

Submission from [REDACTED]

My mother-in-law was unmarried when she gave birth to a daughter in a Northern Ireland workhouse infirmary in [REDACTED] She was [REDACTED] when she first met her daughter who was then [REDACTED]

My principal concern with the draft bill lies in the current proposals for standardised redress, in particular the exclusion of unmarried mothers and their children who suffered within the workhouse system.

As you will be aware, survivors of workhouses endured conditions and treatment comparable to, and in some cases worse than, those experienced in other institutional settings now covered by redress. To exclude them risks creating an unjust hierarchy of suffering, and leaves many without acknowledgement, support, or access to remedy.

The justifications for this exclusion as set out in the Equality Impact Assessment for the redress proposals are invalid for a number of reasons.

The Equality Impact Assessment acknowledges the 2021 Truth Recovery Report (*Truth, Acknowledgement and Accountability*) recommended and the NI Executive accepted that financial redress scheme should include all women who spent time or gave birth in a workhouse. To exclude these women therefore fails to deliver the full scope of the decision taken by the NI Executive in respect of the findings and recommendations of the Truth Recovery Report thereby effectively disregarding and compromising the authority and intention of the Executive. Those charged with the responsibility of giving effect to legitimately taken and carefully researched recommendations are under a duty and obligation to find ways of delivering those recommendations rather than adduce arguments for refuting and rejecting them as the authors of the EIA have done.

The legal advice the authors of the EIA report that they received to justify excluding unmarried women and their children who were in workhouses from standardised redress, namely, that it would be discriminatory towards other Workhouse residents, is clearly open to serious question.

The EIA justifies the exclusion of unmarried mothers in Workhouses from standardised redress on the grounds by claiming that married and non-pregnant women who were in workhouses may feel their experience has not been recognised. It is not at all clear why this should be so when it has been perfectly clear from the start of this process that the focus of its attention is upon the experiences of unmarried mothers and their babies. Patients in hospital with kidney problems surely don't feel their experience has not been recognised when there is an inquiry into how patients with heart disease have been treated although they have all been in the same hospital.

The EIA further seeks to support its justification for excluding unmarried mothers in workhouses from eligibility for standardised redress on the grounds that there is limited

first person testimony about the particularly distinctive treatment pregnant women in workhouses yet it acknowledges there is plenty of evidence in published research about the way they were treated. It does not explain why this evidence, which presumably is based on interviews with those who spent time in the workhouses or historical records, is seen as less valid.

Moreover, the EIA acknowledges that the Public Inquiry will not focus on people in the workhouses who were not pregnant women and children now adults thereby conceding the point it is perfectly possible to deal with pregnant women and children now adults in workhouses as a separate group. Yet it then goes on to deny unmarried pregnant women in workhouses access to redress on the grounds they do not constitute a sufficiently distinct group.

It should be noted that unmarried mothers who were in workhouses have been included in access to support services. This inclusion is a tacit acceptance their experience was comparable to that of women in mother and baby homes and Magdalene laundries. Yet the EIA denies unmarried mothers in workhouses the access to standardised redress that it affords to women who were in mother and baby homes and Magdalene laundries.

It is not entirely clear why the EIA highlights the difference in age between survivors of workhouse incarceration and survivors of those who've been in mother and baby homes and Magdalene laundries, but the fact those in the workhouses are fewer and older seems to be being unreasonably cited as a justification for their exclusion from the standardised redress scheme.

I conclude by noting that the exclusion of unmarried mothers in workhouses from access to redress could be open to legal challenge. A further judicial review may be necessary if the redress scheme fails to recognise their experiences.

I ask you to give due consideration to this matter to ensure that the scheme does not compound the historical injustices already suffered by this group.

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27 September 2025