

**Children's Rights Alliance  
NEWS RELEASE**

For Immediate Release  
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**Stop gambling with the lives of  
children:  
They have the *right* to health care  
and Government has the *duty* to  
provide it**

The Children's Rights Alliance has today called on Government to adequately fund children's health care services and to establish the Office of Ombudsman for Children without further delay to ensure that children's fundamental human rights are protected and promoted.

Every child in Ireland has the right to "the highest attainable standard of health" and to "access to such health care services" as are necessary for the treatment of illness and the rehabilitation of health.

These rights are stipulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, international law which Ireland ratified in 1992, without reservation.

Although Ireland has assumed a moral and legal obligation to protect children's fundamental health care rights, they are being systematically ignored and routinely trampled upon with apparent impunity.

The tragic death of a two-year old child whose scheduled operation at Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children in Crumlin was cancelled because of the chronic failure to adequately staff intensive care beds has shown the extent to which children are being placed and left in jeopardy.

According to Dr. Freddie Woods, paediatric cardiologic surgeon at Our Lady's who was interviewed today on Morning Ireland, as many as one-third of critically needed surgical operations are being cancelled on a daily basis due to a lack of hospital nursing staff. Roughly half the intensive care beds are going unused because of a failure to correct this widely known problem which was identified and highlighted in a management report published in August 2000.

When asked whether more shocking and tragic deaths of children could occur under these circumstances, Dr. Woods said that, "Yes, it could occur again. The scenario is occurring on a daily basis."

To address these intolerable conditions and to prevent any more tragic and avoidable deaths, the Government must end its cuts to children's health care and provide adequate resources to support the medical care to which children are entitled. The Alliance has also called for immediate action on setting up the Office of Ombudsman for Children.

"Children urgently need an independent champion who can stand up for their rights and hold public officials and statutory bodies accountable when they engage in gross violations of children's rights," said Raymond Dooley, Chief Executive of the Children's Rights Alliance. "Children need an Office that will insist that the best interests of children be the paramount consideration in matters that affect them." As an example of the vulnerability and relative political powerlessness of children, he noted that the proposed re-organisation of the Health Boards and the Department of Health and Children appears to be proceeding without any mention of the potential impact it will have on children or their services.

"After seven years of promises, the Act to establish the Ombudsman for Children was finally passed in April of last year. But now more than a year has gone by and the post remains vacant. In sharp contrast we see that Northern Ireland, which passed its analogous legislation only months ago, has already managed to advertise, recruit for and just last week appoint the first Children's Commissioner for Northern Ireland. The post of Ombudsman, however, has not been advertised and procedures for recruiting and selecting staff, including the Ombudsman, have still not been announced."

With all signs pointing to the Department of Finance as the cause for the ongoing delay, the Alliance has called on Minister for Finance Charlie McCreevy to stop stalling and permit the Office to be established.

Passage of the Ombudsman for Children Act was warmly welcomed by the Alliance last year and was hailed as a major step forward in the effort to promote and protect the rights and welfare of children in Ireland. To ensure that the potential of the legislation is fully realised and that children will have a strong, independent ally to champion their interests, the Alliance has urged that the post of Ombudsman for Children be publicly advertised and be supported by a recruitment process that encourages applications and identifies the most qualified candidates for the position.

The Children's Rights Alliance is a coalition of 74 Irish NGOs concerned with the rights and needs of children. The Alliance works to secure the full implementation of the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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