

Date _____

Re: Restoration of Child Benefit as universal payment

Dear _____,

I am writing to you about the disturbing government policy in relation to Child Benefit. As you know, Child Benefit used to be a universal payment, paid for every child living in the State, regardless of family income or status. The introduction of the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) in May 2004 ended this policy.

The HRC might have been originally intended to restrict benefits to EU workers, but it no longer affects them. Instead it is now having a terrible impact on families in vulnerable situations and particularly their children. Families in a variety of situations where they cannot meet the HRC are now prevented from getting Child Benefit. To a family living in poverty, this payment can mean the difference between having shoes for the children – or not; between a child having a warm coat for the winter – or not.

For many years, government policy has recognised children’s allowance (Child Benefit) as a key mechanism to protect children at risk of poverty or living in poverty. Denying it to those in the most vulnerable situations is a puzzling reversal of government policy. The only explanation given by any state agency is that this too is government policy, based on immigration control.

It appears that the government's immigration policy is taking precedence over children's rights and its own stated policy on ending child poverty. This is particularly contradictory given its repeated commitment to upholding children's rights and recent announcement of a referendum to enshrine children's rights in the Constitution.

Restoring the monthly Child Benefit payment as a universal right for all children in Ireland is a vital step in guarding against child poverty and ending inequality between children living in the State. International law forbids discrimination against children on the basis of their parents' status or income, including the right to benefit from social security.

This is not about immigration policy; it is about putting children's rights at the heart of all government policy decisions that may affect them.

I call on you, as my representative, to ask An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern TD to restore Child Benefit as a universal payment to every child living in Ireland. I request that you help the government put the best interests of the child first. I am joining with the FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres) campaign to restore universal Child Benefit by saying:

Don't make children pay the costs of immigration policy.

Yours sincerely,

Name: _____

Address: _____
