

NEWS RELEASE

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Children's Rights Alliance calls for Sinnott appeal to be withdrawn

The Children's Rights Alliance, a coalition of sixty six organisations promoting the rights and welfare of children, today called upon the Government to withdraw its appeal of the High Court decision in the Jamie Sinnott case. The appeal to the Supreme Court is scheduled to begin tomorrow.

In a letter to Minister Michael Woods, T.D., Alliance Chief Executive Raymond Dooley urged the Government to welcome the High Court decision and "embrace the opportunity it provides to ensure that a quality education is made available to all. Rather than resisting the High Court judgment, the Government should use it to reinforce its commitment to provide every child with a meaningful education suitable to his or her needs."

Noting that "we cannot forget that this decision comes more than six years after the O'Donoghue judgment which made clear that the severely disabled were fully entitled to free primary education," Dooley cited Mr Justice Barr's finding that the Department of Finance has "persistently dragged its feet" in recognising its obligations and implementing the requirements of that judgment. "Under these circumstances it seems highly inappropriate for the State to continue to resist efforts to compel the provision of meaningful education to those whose rights and needs are not in dispute," stated Dooley.

"Appealing the Sinnott decision and continuing to attempt to reduce or minimize the State's obligations makes it clear to all involved," according to Dooley, "that the Government continues to view this as primarily a budgetary problem and a matter requiring cost containment measures." He urged the Minister to remember that "if the Government goes forward with its appeal and succeeds in reversing or weakening or limiting the High Court decision, such success will come at the expense of all the children with special needs who have a right to expect that the State will provide them with a meaningful education - not only after years of begging and fighting and going to court, but as a matter of course."

A copy of the letter to Minister Woods is attached to this release.