

Special Advocate for Survivors Advisory Council

Meeting Note

Meeting 1, Pillar 6 – People Affected by Illegal Birth Registration

12 March 2026

Agenda item: Introductions

- Special Advocate and pillar members in attendance introduced themselves and shared some background information and further information about why they applied to the Advisory Council and what they hope to achieve as part of the Advisory Council work this year, through these meetings.

Agenda item: Overview of the work of the Special Advocate Office, the Advisory Council and Pillar Structure

- Special Advocate provided pillar members with an overview of the work of the office since the establishment of the role in March 2024, and further details around the key issues shared with her by Survivors, particularly around records, redress, memorialisation and dignified burial, and the need for ongoing health and housing supports.
- Since her appointment in March 2024, she and the team have engaged with over 1800 Survivors and Affected Persons, living in Ireland and overseas. Her remit covers people who spent time in Mother and Baby institutions, County homes, Magdelene Laundries, Industrial School and Reformatory institutions, people affected by illegal birth registration, people who were boarded out and Survivors living both in Ireland and overseas.

Agenda item: Discussion on the purpose of the Advisory Council and opportunities for engagement with the pillar members for 2026

- The Advisory Council supporting the work of the Special Advocate consists of 7 distinct pillars, covering a range of different experiences of institutional abuse and forced family separation.
- 38 people have been appointed to the Advisory Council, living in Ireland and overseas.
- The Advisory Council members have been appointed for a year.



Agenda item: Key themes and possible areas of focus for the pillar in 2026

The following includes a summary of the key issues discussed at the meeting:

Issue 1: Records

- Incorrect information received under records
- Pillar members discussed Baptismal records and Special Advocate advised she will look into this further, writing to the Archbishop for clarity.
- Administrative burden placed on Survivor/Affected Person – feeling in limbo, many with no records or trusted information to base on except accounts from other people.
- Years of searching, and feeling stonewalled by State and various bodies - this is unfair and discriminatory
- There is a lack of clarity about what is sealed or unsealed in the General Registry Office amongst those affected. Any decisions around this must be consent-based and a choice for the individual involved.

Issue 2: DNA and Tracing

- Strong feelings around the importance of DNA – and that the State cannot give people information and records about their identity without verifying through DNA as a first step (as clear in situations when paperwork is falsified or contains incorrect information).
- Highlighted poor experiences, challenges and inconsistency of delivery by state bodies. DNA and Tracing was identified as a critical issue for the pillar, and those affected by illegal birth registration.
- Overview of years of experience being ‘assisted’ by state bodies. Experience with Tusla and barriers – decisions to ‘close’ cases without consent / while ‘unresolved’ to satisfaction of the individual at the heart of this. Importance of keeping cases open / decision to not proceed with DNA.
- The use of private/ commercial DNA kits by Survivors/ Affected Persons highlighted as an invaluable resource during discussions. Engagements with genealogists, commercial DNA undertaken by many on their own initiative – not an easy or a quick service. Flagged that it is only for privately obtained DNA, many people affected would have no information at all.



- Given the importance of DNA in these cases, it is important that DNA services are paid for by the State.
- Discussion followed on the inconsistency around DNA tracing – and promises previously made to people affected by illegal birth registration around access to DNA and Tracing services.
- Further clarity from the General Registry Office (GRO) on DNA and how and when this is used and 'legally recognised', and any limitations would be welcome – particularly in comparison to commercial DNA that may have been privately obtained by people affected but is not accepted by State Bodies.
- The development of resources, infographics and information on relevant state body and government websites would be very helpful, as there is a lot of confusion and miscommunication and misunderstanding on entitlements and use of DNA
- Special Advocate advised she will contact the Department of Children, Disability and Equality regarding an update in relation to policy and procedures for Tusla and Adoption Authority Ireland around DNA and Tracing.

Issue 3: Justice and Truth-Telling

- Consensus that there are more people affected by illegal birth registrations out there/ still coming to light. More work needs to be undertaken to assess the numbers affected, and to support them.
- Pillar members shared their positions and feelings regarding justice and truth telling
- Positive stance on the 2022 independent report by Professor Conor O'Mahony, Special Rapporteur on Child Protection on Proposals for a State Response to Illegal Birth Registrations in Ireland highlighted – noted as an honest appraisal. The 17 recommendations within this report also praised, but the lack of follow through by the State in relation to these recommendations were highlighted. Pillar members noted that they felt strongly that they would like to see pressure on the State and a formal response about why this report and its recommendations were not progressed.
- Interest expressed on detailed information about the networks, organisations, agencies and individuals involved, and proper and accurate data (numbers affected) was agreed to be extremely important.
- Need to keep this in public attention as all issues are not yet resolved or addressed.



Issue 4: Memorialisation (Local, National and Overseas)

- Discussion followed around plans for National Memorialisation – namely the National Centre for Research and Remembrance, a site of conscience which will properly honour all Survivors of institutional abuse and forced family separation. This will be located in Dublin and will include a museum and archive. Special Advocate provided some additional information about the National Centre and advised that she sits on the Steering Group for the project, along with 3 other Survivor representatives, and noted some of the commitments from the Steering Group – including dedicated Survivor/Affected Persons-only days at the site, and dedicated meeting spaces for use by Survivors/Affected Persons.
- The importance of ensuring that people's stories are properly captured and honoured in this National Centre project, what the National Centre will look like, and access to the archives briefly discussed.
- Interested in archival documentary footage from this network of individuals and institutions involved in illegal birth registration, being included in the National Centre – these are important artefacts.
- Special Advocate office will send over some additional information about the National Centre project, as well as the work undertaken by the National Museum and the National Archives as part of this.

Issue 5: Language and Terminology, and Communications by Government and State Bodies

- Pillar members discussed their positions around language and terminology, in particular around the use of '*illegal*' vs '*incorrect*' in the context of birth registrations, and differing opinions and positions on this amongst the community of people affected were noted.
- For some the fact that an illegal activity took place, means that an investigation should take place.
- Special Advocate noted a Survey for people affected by illegal birth registration due to be shortly launched by Minister Foley relating to language and terminology, and advised that the office will share this with the pillar for their input once the details are available.
- Poor communication by state officials, including in cases where potential leads were identified earlier was highlighted



- Highlighted unique experiences by people affected by illegal birth registration – no direct route or pathway for this, dependent on people's own experiences and situation

Issue 6: Supports for Affected Persons

- The lack of supports for people affected by illegal birth registration strongly emphasised.
- The exhaustion felt by those affected in trying to find their information, undertake tracing, and advocating for the services they are entitled to was shared by pillar members. The huge emotional toll of this was emphasised, over years – stress, giving up, exhaustion, worn out.
- The importance of supportive community for those affected and the value of a united front was highlighted. Some factors affecting this may be that people affected by illegal birth registration may not be bonded in the same way, possibly due to lack of shared experience in an institution, as well as the lack of knowledge around this, and that many people are not fully aware of the illegal birth registration issue, the complexities around this and the impacts, even if affected.
- Traumatic Counselling identified as a real need for people affected by illegal birth registration, with pillar members advising that many are affected more as they get older with issues/ trauma coming back to the fore.
- Impact of different name, different birthday, different genetic/family medical history and lack of information and accurate records.

Agenda Item: Discussion about future meetings and sharing information

Advisory Council Engagement throughout 2026

- Special Advocate advised that it is her hope that the Advisory Council will be involved with, input into and support the work of the office, throughout the year. While there are 3 meetings which pillar members will be invited to attend throughout the year, (2 pillar meetings and one full Advisory Council meeting) the Special Advocate envisions that members will engage with Advisory Council pillar members across the year as part of her ongoing advocacy work, and other projects, events and initiatives.
- The Special Advocate office noted that the team are happy to provide and information/ documents in whichever format is most useful for members, please just let the team know.



Meeting 2 in Summer 2026

- Special Advocate office will be in touch with pillar members regarding the scheduling of the next meeting, and agenda items for discussion.

Full Advisory Council Meeting 3 in Winter 2026

- Special Advocate provided some further information about plans for the plenary meeting of the Advisory Council at the end of the year, where it is envisioned that members from all 7 Advisory Council pillars would be invited to come together in Dublin for a full meeting.
- Ideas, thoughts and suggestions about what items and issues pillar members may want to include on the agenda for this meeting, as well as possible external attendees to invite to speak to issues, would be very welcome in coming weeks and months.

A note on privacy and representation concerns

- In relation to the brief discussion about privacy and representation, the Special Advocate advised that Advisory Council members represent themselves and their own experiences, insights and views on the Advisory Council.
- Notes of meetings will be a high-level summary of points of discussion and matters for follow up. Any member's personal information will not be included, and specific points will not be attributed to any single member.
- Copies of the note will be shared with pillar attendees for review and sign-off, and will be published on the Special Advocate website for transparency.
- Decisions on the naming of pillar members (for example as included by way of thanks in any published outputs, can be agreed in advance)

Agenda Item: Next Steps

- Special Advocate office will be in touch to share a note of this meeting, any follow up actions, and more information about the date and details for next meeting and in person meeting.



Meeting Follow ups

Action	Responsible	Status
Confirmation of details for next meetings of pillar	Special Advocate office	
Send on additional information to pillar, • DCDE Consultation on language relating to Illegal Birth Registration • Details on National Centre information and National Museum's Lived Experience Panel	Special Advocate office	
Special Advocate Write to Archbishop seeking clarity regarding 'Expiria' Register / Special Register of Baptism Certs, relating to illegal birth registrations.	Special Advocate	Ongoing
Special Advocate to contact Department of Children, Disability and Equality in relation to updated re. policy and procedures for Tusla and Adoption Authority Ireland around DNA and Tracing	Special Advocate	Ongoing