinator, Catholic Guides of Ireland

Carol Coulter, Director, Child Care Law Reporting Project

Tanya Ward, CEO, Children's Rights Alliance

Anna Gunning, CEO, Children in Hospital Ireland

Don O'Leary, Director, Cork Life Centre

Ger McGee, Senior Manager, Crosscare

Alex Cooney, CEO, CyberSafeIreland

Dr Tracey A Monson, Director of Services, Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service

Dr Helen Lynch, Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, UCC

John Dolan, CEO, Disability Federation of Ireland

Noeline Blackwell, CEO, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre

Harry Conway, CEO, Dyspraxia/ DCD Ireland

Teresa Heeney, CEO, Early Childhood Ireland

Emer Nowlan, CEO, Educate Together

Terry Dignam, CEO, EPIC

Paul Ginnell, Director, European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland

Mike Allen, Director of Advocacy, Focus Ireland

Sean Campbell, CEO, Foróige

Aine McGuirk, Chair, Irish Association of Social Workers

Liam Herrick, Executive Director, Irish Council for Civil Liberties

Catherine Bond, CEO, Irish Foster Carers Association

Amanda O’Sullivan, Chief Commissioner, Irish Girl Guides

Chris Macey, Head of Advocacy, Irish Heart Foundation

Bernard Joyce, Director, Irish Traveller Movement

Brian Killoran, CEO, Immigrant Council of Ireland

Fíona Ní Chinnéide, Executive Director, IPRT

Nick Henderson, CEO, Irish Refugee Council

Alison Dervan, Student Voice Development Manager, Irish Second-Level Students' Union

John Church, CEO ISPCC

Jo Holmwood, Creative Director, Kids’ Own Publishing Partnership

Fiona Coyle, CEO, Mental Health Reform

Edel McGinley, Director, Migrants Rights Centre Ireland

Denise Mc Cormilla, CEO, National Childhood Network

Noel Keenan, Vice President, National Parents Council Post Primary

Mary Cunningham, CEO, National Youth Council of Ireland

Una Burns, Head of Policy and Communications, Novas

Karen Kiernan, CEO, One Family

Maeve Lewis, CEO, One in Four

Lyndsey Anderson, Co-ordinator, Prevention and Early Intervention Network

Anne Staunton, CEO, Rainbows Ireland

Clíona Saidléar, Executive Director, Rape Crisis Network Ireland

Sharon O’Halloran & Mary McDermott, Co-CEOs, Safe Ireland

Anne Griffin CEO and Adrian Tennant Chair of the Board, Scouting Ireland

Wayne Stanley, Head of Communications and Policy, Simon Communities of Ireland

Noel Howard, Co-Ordinator, Social Care Ireland

Louise Bayliss, SPARK Ireland

Ian Power, CEO, Spunout.ie

Dr. Nicholas Breakwell, Chief Executive, St. Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland

Paul Gilligan, CEO, St. Patrick's Mental Health Services

Margaret Morris, National Co-ordinator, Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP), Treoir

Aideen Howard, Director, The Ark

Marian Quinn, CEO, The Childhood Development Initiative

Yvonne Casey, National Director, The Irish Aftercare Network

Majella McAllister, Founder of The Museum of Childhood Ireland Project

Tricia Keilthy, Head of Social Justice and Policy, The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

Professor Pat Dolan, Director, UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUIG

Vivienne Parry, Child Rights Advocacy and Education Manager, UNICEF Ireland

Siobhán O'Dwyer, CEO, Youth Advocate Programme

Dr Patrick Burke, CEO, Youth Work Ireland