ONE IN FOUR
Ending the trauma of childhood sexual abuse

Opening Statement Deirdre Kenny CEO One in Four
The Joint Committee on Justice
General Scheme of the Criminal Law and
Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2025

Tuesday, 30th September 2025

Good afternoon, Chairperson and Committee members—Deputies and Senators. Thank you for inviting One in Four to make a submission on this important issue and for giving us the opportunity to address you today, representing the experience of those we support. Each year, One in Four supports approximately 1,200 men and women who have experienced child sexual abuse, many of whom we accompany through the criminal justice system. We welcome open discussion about child sexual abuse. Every conversation helps make it easier for survivors to feel seen and supported, and for society to respond with empathy and insight.

The core experience of child sexual abuse is fundamentally shaped by an abuse of power. Sexual abuse is not just a violation of the body, but a profound assault on agency, trust, and a child's sense of control over their world.

From our work, we know that survivors of child sexual abuse who engage with the criminal justice system often do so from a position of deep vulnerability. Many have carried the trauma of their experience for years, often in silence and isolation. The decision to come forward and report abuse is shaped by fear, shame, concern for others, and a deep mistrust of authorities that have historically failed them.

Survivors often carry these wounds into adulthood, navigating feelings of powerlessness and stigma that can persist for decades. How society responds to adults who come forward—whether they are believed, respected, and supported—matters deeply.

For many, engagement with the criminal justice system is a crucial part of healing. It represents an opportunity to reclaim voice and agency. But this process must be handled with utmost care. Our collective responsibility is to ensure that, in seeking accountability, the justice system does no further harm and supports—rather than undermines—the recovery of survivors.

Building on this understanding, One in Four's submission to the Committee draws directly from our experience supporting survivors, as well as from empirical research—specifically, the "Victim Experience in Focus" report, funded by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. This research presents detailed accounts from survivors themselves about the impact of criminal justice procedures. It highlights that routine court practices—such as requests for disclosure of personal records, lengthy hearings,

and lack of agency—can compound trauma and, in some cases, deter individuals from seeking justice or therapeutic support.

As outlined in our submission, it is essential that survivors retain agency in decisions about their personal information. All personal records—not just counselling notes, but also medical, psychiatric, and advocacy records—can contain profoundly sensitive details and must be protected by robust statutory safeguards.

Our research demonstrates that exposing survivors to additional court proceedings—particularly when these remove their ability to choose or control what is disclosed—carries a real risk of compounding harm. Any reform must ensure that the justice process upholds survivors' dignity, privacy, and right to determine what is best for themselves.

I would welcome your questions and further engagement.

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