



The Association of

affiliated to



6 November 2019

Dear Sir/Madam

RETENTION OF RECORDS BILL

I write on behalf of the members of The Association of Mixed Race Irish regarding your Proposed Retention of Records Bill. I have canvassed our members seeking their views on the proposed removal of our testimonies from our ownership and sealing them at your leisure.

I can state with a degree of certainty that my members are opposed to any attempt to hide our testimonies given to all Commissions (including The Ryan Commission, Residential Institutions Redress Board) in good faith and with the promise that our testimonies remained the property of the Survivors who braved deep personal trauma and shared their horrific experiences with the various Commissions.

At the time of giving our testimonies to these Commissions all Survivors were obliged to sign a gagging order under the threat of legal and financial sanctions by the State against them. However, this threat of legal action does not mean that the State has the right to OUR records to dispose of them as they see fit – these records remain the property of Survivors. We have no doubt that any further gagging or sealing of our records will conveniently be applied to the testimonies of Survivors given again, in trust to the Mother and Baby Commission. Below are the words from individual members of AMRI expressing their mistrust of the Irish State:

‘I made a special trip to London to give my submission to the Committee in person. I did not do this for the State to lock my testimony away for 75 years. I am now left wondering what it was all for and what is the State trying to hide. When such a Bill is put in place it is usually to protect the State. Locking away our records is most certainly not for benefit or the protection of survivors.

My submission was given in good faith. As my submission is my own “words” I do not give the Irish State permission to lock away my ‘words’ for 75 years or any records related to either to my submission or my time spent in institutional care. This move will always leave the State open to criticism and conspiracy theories as to why the need for such a veil of secrecy that the State really shouldn’t be so comfortable with.

A.P.

‘I wrote 2 statements touching on some of my experiences in state institutions and enormous suffering and unhappiness. Before submitting statements I was never informed that my testimonies would be kept secret for any number of years, or that by submitting I had given copyright of my testimonies away. I am a victim of institutional abuse afforded to me by state institutes, a state initiative. Those experiences were endured and issued through religious silence. Shame needs exposure, yet another blanket of silence is now being proposed. I am present, living alongside those experiences. In order to heal, and heal I must, I need my experiences aired, shared, scrutinised and acknowledged in my lifetime! Knowledge will help ensure those atrocities are never again repeated. Besides, I’m not history, yet.’

E.A.

‘Why take testimonies if they are to be locked away forever, who does it serve? Our histories are to be sealed. Who decided they have the copyrights to our own testimonies. It appears we were used for some unknown purpose.’

D.K.

‘I completely disagree with their plans, it’s our property. Maybe they have written their own version and don’t want it scrutinised in case we would challenge their version. I strongly suggest they listen to our points of view.’

J.H.

‘I appeared before the Ryan Commission to Enquire, it was a deeply traumatic experience however, at no point was I ever informed that my testimony, my pain was the property of the Irish State; you were the cause of it – my story remains my story, my property – not yours to dispose of at your whim’.

Anonymous

Truth and Reconciliation

I am a member of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs Collaborative Forum. One of the goals of the Forum is to establish priorities for inclusion within a Transformative Truth and Justice initiative – a first for the Irish State. It is patently obvious that first there must be a history that is acknowledged for this type initiative to even have a chance of succeeding. To remove the Survivor Testimonies and seal them for 75 years is a massive Human Rights Abuse and Ireland has a lot of gendered Human Rights Abuses within its short 100-year nation state history since 1922.

This year, the Collaborative Forum produced a 90 page report to the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs with some 30 recommendations delivered to the Irish Cabinet. There are two key recommendations that would be undeliverable should the Irish State proceed to steal the testimonies of the Survivor community; make no mistake – the Irish State is attempting the theft of the thousands of testimonies of living Survivors.

1. A national monument to the Survivors of Ireland’s Institutions
2. Survivor history to be taught at Secondary School level

Anybody can understand that sealing the testimonies of all Survivors for 75 years makes these two recommendations null and void – History cannot be taught when that history is removed from the national narrative. Monuments cannot be erected outside a context.

Both the Department of Education and Department of Children and Youth Affairs are working at cross purposes and this undermines the trust of the entire Survivor community in any Irish Government.

Our mixed-race Irish stories of pain have already been whitewashed from Survivor narrative. In 2014 we gave evidence before the Justice, Defence and Equality Committee. One of our most important asks was:

‘We ask members of the Justice, Defence and Equality Committee to ensure to the extent possible that all records pertaining to our childhood in State Institutions (including third party correspondence) be made available to us, to include, fostering, adoption, and medical files and that the Committee appoints an Officer with the necessary authority to oversee this’.

Should the Retention of Records Bill be legislated into Irish law, it will set a precedent to deny the mixed-race Irish community all rights to our own histories, our

true identities, our medical records, adoption and indenturing and institutionalisation decisions continuing the Irish tradition of sweeping it's unwanted, discarded citizens under the national carpet – this cannot stand.

Faithfully

Rosemary C Adaser BA (Hons.) MSc/Dip

Founder and CEO
Association of Mixed Race Irish

Winner of the 2017 Gerry Ryan Community Award, presented by 