

Civil Registration (Electronic Registration) Bill 2024

Dáil Éireann – Committee Stage

Opening Statement by Joe O’Brien TD, Minister of State for Community Development, Integration and Charities

22nd May 2024

Check against delivery

Thank you Cathaoirleach for the opportunity to bring this Bill to Committee Stage. I thank members of the committee for engaging in pre-legislative scrutiny and for the committee’s report which has been extremely useful.

This Bill will enhance the civil registration process in the State. It will provide the opportunity for parents and bereaved families to register a birth, death or stillbirth online, update the criteria for stillbirths to reflect modern clinical advances and for the first time, introduce a system of electronic notification of deaths.

The new online registration service will be available to persons who have an authenticated SAFE identity (in the form of a Public Services Card issued by the Department of Social Protection) and a verified MyGovID account. The existing service provided in local registration offices by the HSE, as recommended by the Committee, will be retained for those persons who wish to avail of this channel for registration.

The online process will not only provide a more convenient method of registration for some, but it will also allow the service to operate if registration offices are not accessible for physical attendance, as occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A high-level working group which incorporates officials in the Department of Health, Social Protection and the HSE continue to work together to ensure that the systems development necessary to facilitate the electronic notification of Deaths and births set out in the Bill are progressed in conjunction with the progress of the legislation.

I will ensure that this high-level working group will also consider the recommendations aimed at supporting bereaved persons made by the Committee. Whilst some of those recommendations fall outside the scope of the Bill, they do highlight the need to ensure that the registration of a death should be carried out in a sympathetic manner with any support that the State can provide to bereaved families.

The Bill offers a measure of comfort to bereaved families in facilitating the issuing of an interim death certificate in cases where the death of a loved one is awaiting the outcome of an investigation by the Coroner.

The committee's recommendation in relation to investing in a 'Tell-us-Once' approach will be assisted with the notification of deaths by the HSE and other healthcare providers to the General Register Office. The GRO provide death registration data to the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO), and it is hoped that the proposed death notification system and online registration system will assist development of an appropriate whole-of-government response on this issue.

In relation to the Committee's recommendation for Stillbirth registration, the Bill proposes a reduction in the criteria for assigning stillborn status in line with advances in clinical care. I can assure the committee that future recommendations from the Minister for Health in this area will be examined by my Department with a view to reflect proposed changes in the legislation.

Access to the Register of Stillbirths will be broadened to additional family members and a Record of Stillbirths, to allow those families who wish to allow public access to the details of their stillborn child, do so, will be created. The provision will ensure open access to some records whilst also recognising and respecting the wishes of those parents who wish to retain the private status of their child's record in the Register of Stillbirths.

There are other provisions in the Bill which will allow registrations in the online environment to be recognised in the same manner as the existing in-person registrations. This will facilitate the civil registration service to use the legislation around corrections, amendments, cancellations, investigations, and printing of certificates for both in-person and online registrations.

Other amendments will assist the GRO in the operation of the civil registration service and facilitate the commencement of section 6 of the 2014 civil registration amendment act.

As I have set out, this Bill proposes major changes to how life events are registered in the State and provides important provisions that can have a positive effect on those who have suffered the pain of a stillbirth and those who must register the death of a loved one. It proposes to use technology to improve the process of registering life events and to bring the system of civil registration into the modern era.

I look forward to hearing the views of the Committee and working with you to progress this important legislation.

ENDS