

Truncated Transcript of Comments by Barry Ward in Seanad Eireann, 23rd October 2020

Barry Ward

One of the issues in Irish politics is that we don't admit when we've made mistakes often enough. Your comments demonstrate humility.

I acknowledge what other speakers have said about the level of pain, anxiety and hurt caused in the public discourse.

The effect that that has had on the survivors, the victims of these horrible deeds. In all of the discussions in both this house and the Dáil what has been absent is a recognition of what I think has truly caused that hurt. And that is a sustained and dishonest campaign of misinformation about what this bill actually does. Every member of both houses of the Oireachtas has received literally thousands of emails about this subject. They have received emails that are grossly misinformed because of what I see online and elsewhere even in our mainstream media, discussions about issues that are not in this bill.

I don't know how many emails I have received from people criticising me for sealing the records of the mother and baby homes, something that is not in this bill. And I have challenged members of the houses to tell me where in this bill it says we are sealing the records. They haven't been able to tell me because I's not there. This is a short bill. It deals with a very specific issue... and that is safeguarding the database.

That said I welcome absolutely what I said about revising the time limits that are applied...revising what we are going to do about making that available to people. But I think if we are to be honest on this subject, we must also recognise that there are parties out there and in here who have been involved in wilfully misleading the victims of these homes. In wilfully putting out information that has deliberately caused upset, anxiety, hurt to the very people they then come in here and purport to represent. And in fairness those same people have acknowledged minister your goodness in this because I think you have an honest and a forthright approach to this and you have sought to do something that was right. But others have twisted that. They have taken that information of what's in this Bill and misrepresented it and they have led those people up the garden path.

Ivana Bacik

I think the senator making some very serious allegations... I think he just needs to be careful about where he is going with the allegations, what...I think he used the words 'wilfully misleading' and 'deliberately misleading' and I think that is a very dangerous sort of allegation.... Especially in such a sensitive area when so many people feel so passionately about this and when they have been wronged...

Barry Ward

I think it's really important to call this out. Because the senator is quite correct, there are people who have been wronged here. I am not blaming any of them by the way because there is a cohort of people, people who have been through the homes, the families of those people...

What I blame is other parties who have intervened and the reality is...I can stand over that because I have over 5,000 emails on my computer upstairs here about this issue, and the vast majority of them – I'd say some 4,000 – are exactly the same because they came from a website that was generated to allow people to plug these in.

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Ivana Bacik

...we are a democratically elected institution and we're public representatives and people are perfectly entitled to email us, to organise emailing campaigns, this hasn't been the first and I'm sure it won't be the last and people are perfectly entitled to do that and indeed justified in doing it if they feel strongly about issues, and it's up to us as public representatives to respond and call out those individuals if we believe what they're emailing us is wrong or we don't agree with them, but we shouldn't be critical of them in this house.

Alice Mary Higgins

...there is a practice in this house that you do not refer to persons who are not in this house or organisations not in this house in a way that is identifiable in relation to specific campaigns run by specific organisations, I feel we have strayed into that area...

Barry Ward

...I'm not saying there is anything wrong with sending emails. What I'm saying is... much of the information contained in those emails deliberately is misleading. It's inaccurate.

...

The point that I'm making is not criticising people for emailing senators...what I am saying is that there's a visible campaign of misinformation in relation to what's in this Bill...

...there is a significant misunderstanding abroad in the community in this country, that this bill does something that it does not, and what I'm saying is that is as a result of information that has been put out there by people which is incorrect and that is a significant factor because I think it is a major part of why the hurt and anxiety that has been caused in the first instance.

I'm calling it out because I think it is wrong...there is a major problem there and I believe that we need to identify it because if we say nothing about it, it just happens again and we allow...the point that I'm making is if we don't call this out it happens again and again and again and I think it's important for people to stand up when they recognise that something is happening that is wrong...

Lynn Boylan

...I'll also just defend the Clann Project, which is an admirable project, and the human rights lawyers who have been putting out the information and you with a legal background Senator Ward should know that legal opinions differ and how dare you call into dispute other legal opinions and say that they're trying to misrepresent what is trying to be done here...I do think it's important to call him out and to defend the right of people to email us here...he said that they orchestrated a campaign—a body such as the Clann Project orchestrated a campaign—yeah, you weren't brave enough to name them, but that's who you're talking about.