

NAIRO (the National Association of Independent Reviewing Officers) is the professional body supporting IROs. We are a registered charity. Our main aim is to promote the welfare of children in care by maximising the benefit and effectiveness of the reviewing process. We have a large membership and are supported by a number of eminent patrons. NAIRO is highly concerned about the Statutory Instrument (The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020) that came into force on 24.4.20. Since the measure contains important changes for the responsibilities of IROs, we were disappointed not to have been consulted on the matter.

NAIRO of course welcomes any legitimate steps that may be taken to assist hard-pressed front-line children's services and protect and promote the welfare of vulnerable children in these difficult times. However, we fear the easing of regulations contained in this instrument does not achieve this objective and instead undermines important children's protections. In particular, the removal of the requirement to have reviews for children in care every six months is neither necessary nor helpful, and we fear merely reduces essential safeguards for looked after children.

We fear that Covid 19 is being used as an excuse to introduce the relaxing of important safeguards for children in care that parts of the government wish to introduce anyway. Three years ago, the government sought to water down children's safeguards through the so-called "exemption clauses" in the 2017 Children and Social Work Bill. After a vigorous campaign by concerned parliamentarians, children's charities and others, the clauses were dropped, and the eventual Children and Social Work Act did not contain them. We fear that the new statutory instrument wishes to re-introduce some of these dilutions under the cover of Covid.

We strongly urge the Children's Minister Vicky Ford to withdraw these unnecessary, unhelpful and potentially dangerous changes, or at the very least to allow them to lapse in September 2020 when the statutory instrument lapses.