



proibhinse fhroinsiasach na h-éireann

franciscan province of ireland

provincial office – 4, merchants' quay – dublin 8 – ireland

Whistle Blowing Policy

RATIONALE FOR POLICY

The aim of this policy is to encourage those who have concerns about the welfare or safety of children involved in Church activities to express those concerns without the fear that they will be victimised or harassed for so doing. The policy applies to all those who work for the Franciscan Province of Ireland whether in a voluntary or paid capacity.

There are protections under civil law for people who report child protection concerns. Under the 'Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998', people are protected from civil liability when they report child protection concerns to designated officers of the HSE, provided that they do so reasonably and in good faith. It is an offence to report child abuse, knowing that the information provided is untrue.

It can be difficult for people to raise concerns about the practice or behaviour of colleagues. People may be reluctant to do so because of:

- Fear of getting it wrong and damaging the career or reputation of a colleague
- Fear of disrupting working relationships
- Fear of not being believed
- Fear that the information will be used inappropriately, precipitating a chain of events that spiral out of control.

These concerns, however, have to be considered in light of the following:

- Each person working for or on behalf of the Province, its friaries and province agencies has a responsibility for the welfare and safety of children involved in church activities
- Raising a concern in a timely manner can prevent a bad situation spiralling out of control
- Raising a concern about one situation can reduce the risk of similar situations arising elsewhere
- Raising a concern about poor or inappropriate practice will prevent the person raising the concern from becoming implicated in such practice.

The Franciscan Province of Ireland commits itself to ensuring that any person, staff member or volunteer, who raises a child protection concern reasonably and in good faith, will not be victimised, harassed or in any other way be disadvantaged by so doing in any of its friaries or province agencies.



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ESTABLISHING GROUNDS FOR CONCERN

The protections of this whistle blowing policy apply to those who act reasonably and in good faith. Any person who is worried about poor or inappropriate practice or behaviour towards children involved in church activities should try to establish the grounds for their concern. They may make a point of closely observing the practice or behaviour that is worrying them and making a note of their observations, asking about the rationale for doing things in a particular way, checking with children and parents if they are comfortable with the way things are being done and/ or discussing their concerns with colleagues.

ACTING ON THE CONCERN

Once the person has established that there are grounds for concern there are a number of options open to them. They may choose to discuss the matter with the person about whose practice or behaviour they have concerns, they may choose to bring it to the attention of the group leader/ manager or the Guardian. However, if the person has information that clearly indicates that a child has been abused or is at risk of abuse that information must be referred without delay to the Provincial Designated Officer. People also have the right to share such information directly with the civil authorities, by contacting their local HSE office or, if the matter is urgent, the local Garda Station.

Whatever step is taken the person has the right to expect that their concern will be taken seriously and acted on appropriately. If the person believes that they have not been heard or taken seriously or that they have suffered negative consequences for raising their concern, they should report this to the Designated Officer or Deputy Designated Officer.

PROVINCE RESPONSE

The Province will ensure that any person who reports a concern for the safety and welfare of a child or children involved in church activities reasonably and in good faith will suffer no negative consequences for doing so.

If the matter is reported to the Designated Officer, it will be discussed with the person raising the concern and an appropriate response determined. The response will depend on the seriousness of the concern raised. At one end of the spectrum it might involve encouraging and supporting the person to try to resolve the matter at local level. At the other end, it could involve reporting to the civil authorities. The Designated Officer will inform the concerned person about the steps being taken to address their concerns.



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CONFIDENTIALITY

If a person reports concerns anonymously, the Designated Officer will try to establish whether there are reasonable grounds to be concerned for the safety and welfare of children and act accordingly. However, it is difficult to act on anonymous information. For example, information may need to be clarified and this is not possible if there are no contact details for the informant.

An informant may be prepared to give their name when reporting a concern but ask that it be kept confidential. The Designated Officer will discuss this with the informant when the concern is reported. (See Provincial Policy: 'Confidentiality and Exchange of Information').

HELP AND SUPPORT

The Designated Officer and Deputy Designated Officer are available to provide advice and support to those who are worried about the safety and welfare of children. Dr Johanna Merry can be contacted on 087- 2573450 or merryjo@eircom.net and Br Niall O'Connell can be contacted on 01-6742541.

Hugh McKenna, OFM
Minister Provincial