



James M. Smith  
Associate Professor  
Department of English  
140 Commonwealth Avenue  
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467

Mr. Alan Shatter, T.D.  
Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence  
Office of the Minister for Justice  
94 St. Stephen's Green  
Dublin 2  
Rep. of Ireland

Ms. Kathleen Lynch, T.D.  
Minister for State, Disability, Equality and Mental Health  
Office of the Minister for Justice  
94 St. Stephen's Green  
Dublin 2  
Rep. of Ireland

March 12, 2011

Dear Ministers Shatter and Lynch,

First, let me take this opportunity to congratulate you on your recent re-election to Dáil Éireann, and the even more recent appointment to your respective ministerial portfolios. Speaking on behalf of Justice for Magdalenes (JFM), I look forward to working with you in the coming months to help deliver justice for the population of women who spent time in these abusive institutions.

Second, as you are aware, the previous government referred the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC) *Assessment of the Human Rights Issues Arising in relation to the "Magdalen Laundries"* report to the Attorney General for his "consideration" on 11 November 2010. The *Assessment* document, you will recall, offered twelve conclusions underscoring the State's complicity in the abuse of women and young girls in the laundries. More importantly, the *Assessment* recommended that the government establish "a statutory mechanism ... to investigate the matters advanced by JFM and in appropriate cases to grant redress where warranted."

I am writing to ask that you ascertain the Attorney General's response to the IHRC *Assessment* as a matter of urgency. Moreover, I ask that you notify the Irish public as to the Attorney General's response as soon as possible. Ultimately, I encourage you to advocate with your government colleagues that the State adopt the IHRC's recommendation and immediately

institute the statutory inquiry. I also ask that you help convince the government cabinet as to the importance of immediately offering a formal apology to all Magdalene survivors.

Third, I know that you are both well aware of JFM's work over the past 18 months to establish the State's complicity in the abuse of women and girls in the Magdalene Laundries. JFM has met with the Departments of Justice, Health and Education, and we have had ongoing written communications with the Department of Defense and Social Protection. I can provide you with copies of any and/or all of JFM's correspondence with the State. What JFM is anxious to avoid, however, is the need to start over with the new government, a process that would be time consuming and non-productive. In pursuing restorative justice—an apology, reparation, and services—for the survivors we work with, JFM remains ever aware of the fact that the majority of these women are aging and elderly. This campaign, therefore, is time sensitive. We ask you, in turn, to please give these issues your earliest and most serious consideration.

Fourth, as you know, the previous government nominated the Department of Justice as the “lead department” in dealing with survivors of the laundries. Can we assume that the new Fine Gael/Labour coalition government will continue this arrangement? For your information, JFM worked closely with Mr. James O. Martin, Assistant Secretary in your department and, no doubt, he will be in a position to brief you on our two meetings and various communications to date. At our last meeting (25 June 2010), Mr. Martin and his colleagues raised the prospect of a formal state apology. This is something we at JFM are now prepared to discuss further. Likewise, we are working on a revised reparation scheme, one that focuses on services, and this is something we would like to discuss further.

Finally, please know that Justice for Magdalenes is prepared to meet with you to discuss any of the above. If it would be helpful, we would like to outline our latest ideas about the nature and costing for our proposed reparation scheme. We can also update you on our group's submission to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Office for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) as part of the United Nation's Human Rights Periodic Review process.

In conclusion, JFM is very aware and deeply appreciative of your support—as individuals and as representatives of your respective political parties—for our campaign while speaking from the opposition benches. Now that you are in government, we also appreciate that there are unique challenges facing the nation in the years to come. However, for the women at the center of this campaign, women who have been ignored by Church and State for far too long, we ask that you give priority to this matter and respond as soon as possible.

I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

James M. Smith (Electronic Signature)

James M. Smith  
English and Irish Studies Program

cc. Mr. Enda Kenny, Taoiseach; Mr. Eamon Gilmore, Tánaiste; Mr. Ruairi Quinn, Minister for Education and Skills; Ms. Joan Burton, Minister for Social Protection; Dr. James Reilly, Minister for Health; Ms. Frances Fitzgerald, Minister for Children