

Justice for Magdalenes

Crocknahattina, Bailieborough
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Ms. Kathleen Lynch, T.D.
Minister for State, Disability, Equality and Mental Health
Department of Health and Children
Hawkins House
Hawkins St.
Dublin 2

17th September 2012

Dear Minister Lynch,

Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) is writing to you in your capacity of Minister for State with responsibility for Older People as we continue to be concerned about the welfare of Magdalene survivors.

In light of Minister Shatter's recent announcement regarding the additional delay in publishing the Inter-Departmental Committee's final report, we feel it imperative that a dedicated help line and outreach service be made available to survivors of the laundries as soon as possible. As you are aware, many of these women are aging and elderly and they need their government to offer assistance immediately.

Over three years have passed since JFM submitted its first redress scheme to the government. The Minister for Justice insists that there can be no discussions of an apology, redress or restorative justice until after the publication of the Committee's final report. Now with the additional delay, survivors are once more left to wait on an apology, redress and much needed services.

As you know, JFM is primarily an advocacy group. Still survivors nonetheless seek us out and we have as a result had the honour of getting to know these women. We have predominantly operated a referral system as a means to assisting these women with their queries, however the work remains time consuming for a voluntary group to carry out. Moreover, and based on past experience, JFM anticipates an increase in the number of survivors coming forward after the publication of Inter-Departmental Committee's final report.

Bearing this in mind, we would like to draw your attention to Section 2 of our Restorative Justice and Reparations Scheme, submitted on 14th October 2011, concerning a Dedicated Unit within the Department of Justice for survivors of Magdalene Laundries. JFM believes that such a facility is absolutely imperative and the very least that can and should be provided for survivors.

Consequently, we are requesting that as Minister for State with responsibility for Older People, you put an interim service in place for Magdalene survivors. A simple provisional service such as a helpline and referral mechanism would not involve a massive drain on government resources, nor should it be considered as a solution to addressing all of the women's needs, yet it would mean a great deal to survivors. And, JFM would submit, it is the responsible and ethical thing to do.

We urge you to consider putting this service in place and should you wish to discuss the matter further we would be glad to meet with you.

Yours sincerely,

Mari Steed, Director, JFM Coordinating Committee

Claire McGettrick, JFM PRO & Coordinating Committee

Professor James M. Smith, Associate Professor, English & Irish Studies, Boston College

Dr. Katherine O'Donnell, Women's Studies, School of Social Justice, UCD

Maeve O'Rourke, Harvard Law School 2010 Global Human Rights Fellow

cc. Mr. Alan Shatter, T.D., Minister for Justice; Senator Martin McAleese, Independent Chairperson, Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of state involvement with the Magdalen Laundries.