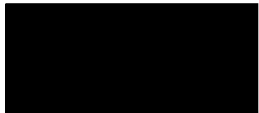


Ms Kathy O'Hanlon
Clerk to Justice Committee
N. Ireland Assembly.


27/10/2025

Dear Kathy,

Thank you for your letter dated the 16/10/2025. I did become aware earlier this week that the webpage had been updated and that the submission was extended from 5 pages to 6. Thank you, as well, for your work on that. I am pleased that my contribution has merited inclusion on the page.

It is imperative for me to make clear, however, that the focus of my contribution still remains with my original submission (30/3/2025) which was copied to the Justice Minister, as I was uncertain about:

1. The Committee getting my letter in time,
2. It may not have been accepted.

My own clarity of conviction is to stick with the proposal to restore the Children and Young Persons Act 1968 as the best way forward towards fixing the problems that have beset the child care sector here, over such a long period of time. I have asked my MP - Claire Hanna - to look into the problem of how it was amended in the summer of 1996. Up until 30/6/1996, services for Close Supervision (Secure) care - under the Children and Young Persons Act 1968 - were provided for in Slemish House at Glenmona, West Belfast (7/8 beds) and in Shamrock House at Lakewood, Bangor, Co Down (8 beds). On the 30/6/1996 Lakewood was then established as the single unit for the region (8 beds).

It is in this context that I would see a 2000/2001 Health Committee Report's recommendation of 2000/2001 as a possible way to get this done.

Recommendation ix. 'To help alleviate the current crisis in provision by the statutory sector, the Department should introduce subordinate legislation to lift the current restriction on the voluntary sector from providing secure care accommodation.'

It would also address the concerns raised by Mr Frank McKeating which I have highlighted on page 3 of my submission - see at 120 and 121.

Please find appended the first couple of conclusions from the Health Committee's Report of 2000/2001. This is to highlight some issues of real public concern arising from the evidence their inquiry examined at that time and the need for candid discussion on how we are doing the best that we can do for some of the most vulnerable and the most disadvantaged children and young people here in N Ireland.

Yours sincerely,


Appended : Conclusions; 192 & 193 (Page 38) - First Report of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2000/2001.

Cc - Justice Minister

Conclusions.

192. The central theme running consistently throughout the evidence provided to the Committee was the deep concern at the general neglect within, and historical underfunding of, the residential sector for children and young people in Northern Ireland. Children's residential care was frequently referred to as a Cinderella Service—a damning indictment of a service that should be valued as providing security and stability for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in our society.

193. While the Children Order was an enlightened piece of legislation that placed the best interests of the child at the heart of services for children by imposing a raft of new duties on statutory authorities, its implementation has been severely emasculated by a lack of accompanying resources. Indeed, witnesses complained that not only was there underfunding, but they cited instances where resources had been further diverted out of children's services into other "priority" areas. This is clearly an unacceptable state of affairs that must cease immediately. There is a moral as well as legal obligation on statutory authorities to provide proper support and guidance to children in a safe environment.

- Deep concern.
- General neglect.
- Historical underfunding.
- Other "priority" areas.
- Moral / legal obligation → Safe environment.

Ms Kathy O'Hanlon,
Clerk to the Justice Committee,
N. Ireland Assembly.

21/7/2025.

Dear Kathy,

Further to my earlier correspondence to you on June 9th. 2025.

I am pleased my submission has been accepted - as confirmed on the Committee webpage - and I hope it will be helpful to the Committee as a way to scrutinise the legislation.

I would be very happy to engage constructively with the Committee in respect of further discussions.

In regards to my contribution towards a more effective scrutiny, at the outset, could I please request your consideration of the following suggestion.

I am enclosing an improved presentation of my original submission (30/3/2025) for the webpage, as it is:

1. Typed out to cover two pages only;
2. Containing, as added, the full text of my references at Appendix 2. of the submission.

I reiterate that the references at (120) & (121) are the focus for my proposals. They are also the basis for one of the Health Committee's recommendations which can be elaborated on at a later stage of possible scrutiny discussions /considerations.

At this juncture it is incumbent on me to admit that I have no knowledge of how the Health Committee's recommendations were actioned, other than the last one (xxxvi.) - 'A Commissioner for Children' - was brought into law in 2023.

Yours sincerely


30th. March 2025

Dear Joanne,

I wish to make a contribution to your Justice Bill Committee, by letter, as I am not in a position to do it on-line.

My input, for your consideration, would be focused primarily on the area of: 'to make changes to bail and custody arrangements for children and young people.'

In consideration of the long-standing problems in the Close Supervision (Secure) Care Unit in Lakewood at Rathgael Centre, Bangor, Co. Down, I note, to you, a recent Independent Report's proposal (7 out of 53) as relevant, ie linking Lakewood up with the Juvenile Justice Unit (Woodland) as a way to resolve the problems. The Report by Prof. Ray Jones was published in June 2023.

Significant change to existing arrangements would require the establishment of a new Children & Families Arm's Length Body ('ALB') for the managing of above.

My resolution proposal would be referenced to an earlier Report, ie 'Inquiry into Residential and Secure Accommodation for Children in N. Ireland,' set up by the then, Health Minister, Bairbre de Brun - 2000/2001.

The recommendations and oral evidence (Vol.1 & Vol.2) give a better understanding of WHY, I believe, it is the best way forward (to resolve the problems) for the benefit of the most vulnerable children here in N. Ireland. Appended 1 & 2.

WHAT has to be changed?

I would envisage the removal of the legislative prohibition in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, and also, the restoration of the Children and Young Persons Act 1968 as the way to do this - See in particular, appended (2)

Yours sincerely,

SEAN MULRINE

Cc To Justice Minister

PTO -

Appended (1)

N. Ireland Assembly.
Committee Health, Social Services and Public Safety.
Vol. 1 and Vol. 2.
Session 2000/2001. — First Report.

Inquiry into Residential and Secure Accommodation for Children in N. Ireland.

Appended (2)

Above (1)

Oral evidence, Wed. 20/9/2000
Mr. Frank McKeating (Child Care N. Ireland.)

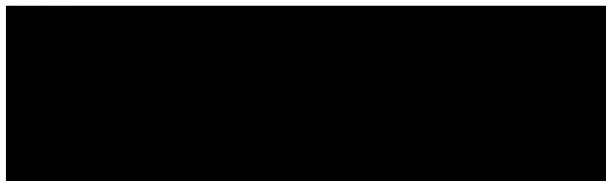
Page 28 of Vol.2 — (120 & 121)

120. I shall move on to the difficulties with secure accommodation. We recognise that a significant but small number of children need to be placed in secure accommodation to afford them the protection they need. We fully support a range of services to pre-empt the need for children to enter that type of facility, but for some it is the best option at a particular time in their lives. The provision of secure accommodation has been restricted to the statutory sector in Northern Ireland, excluding both the voluntary and private sectors. Such a prohibition does not apply in England and Wales, and we are at a loss to understand why we ¹have been excluded.

have

121. In June 1999, when there were major concerns about the number of children who should be in secure accommodation but were not so accommodated, my organisation made an offer to the Department to provide a secure facility on our site. Although we had a staff and management team with previous experience of working in secure accommodation, the Department would not remove the ban on the voluntary sector's providing that facility. One year later, the additional provision commissioned for the unit at Lakewood, is still not available because it has not been possible to find appropriately qualified and experienced staff. That was a major failure by the Department, and our organisation feels that the prohibition, which is prejudiced and discriminatory against the voluntary sector, should be lifted.

Chair of Justice Committee,
N. Ireland Assembly.


15th. September 2025

Dear Joanne,

Further to my letter to you just before the summer holiday break (29/6/2025) on my submission of (30/3/2025) to the committee - Citizen response to the Justice Bill Call for Evidence. Can I start by saying that I hope you had an enjoyable holiday before making a couple of points on the letter.

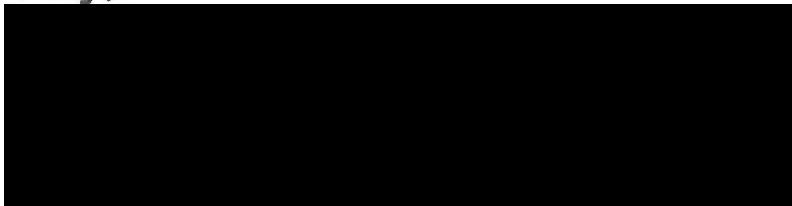
Firstly; I want to acknowledge and thank you for the attention given to it. I was pleased, notwithstanding your evidence call was set up to be done online, that you allowed my submission, by letter, to be accepted.

Secondly; I was pleased at your decision to amend the original submission by adding my second letter to your committee clerk (Kathy), as further useful evidence for your scrutiny process. Certainly, good schooling/education is of paramount importance for all children towards developing their full potential. Essentially, being in a school that is welcoming, nurtures positive self perception and builds confidence through achieving is vital, in my view, as a preparation for society.

During the summer I wrote to Kathy with a request to amend my original submission to improve its presentation and add text to make it more effective in the scrutiny process. I am hoping it will receive favourable consideration.

To conclude I want to point out a clerical error at the very end of my letter to Kathy. The sentence - 'A Commissioner for Children' was brought into law in 2023. The sentence should have ended.....2003, not 2023! The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) was introduced in 2003 with the late Nigel Williams as the first post holder.

Yours sincerely,


Sean Mulrine.

Ms Kathy O'Hanlon,
Clerk to Justice Committee,
N. Ireland Assembly.

[REDACTED]
Monday 9th. June. 2025.

Dear Kathy,

Re; My letter to you of the 29/5/2025.

As my submission has not yet been placed on the committee's webpage I wish to make the following suggestion: I would have no objection to my submission being referenced by 'Retired Teacher' for the publication - as well as my name.

My reason re. above; I note that none of the Teacher Unions have made a contribution by the cut - off date of 4/4/2025. Indeed it was the same in 2000 for the Health Committee Inquiry at that time.

NB.

Evidence in the Health Committee Report of 2000 did note that Education in the various 'care' centres, prior to the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, was a key issue. They were schools. They were places of learning.

* See appended at A.

Yours sincerely,

SEAN MULRINE

Appended A.

N. Ireland Assembly:
Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.
Inquiry into Residential and Secure Accommodation for Children in Northern Ireland.
Wednesday 24/10/2000.

Volume 2 - MINUTES OF EVIDENCE - Page 57 (405).....Ms Mc Williams.

Page 70, (511 & 512).. Miss Webster.

Page 1

TEXT: 405, 511 & 512

P10

TEXT at A. Page 1.

405. Ms McWilliams: Page 57.

I visited a project in Middletown that is closed now; that has been discussed in the committee before. What is happening to the educational needs of those young people? It was not just accommodation and safety that was being provided for these young people at Middletown. They were also being educated. Now they are being spread out and supposedly "mainstreamed," but their needs will not be met because they have special criminal justice, social services, adolescent and mental health needs.

511. Miss. Webster: Page 70.

There used to be St. Patrick's Training School, Rathgael, and St Joseph's in Middletown. They have closed but children were able to move into the care side of those training schools before the court system put them into the juvenile justice side. There was education on site, and that was a key issue with those facilities. The regional care centres are now known as Glenmona, which was the old St. Patrick's on the Glen Road, and Lakewood, which was the old Rathgael. St. Joseph's in Middletown which is another voluntary sector school, has withdrawn from residential children's services.

*

NB. * sell.

512.

Some young people from the Foyle Trust were in St. Joseph's and the irony of it is that we had to put them into Brindley House. We did not have anywhere else to put them. Those regional centres are not secure accommodation but they provide intensive support and they have education on site. In Foyle we need that kind of intensive support unit developed locally working in partnership with parents and children, and having a local facility. The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 says we should maintain children in or as near to their communities as we possibly can — not 70 or 80 miles away in Rathgael.