

NEWS RELEASE
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**Children's Rights Alliance Welcomes
Passage of Ombudsman for Children Bill**

The Children's Rights Alliance has welcomed today's passage by the Dail of legislation to establish an independent Office of Ombudsman for Children.

"The passage of this legislation is a major development for all children and a big step forward in the effort to promote and protect the rights and welfare of children in Ireland. Children and young people will now have a strong, independent ally to champion their rights and defend their interests in all aspects of public life and policy that affect children," said Raymond Dooley, Chief Executive of the Alliance. "We particularly welcome the dual role proposed for the Ombudsman: to protect children's rights by conducting investigations into complaints regarding specific violations, and to promote the rights and welfare of children in all aspects of public policy, practices, procedures and law. It is now important that all of us in the statutory and the community and voluntary sectors take steps to ensure that all children under the age of eighteen, as well as their parents and guardians, becomes aware of this Office and its powers and responsibilities."

The campaign to establish an Office of Ombudsman for Children dates back to 1995. The Children's Rights Alliance, which has advocated since its inception for an Ombudsman for Children, welcomed the first governmental commitment in December 1996. In January 1998, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child urged Ireland to take action on this issue as part of its Concluding Observations on Ireland's performance in implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 1999, and again in November 2000 with the launch of the National Children's Strategy, the Government made its commitment to create through legislation an independent Office of Ombudsman for Children.

The Alliance recognises and appreciates the efforts made by Minister for Children Mary Hanafin, TD to secure publication and passage of this legislation, and the support and advocacy provided throughout this process by Frances Fitzgerald, TD, Roisin Shortall, TD, Austin Currie, TD and Senators Mary Jackman, Mary Henry, Joe Costello and other members of the Oireachtas who have worked to promote passage of this important piece of legislation. The Alliance would also like to thank its member organisations who have worked so hard to establish an Office of Ombudsman for Children, and to recognise the efforts of Noirin Hayes, Geoffrey Shannon, Tom O'Malley, Teresa Blake, Madeleine Clarke, Peter McVerry, Mel Cousins and especially the crucial support and contributions provided by Michael Mills, Ireland's first Ombudsman.

The Children's Rights Alliance is a coalition of sixty-eight non-governmental organisations concerned with meeting the needs and promoting the rights of children in Ireland. The Alliance seeks the full implementation in Ireland of the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.