

Introduction

1. I am pleased to make this submission to the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills on the Retention of Records Bill 2019. I am a survivor of a residential institution where I spent my life from age of 11 months until I was 16 years old. I gave testimony to the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse and to the Residential Institutions Redress Board.
2. I strongly object to the Retention of Records Bill 2019. All records should be made available to any survivor, should they request them.

Survivors' Access to Their Records

3. I think any survivor who wants their records should absolutely have the right to access any information that is held by the state concerning them. At present these are our records and to lock up these for 75 years as proposed is a scandalous suggestion. It would add to the trauma that a lot of us had to endure while preparing our documentation for these committees if this was to happen. It would be so hurtful and unjust to take away any hope of finding any information that is held in these files that might give us a better insight as to why it all happened in the first place. Seeing our own files might give us survivors some healing and help us move on. Not spending our lives wondering why we suffered like we did?
4. Survivors should be able to request a copy of their own testimony/records which they gave to the Ryan Commission or the Residential Institutions Redress Board. It is our own testimony. I cannot see any valid reason for withholding this information from any of us.

Access to Survivors' Personal Records by Other People

5. I think if anyone who died in the schools have any next of kin who are interested in accessing their records, they should be able to do so. I would be slow to give them to just any family member. It should only be the next of kin.
6. I feel the same should apply to anyone whose relative was in a school and who died as an adult. Only the next of kin should be allowed access. They can show them to other family members if they choose to do so.
7. Survivors' testimony should never be made public by anyone other than themselves if they choose to do so. It is a very personal choice. Some may have no problem but others may object even if the testimonies are anonymous. A person can be recognized by something they have said in their statement. Even if names are not mentioned.

8. Personally, I would not like to have my testimony made public unless I chose to do so. Which I probably would not. I feel it is an individual decision for each person.

9. I seem to remember that our records of the testimony we gave to the Ryan commission and the RIRB would be destroyed at the end of its work. I have not requested my records because I understood that they were going to be destroyed. A lot of us were in agreement at the time that but, now in hindsight it's good that it did not work out that way because they would be lost to us forever. I really hope the same will not happen if you decide to pass this outrageous bill to lock our records away and completely out of our reach for our life time and possibly our grandchildren's lives. It is unlikely that anyone would look on it as history. That is one of the lamest excuses I have ever heard.

Records of the Industrial School System

10. Honestly, I don't see the benefit of revealing how the schools were run is going to benefit any survivor except to see how the state paid for each child in their charge. Maybe if someone was doing their thesis, the records could be made available for research purposes. I have been contacted by some students who are doing papers on this subject. I think that the non-personal records such as administrative records or financial records of the schools and the Department of Education's records should be made available to academics and researchers studying this topic.

Recommendations to the Committee

11. Survivors' personal records including their testimony and any records, such as medical records or birth certs or records of institutionalization, should be made available to survivors if they wish to access them. These personal records are our property and we have a right to them.

12. Survivors' (living and deceased) personal records should be available to their next of kin.

13. Survivors should have the final decision as to whether their records should be made available to anyone, including researchers and the public.

14. Records relating to how the industrial school system was run (religious orders' records and state records that do not mention individuals) should be available to researchers.

Submission on the Retention of Records Bill 2019

15. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to give my opinion. I sincerely hope the committee will look favorably on some if not all of my suggestions. Please do not lock up our records for 75 years.

Go raibh maith agaibh.