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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 7, 2014

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Ambassador Anne Anderson
Embassy of Ireland
2234 Massachusetts Ave NW
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Ambassador Anderson,

I recently had the pleasure of meeting with Philomena Lee to discuss the difficult, decades-long search she relentlessly pursued to find the son she was forced to put up for adoption as an unwed mother sent to the Sean Ross Abbey in Roscrea, Ireland. In 1955, a St. Louis family from my home State of Missouri adopted Philomena's three-year-old son Anthony, whom they renamed Michael Hess. Despite both Philomena and Michael's efforts to obtain information about each other from the Abbey where they were separated against their will, the nuns refused to provide either of them with this information.

Through her own independent research, Philomena ultimately located her son, but not before he died. Michael arranged to be buried near the Abbey in the hopes that someday his mother, whose efforts to locate him he would never know, would come back to look for him. After his death, Philomena learned that Michael had taken two unfruitful trips to the Abbey only to be turned away by the nuns. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident. Many more of these children were sent to adopted families in the United States and are still encountering obstacles in obtaining their birth records.

Recognizing the scope of the issue, Ireland's Taoiseach Enda Kenny, on February 19, 2013, issued an official state apology to individuals, like Philomena, who were sent to convents and had their children adopted against their will, declaring it "the nation's shame." Taoiseach Kenny outlined a plan to compensate those who had been wronged by the institutions and begin a process to make adoption records public, so that mothers and children could be reunited.

Unfortunately, I have received reports that the process is still overly cumbersome, with adopted individuals waiting two or three years to even speak with an Adoption Authority social worker to begin the process of reuniting with their birth mothers. An Adoption Authority publication notes, "Unfortunately, current adoption legislation is extremely restrictive regarding the type and amount of information that can be released from an adoption file. . . . The Adoption Authority has repeatedly made it clear to Government that it considers the introduction of updated legislation in this regard to be long overdue."

I urge the Irish government to pass legislation to help expeditiously reconnect these adopted individuals with their birth mothers. I look forward to hearing from you regarding the progress

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the Irish Government has made on the reforms announced by Taoiseach Kenny and additional legislative measures that will be enacted to address this.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Claire McCaskill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Claire" starting with a large loop and the last name "McCaskill" following in a similar style.

Claire McCaskill
United States Senate