



**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**Closing Speech by Chairperson, Ms. Justice Mary Laffoy,  
at the Fifth Meeting of the Citizens' Assembly  
on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution**

**The Grand Hotel, Malahide, 23<sup>nd</sup> April 2017**

Good afternoon all.

Thanks for your attention as I bring this the final meeting on the topic of the Eighth Amendment to a close.

This weekend we have reached a conclusion of sorts as you the members have fulfilled the first task that the Houses of the Oireachtas asked of you. Having comprehensively considered Article 40.3.3 as set out in the Constitution you have made your recommendations known. And these recommendations, at a minimum, have called for a change to the status quo. I will now for the purposes of absolute clarity and posterity take the room through these recommendations.

Results

In Ballot 1 the members voted by a majority that Article 40.3.3 should not be retained in full.

To be clear, to act on this initial recommendation, a constitutional referendum will be required.

In Ballot number 2, 56% of the members of the Assembly voted that Article 40.3.3 should be replaced or amended.

This result brought us to ballot number 3. In this vote 57% of you recommended that Article 40.3.3 should be replaced with a Constitutional provision explicitly authorising the Oireachtas to address termination of pregnancy, any rights of the unborn and any rights of the pregnant woman. In other words, it would be a matter for the Oireachtas to decide how to legislate on these issues.

This morning you were asked to make recommendations by ballot to the Oireachtas about what should be included in the legislation. Specifically, what reasons, if any, for which termination of pregnancy should be lawful in Ireland, as well as any gestational limits that should apply.

I will not revisit today's results which you have just heard.

These recommendations, at a minimum, have called for a change to the status quo. But they have also provided a clear map for my report to the Houses of the Oireachtas

#### Ancillary Recommendations

Further to these definitive balloted recommendations I will turn now to the matter of the recommendations that we asked you to provide earlier through the reflective written exercise. I know I can be prone to repetition on the matter of how well informed you are as a group of people on this topic. I make no apologies for this as I have seen how hard you have worked throughout this process and I remain convinced of the merits of capturing as much information from you as I can. Therefore, the consensus issues which come through this process will also have a home in the report and I believe they will be of benefit to the those who will be tasked with considering this report.

#### Dissenting voices

And though I talk now of majorities and consensus, I wish to acknowledge those whose perspectives or opinions did not emerge in the final vote. This is an exercise in deliberative democracy and your vote remains important to me because of the very fact it captures that other perspective, that dissenting voice, the different interpretation and I wish to assure you that your votes and voices will be recorded and have a valuable place in the report.

## The process.

Which brings me to a reflection on this weekend and how we reached the recommendations.

Since we have come together on this topic, we have challenged experts, each other and ourselves to find answers to deeply complex questions. This weekend was not without its moments of tension and was often fraught with the pressure we all felt. I think this was an entirely reasonable response and every sentence deserved to be parsed to the extent it was and I have come to expect nothing less from this forum.

And I was heartened to see how the spirit of collegiality ultimately prevailed. Your work alone has allowed so much new information to enter the public sphere and your respect and willingness to listen to one another may have set a new tone for it.

I want to thank those who have contributed to the Assembly. In the room every weekend we have had incredibly bright and enthusiastic team of facilitators and note takers. Their work involves a very special skill and we benefitted immensely from their presence. The Expert Advisory Group who have also been an immense support to the Secretariat and I throughout this process and I am very grateful for all their work.

I want to thank those who helped us to provide you with the information you needed to come to this weekend's recommendations. As I have said before we were fortunate to be able to withdraw from the more polarising perspectives and begin with the facts. Over the course of this Assembly you heard from 25 experts across medical, ethical and legal fields and I believe their contributions provided us with a solid foundations to go forward.

But advocates played exceptionally important role in this process as well. I wish to extend my gratitude to all those groups who came before us to share their perspectives. This is also true for all those individuals, representative groups and organisations who made a submission to the Assembly on this topic. The volume of submissions alone provided us with a further impetus to our work on this process.

To the women whose voices reverberated around the room as they recalled their own experiences of the Eighth Amendment, thank you again for your powerful contributions.

And you the Members. I know many of you have made some major sacrifices to be part of this process and absolutely all of you have given up your time and energy. Each weekend involved an incredible degree of concentration and evaluation, you were pushed and pulled and you never flinched. It was September 2016 when most of you were initially approached to participate in the process and it is important that in April 2017 we recognise your continued dedication to it.

### Conclusion.

In conclusion, I wish to advise you of the next steps. You have made your recommendations known through a rigorous voting process and it is now up to me fulfil the next step of the terms of reference. I endeavour to finalise this report and furnish to the House of the Oireachtas by late June. The Secretariat and I will communicate the contents of the report and the date it will be submitted to the Houses to you in advance of that date. Thank you again.

With that I call our weekend to a close.