



Statement from the Special Advocate for Survivors regarding Dignified Burial and Memorialisation

Friday 5 December 2025

Findings in Tuam marks the need for a clear and urgent government response to locate burial grounds in other institutions for Dignified Burial and Memorialisation for all who died in institutions.

The Special Advocate for Survivors of Institutional Abuse, Patricia Carey notes the update on 5th December 2025 from the Office of the Director of Authorised Intervention Tuam (ODAIT) in relation to infant or child remains at the site of Tuam Mother and Baby Institution.

These findings in Tuam signal the need for a clear and urgent government response to locate burial grounds in other institutions for Dignified Burial and Memorialisation for all who died in institutions.

I acknowledge that the confirmed identification of infant or child remains at the site of the Tuam Mother and Baby Institution is a deeply upsetting and painful development for Survivors and their families today. I wish to express my sympathy to all those affected by this update at Tuam, in particular to those Survivors who have been seeking information on their family members for decades.

I agree with the concerns raised in respect of the immediate and urgent need for dignified burial and the sensitive treatment of mass graves, unmarked graves and sites of burial for Survivors across institutions in Ireland. I am in full support of Survivors who have been calling for this to be addressed by the State for decades.

Since my appointment in March 2024, Memorialisation, both local and national, and Dignified Burial continues to be a key issue raised with me by many Survivors and Affected Persons, Survivor Groups, family members, and other stakeholders.



This matter continues to cause immense distress, pain and upset to Survivors and Affected Persons and their families. Many Survivors and their families lack basic information about their deceased children or family members.

- **Where are the burial records for each person who died in the institutions?**
- **Where are the exact burial locations for children and all those who died in institutions?**
- **When will we have dignified burial grounds and memorialisation for all those who died in institutions, including accessible space and places for family members to visit and mourn?**

Many Survivors and Survivor groups are seeking permanent and appropriately located areas at each institution to provide Survivors and their families with a space to remember, reflect and commemorate.

Determining and fully understanding the exact location of burial sites is critical to progressing dignity for all those who died. Furthermore, consideration of this is particularly urgent in sites which are in private ownership and are currently under development.

In my first [Annual Report 2024-2025](#), there is a dedicated section to Dignified Burial and Memorialisation (pg 56-58), as well as several recommendations (pg77). I have included a summary of the points raised in the annual report on this subject below.

- **I have engaged with many Survivors and Affected Persons, and Survivor groups with experiences in Mother and Baby Institutions, Industrial School and Reformatory Institutions, Magdelene Laundries and other sites across Ireland seeking support from Government to identify, locate and preserve sites of burial.**
- **Many have emphasised the pressing need for Government to investigate the children and mothers that died in Mother and Baby Institutions, Industrial School and Reformatory Institutions, Magdelene Laundries and other sites to establish as much information about the location of burial sites at these institutions as possible. This includes through access to professional expertise and survey work, as appropriate.**



- The dignified treatment of the children and adults who died in these institutions is a fundamental part of fair Redress by the State. A Human Rights-based approach is required to ensure equal access to Redress for all Survivors, including those who are deceased. **The principle of 'Leaving No One Behind', equality and fairness should underpin all redress measures including dignified burial and memorialisation – and this should be applied to all sites and to all Survivors.**
- As part of my recommendations, I called for urgent consideration to be given to identify, preserve and mark in a dignified and agreed manner, all remaining burial sites of children and adults who died in institutions.
- I also called for a review of the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE) memorialisation grant scheme, and consideration given to the establishment of a shared fund to allow applications from all Survivors and Survivor groups wishing to create local memorials and organise events for Survivor groups to gather.

It is crucially important that dignified burial does not just relate to one institution, but the **fair treatment of all remaining burial sites of children and adults who died in institutions.**

I am aware from work with the *Rún - Ireland's (in)visible buildings* project (www.ru-fada-n.ie), that there are over 300 sites of institutional confinement and incarceration across Ireland. It is important that all places of burial associated with these sites are identified, protected, preserved and marked in a dignified and agreed manner. All of these sites need to be examined in respect of identification of burial grounds and following the wishes of the families and survivors of all institutions as to how these grounds should be treated and their dead memorialised and given dignity.

I have visited many sites including Sean Ross Abbey, Bessborough and Castlepollard institutions where the burial grounds of the mothers and children who died there are not known (from 1921-1998 over 15% of all children born in institutions died – over 9,000 children)¹.

¹ Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes 2021, Executive Summary page 4. Link: [Executive Summary](#)



In **June 2025**, I sent a letter to Minister Foley on the specific issues related to identification of burial grounds and memorialisation. I wrote to Minister Foley to raise this important matter, calling for urgent attention by the Minister and Department officials to relook at the Sean Ross and Bessborough institutions in particular to ensure the burial grounds relating to these institutions can be finally and comprehensively identified. In this letter I outlined the significant distress caused to many Survivors and their families by the fact that there is no definite identification these burial grounds.

Furthermore, given the scale of deaths in these institutions of both children and adults in **Mother and Baby Institutions, Industrial School and Reformatory Institutions, Magdelene Laundries and other sites** across Ireland, it is incumbent on the Government as we are modern, moral and kind nation who value and honour our dead, to finally identify the final resting place of those who died in these institutions.

Section 8(4) of the *Institutional Burials Act 2022* refers to 'Burial Grounds Regulations' of the Regulation of Burial Grounds Act 1888, in referencing this section I contend that Section 8 (1) does cover those other sites whereby:

- **We do not know if burial records exist for each person who died in these institutions.**
- **We do not know if the remains are uncoffined.**
- **We do not know if the burial was recorded or appropriate.**

This would allow for further, forensic and final identification of burial grounds in both these institutions under the powers in the *Institutional Burials Act 2022*.

I have publicly called for the identification of these burial grounds, and the need for further forensic regulations to identify the burial grounds for all those who died in institutions, including in an interview with the *Irish Times* in June 2025 ([Other burial sites must be identified, says survivors' advocate after exhumation preparation begins in Tuam – The Irish Times](#)).

On **Sunday 29th June 2025** at a memorial event in Bessborough, which Taoiseach Micheal Martin attended, I spoke to An Taoiseach about the trauma caused due to the continued inaction to identify burial grounds in mother and baby institutions. Again, in speaking to An Taoiseach I specifically mentioned Sean Ross and Bessborough, along with other institutions.

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In addition, I have engaged with and met with the Department's Memorialisation and Historical Burials Unit to raise the issue of dignified burial and the identification and preservation of burial sites in mother and baby institutions across Ireland. I continue to raise this issue at meetings with Department officials.

In my first annual report, in my press releases, in other public statements and media interviews, and with government officials of different Departments, I have called on the urgent need for dignified burial for children and adults who died in institutions across Ireland. The Government, at both a national and local level, have an important role to play in ensuring that these sensitive sites are protected and commemorated appropriately and according to Survivor wishes.

I note positively the recent work by some local government bodies around memorialisation and dignified burial, who have engaged proactively with Survivors to seek their views, input and advice. I encourage other local government bodies across Ireland to engage with Survivors and affected persons and their families to ensure dignified burial and memorialisation.

I am aware that the [National Centre for Research and Remembrance Steering Group](#) has committed to liaising with the Working Group on Local Memorialisation to ensure alignment between the National Centre, local memorialisation initiatives and the commemorative grant scheme.

Based on direct feedback from Survivors, I have also emphasised the importance of adequate and equitable funding for memorialisation, commemoration and Survivor community events. It is the position of the Special Advocate that a cross-departmental fund should be available to all Survivors of institutional abuse and Survivor groups. This fund should enable access to a simple and streamlined application process for dedicated funds for the purposes of local memorialisation and commemoration initiatives, as well as Survivor community events, gatherings and meetings. It is important that this scheme should be designed to be easily accessed and utilised by Survivors and Survivor groups, avoiding unnecessary administrative and bureaucratic barriers.