

From: Individual

Sent: 28 November 2025 12:32

To: +Comm Executive Public Email <Committee.Executive@niassembly.gov.uk>

Subject: Scope of the Truth Recovery

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing regarding a point made by Junior Minister Joanne Bunting during the recent TEO meeting, where she stated that the focus of the Truth Recovery process was intended to be on “women institutionalised,” and that broadening the scope would “dilute” the investigation. I wish to respectfully but firmly outline why the opposite is true.

1. Forced Family Separation and Abuse Were Not Confined to Institutions

Forced family separation — one of the central harms — along with other forms of abuse, was not confined to institutions. It was the outcome of coordinated practices across a whole system, involving state social workers, private nursing and maternity homes, GPs, hospitals, adoption societies, and religious organisations. These actors operated interdependently, applying the same coercive forces both inside and outside institutions.

It cannot be said that abuse was limited to women admitted to certain institutions. Serious mistreatment also occurred in other settings, including private nursing homes. In our own case, my mother gave birth in [REDACTED] private nursing home, [REDACTED] at just [REDACTED] years old. She was handed a walking stick by a nurse and cruelly told to bang on the floor if she needed help, then left entirely alone throughout her labour. Only at the very end was she given medical assistance to deliver her baby. She was not allowed to see him, hold him, or even give him a name, and he was taken from her immediately. Experiences like this show clearly that the harm was not confined to the more commonly known institutional settings - and excluding these cases would leave substantial parts of the truth hidden and unaddressed.

The Truth Recovery Panel has already recognised that experiences in ‘other institutions’ such as private nursing homes, were often highly traumatic and intensely pressurised. Because the stays were typically shorter, the experience was concentrated, with little time or support, making the impact even more acute for many women.

The crux of the matter is that women inside institutions and women outside institutions were subjected to the same overarching system of harm. A narrow inquiry cannot uncover the truth because it overlooks the very mechanisms that created the harm in the first place, making it impossible to understand how these abuses occurred and to ensure that the same, or similar, atrocities can never happen again.

2. Institutionalisation Was Only One Point in a Larger System of Practices

Institutionalisation was only one link in a wider chain of state and private practices. Women did not arrive in institutions in isolation. Their experiences were shaped by decisions made in community settings, referrals from GPs, movements between private and state-run homes, interventions by social workers outside institutions, and adoption arrangements made entirely elsewhere. While the inquiry is examining pathways and practices, focusing predominantly on certain institutions risks reducing private nursing homes and other non-institutional settings to secondary or incidental roles. These settings were often central to the process of forced separation, with some private nursing homes actually operating as de facto Mother and Baby homes in their own right. Examining institutions alone shows only

where some women ended up, without fully accounting for the decisions, pressures, and actions that took place in private nursing homes and other community settings. This is not peripheral detail — it is essential to a complete and accurate truth recovery.

3. Forced Separation Occurred in Many Settings, Not Just Institutions

The defining harm was the removal of the child, and forced family separation - not the physical location of the mother. Forced separation happened in institutions, in private nursing homes, in GP and hospital settings, in informal placements, and in private family homes where women were pressured by state social workers. Those impacted by state actions outside institutions experienced the same systemic pressures as those inside. Excluding non-institutional cases erases critical evidence about how forced separation operated in practice. It is also important to recognise that not all women who were institutionalised were pregnant or gave birth during their time in those settings. Some were placed there for reasons entirely unrelated to pregnancy, and not all experienced forced separation. Equally, many women who *were* subjected to forced family separation were never institutionalised at all. This reinforces the fact that institutionalisation and forced separation are related but distinct issues. If the inquiry focuses only on institutionalised women, it will exclude many people who suffered the central harm of forced separation, while including others who did not experience that harm. A truth recovery process must reflect the actual patterns of harm rather than relying on institutional status as a proxy for who was affected.

4. The Independent Panel Has Already Taken Evidence from Outside Institutions

The Truth Recovery Independent Panel has already gathered evidence from people outside institutions, including women who gave birth in private nursing homes, individuals pressured by state social workers while living at home, women placed informally with private families, and people whose experiences never involved an institution at all. These testimonies were heard because they are part of the system and part of the truth. This raises important and unavoidable questions: What will happen to this evidence? Will it simply be discarded or written off as irrelevant? Why are these people's experiences now being framed as "diluting" the inquiry when they were significant enough for the panel to document?

5. The Risk of Creating the Need for a Second Inquiry

A further concern arises if non-institutional survivors are excluded from the scope. If these experiences are ruled "out of remit," then what is the implication? Would a separate process or inquiry be required in the future to address the harm suffered by those who were coerced or separated from their children outside institutional settings? Such an outcome would be neither efficient nor fair. It would mean two fragmented historical records, two separate processes for survivors who suffered the same systemic harm, unnecessary delays to truth and recognition, and significantly greater public expense. It would also lead to an unreasonable situation where government must fund a second inquiry to uncover truths that could have been addressed properly in a single, comprehensive process. A truth recovery process that separates survivors into different categories is not only costly — it risks institutionalising inequality in the very mechanism designed to address past injustices. It is surely better, more respectful, and more responsible to address the full system now, rather than create the need for another inquiry later.

6. Suggesting Inclusion Would "Dilute" the Inquiry Is Offensive and Incorrect

Suggesting that including non-institutional cases, or that broadening the scope would "dilute" the inquiry is deeply offensive and fundamentally wrong. Many women who were

never placed in an institution also experienced coercion, mistreatment, severe distress, and life long trauma as part of the state-sanctioned forced family separation system. These harms occurred in private nursing homes, community settings, GP surgeries, and even in women's own homes. Their experiences are therefore part of the same system of violation and cannot be dismissed or treated as secondary. To imply that including their experiences would dilute the inquiry minimises their suffering, suggests their harm is less worthy of recognition, and creates an unjust hierarchy of victims before an official inquiry has even begun. There is no ethical or meaningful way to rank suffering between women in institutions and those outside them. Their settings differed, but the systemic harm was the same. No truth recovery process should invalidate or exclude whole groups of survivors.

7. Excluding Non-Institutional Settings Conceals Key Actors and Breaks the Chain of Responsibility

Excluding private nursing homes and other non-institutional environments conceals key actors and breaks the chain of responsibility. Many decisive actions leading to forced separation occurred outside institutions, often with even less oversight. Excluding these settings removes crucial evidence, obscures the actions of responsible individuals, and breaks the causal chain needed to understand how the system functioned. A restricted inquiry would hide the truth rather than reveal it.

8. Broadening the Scope Strengthens the Truth, Not Dilutes It

Broadening the scope does not dilute the truth; it strengthens it. A narrow inquiry shows only part of the reality, while a comprehensive inquiry reveals the full truth. Broadening the lens does not dilute the truth — it sharpens it. Only a system-wide investigation can answer the core questions the inquiry was created to address: what happened, why it happened, and who was involved.

9. Lessons Must Be Learned from Other Jurisdictions

The Republic of Ireland's Mother and Baby Homes Commission was widely criticised for excluding non-institutional cases, resulting in an incomplete and mistrusted record. Northern Ireland now has the opportunity, and responsibility, to avoid repeating those errors by ensuring that all survivors are heard and none are excluded by an arbitrarily narrow definition of "institutionalised."

10. Recognition of Wider Family Harm and Generational Trauma

Whilst the system was undeniably gender-based, in that women and girls were the primary targets of institutionalisation and coercion, the harm of forced family separation was not gender-exclusive. Fathers were also traumatised, marginalised, and denied their rights, with many prevented from stepping forward, excluded from decision-making, or having their consent bypassed entirely. Their experiences form an essential part of understanding how the system actually operated. Other countries have already recognised this broader reality: for example, the Australian National Apology for Forced Adoptions explicitly acknowledged the harm experienced by fathers, siblings, extended family members and the children taken, recognising that forced separation reshaped entire families, not only the mothers. A truth recovery process in Northern Ireland that focuses primarily on women must still reflect these wider impacts, otherwise the historical record risks becoming incomplete and overlooking those fathers and families who were also harmed by the same systemic practices. Recognition of wider family impacts strengthens, rather than dilutes the truth.

Conclusion

The truth about institutionalised women cannot be uncovered by examining institutions alone. The same systemic practices of coercion, pressure, mistreatment and forced family

separation operated across multiple settings. Excluding private nursing homes, family placements, and community-based pathways would erase crucial evidence, marginalise many survivors, and misrepresent the nature of the system itself. If the goal is genuine truth recovery, the inquiry must reflect how forced separation and related abuses actually occurred — across an interconnected system, not within a single type of institution.

Please note that I submit this information in my capacity as a representative for my Mother, Father and late brother in the Truth Recovery Process. I request that it is not used in a manner that identifies myself or any individual mentioned. The information may, however, be cited anonymously, if required.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kind regards,

Individual