

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



6<sup>th</sup> March 2026.

Dear Kathy,

Re: The Committee's attention to my submission of 30th March 2025 and the recent letter to advise on the query to my MP about the Children and Young Persons Act (N I) 1968.

In recognising that the letter (14th February) is lacking in substance on "new factual evidence" in relation to the main issue raised with my MP, I now wish to clarify on this in order to give the committee a better understanding of the emerging crisis in children's care services from around that time. Page 3 of the Health Committee report of 2000 clearly sets this out. See Appended.

Please find attached two letters to my MP (Claire Hanna) as the most effective way to do this. This evidence highlights the factually legitimate concerns for my query.

NB: A Close Supervision (Secure) Care Unit for the Catholic/ Voluntary sector at Glen Rd., West Belfast, as an integral part of the continuum for residential children's care services, had been established with the agreement of the NIO in 1989. Of paramount importance to that agreement, was the overarching principle for a "restriction of liberty unit in the sector" to be in the best interests of the child. At that time, robust procedures were put in place for admission to such a facility. That was to ensure children's rights, in an appropriate environment, for its use as a last resort and for the shortest time possible.

That agreement with the NIO in 1989 was arrived at under the legal framework of the Children and Young Persons Act (NI) 1968.

Thus, in context from that time, there is strong evidence to support the fact that the Board of Management of the Glenmona Centre/St Patrick's Training School resigned in protest over the NIO top-down diktat to shut the Close Supervision (Secure) Care Unit - the 7/8 bed Slemish House at the Glenmona Centre, West Belfast - on the 30th June 1996.

My thanks again to yourself and the committee members for the attention being given to my submission and the further relevant information.

Yours sincerely,

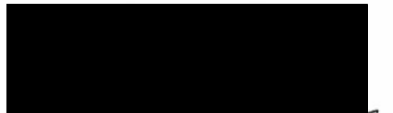


SEAN MULRINE.

Appendix: 1. Page 3 of Health Committee Report 2000.

CC: Claire & SDLP.

Claire Hanna MP,  
(Belfast South & Mid Down),  
1 Rushfield Avenue,  
Belfast.  
BT7 3FP.

  
3<sup>rd</sup> Nov. 2025.

Re: Correspondence 22nd October.

Dear Claire,

Thank you for the letter. I am enclosing a copy of the correspondence referred to (which was dated 29th September 2025). It had been sent via post.

NB:

- \* My original submission to the Justice Committee was made on the 30th March 2025.
- \* Since then it has been updated twice - from 3 pages to 5 pages and most recently (October)
- \* to 6 pages.

One point for clarity of conviction in relation to my request.

I am not aware of any specific provision of the Children (N Ireland) Order 1995 which regulates the transfer of the functions of or the services provided, from the catholic voluntary or nationalist based environment, to the state based environment. That happened on the 30th June 1996.

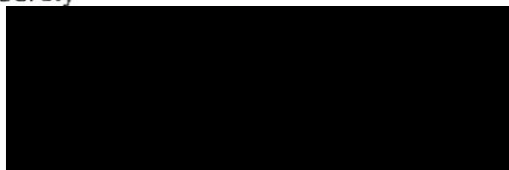
To remedy the problem of how the Children and Young Persons Act 1968 was amended I would see the 2000/2001 N Ireland Assembly's Health Committee Inquiry Report recommendation (ix at page 7 - First Report of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2000/2001.) as a possible way to do this.

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.

Yours sincerely



Ms Claire Hanna,  
MP for Belfast South and Mid Down.

  
29<sup>th</sup> Sept 2025.

Dear Claire,

Further to my letter to you of the 4th March and also of my letter to your Senior Caseworker - Sarah, on the 25th March.

I rang the office and spoke with Sarah soon after to indicate that I had availed of an opportunity to pursue the matter through the Justice Committee of the N Ireland Assembly and that I would be happy to come back later for possible help/advice from yourself.

The opportunity was to make a submission to the Committee for Justice's Call for Evidence on the Justice Bill which is currently progressing through the N Ireland Assembly. That submission can be viewed on the Committee's webpage, which is available at the link below:

<https://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/2022-2027/justice/legislation/bills-primary-legislation/justice-bill/>

- Go to:
1. [niassembly.gov.uk justice bill](https://www.niassembly.gov.uk/justice-bill/)
  2. Committee for Justice- Primary Legislation- Justice Bill
  3. Quick Links. (View Written Submissions)
  4. Citizens Space responses to the Justice Bill Call for Evidence

My submission is a reminder to the N Ireland Assembly of:

1. The still relevance of their own Health Committee's Report of 2000 to the proposed Justice Bill scrutiny process;
2. An example of a major concern raised by the highly respected representative from Child Care N Ireland - Mr Frank McKeating.

A third issue, by way of my proposal, identified the amending of the Children and Young Persons Act 1968 before the end of June 1996 as a contributing factor to Mr McKeating's concerns.

The political reality was that the amending was required in order to effect:

- A. the closure of the voluntary sector's Close Supervision (Secure) Unit in Slemish House at Glenmona, West Belfast. on the 30th June 1996;
- B. the transferring of the services at Slemish to the statutory sector Secure Unit in Shamrock House at Rathgael, Bangor, Co Down on that date,
- C. and for the N Ireland Office to withdraw the funding to the Glenmona Centre, also on that date.

Having now got it accepted publicly on the N Ireland Assembly webpage that the Children and Young Persons Act 1968 was amended as part of very significant changes in summer 1996, could I ask of your help, as my MP, to check the record at Westminster on this - as may be required by parliament. Please advise on which N Ireland Office Minister assumed responsibility to report and record this, presumably, to the N Ireland Affairs Committee, or indeed if there is some other way of confirming on this.

Yours sincerely,

  
Sean Mulrine

PS. Please note a clerical error in Page 1 of my submission to the Justice Committee.  
The last line should have ended 2003.....not 2023.

Northern Ireland Assembly  
Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Inquiry into Residential and Secure Accommodation for Children in Northern Ireland

Volume 1 - Report and Proceedings of the Committee  
22 November 2000.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee, which was established on 29 November 1999, initially identified children's services as a priority area for scrutiny. Serious shortcomings within the children's residential sector were highlighted by a number of oral evidence witnesses, including Putting Children First, which lead to the Committee agreeing to conduct an inquiry under the following terms of reference:  
  
*"To investigate the current position with regard to residential and secure accommodation for children in Northern Ireland, and to make recommendations for improvements."*
2. The chronic problems in the provision of children's residential services have been well documented as far back as 1997 when the former Department of Health and Social Services itself undertook a review of this sector culminating in the report 'Children Matter'. This report mapped out a detailed action plan for an expanded model of specialised residential provision taking account of the wide range of children's differentiated needs. The fact that the Minister, Bairbre de Brún, has recently set up a Task Force to drive forward the model of provision envisaged in the report, while welcome in itself, is a sad reflection on the lack of progress against the report's recommendations since its publication over two years ago. (The number of residential places currently available, 338, falls some 30% short of the estimated 453 places needed.)
3. There are a number of origins for the present crisis in the children's residential services:
  - successive Health and Social Services (HSS) Boards' Regional Strategies aimed to promote family and fostering placements over residential care;
  - an historical over-reliance on the voluntary sector, which, unsurprisingly, eventually came under intolerable pressures and reduced its provision dramatically;
  - the introduction and impact of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 (the Children Order), and the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, which diverted even more children and young people into the care system; and, crucially,
  - an unwillingness by the Department to commit sufficient resources to the sector, including those for preventive family support measures.
4. The severe shortage of places and suitable accommodation contributes to a multitude of problems within the residential sector and compounds the vulnerability of those children most disadvantaged in our society. Witness after witness outlined in graphic and depressing detail the damaging consequences for both children and staff arising from the shortfall in provision. Vulnerable children and young people of varying ages, and conflicting (psychiatric) needs, are being inappropriately placed together in general provision homes, thus compromising their care and safety and exacerbating their problems, as well as placing staff under intolerable pressures. The Committee heard from witnesses of shocking instances of violence in homes, absconding, drug abuse and inappropriate sexual behaviour, including prostitution.
5. There is an obvious lack of adequate provision for meeting the needs of children with mental health problems and of secure accommodation for children and young people who pose a risk to themselves and others. The current piecemeal respite provision for disabled children requires urgent expansion. Put simply, the basic safeguard for looked-after children of choice of placement to reflect their individual needs does not exist. Proper funding will be vital in transforming the current inadequate provision into the expanded residential sector, as envisaged in the report 'Children Matter'. A high quality public care service cannot be built and sustained on the cheap. Regrettably, several witnesses referred to children's residential care as a Cinderella Service, which is surely a damning indictment of a service that is meant to be providing the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in our society with a stable and secure environment.