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*Number 49 of 1998*

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**PROTECTIONS FOR PERSONS REPORTING CHILD ABUSE  
ACT, 1998**

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ARRANGEMENT OF SECTIONS

Section

1. Interpretation.
  2. Designated officers.
  3. Protection from civil liability of persons who have reported child abuse.
  4. Protection of employees from penalisation for having reported child abuse.
  5. False reporting of child abuse.
  6. Saving.
  7. Short title and commencement.
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[No. 49.] *Protections for Persons Reporting* [1998.]  
*Child Abuse Act, 1998.*

Acts Referred to

Health Act, 1970	1970, No. 1
Petty Sessions (Ireland) Act, 1851	14 & 15 Vict., c. 93
Terms of Employment (Information) Act, 1994	1994, No. 5
Unfair Dismissals Act, 1977	1977, No. 10
Unfair Dismissals Acts, 1977 to 1993	



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*Number 49 of 1998*  
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**PROTECTIONS FOR PERSONS REPORTING CHILD ABUSE  
ACT, 1998**  
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AN ACT TO PROVIDE PROTECTION FROM CIVIL LIABILITY TO PERSONS WHO REPORT CHILD ABUSE IN CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES, TO PROVIDE PROTECTION TO SUCH PERSONS FROM PENALISATION BY THEIR EMPLOYERS, TO PROVIDE FOR AN OFFENCE IN RESPECT OF THE FALSE REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE AND TO PROVIDE FOR RELATED MATTERS.

[23rd December, 1998]

BE IT ENACTED BY THE OIREACHTAS AS FOLLOWS:

**1.—(1)** In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires— Interpretation.

“the Act of 1994” means the Terms of Employment (Information) Act, 1994;

“appropriate person” means a designated officer or a member of the Garda Síochána;

“child” means a person who has not attained 18 years of age;

“designated officer” means an officer of a health board appointed under *section 2* of this Act to be a designated officer for the purposes of this Act;

“employee” and “employer” have the same meaning as they have in the Act of 1994;

“health board” means a health board established under the Health Act, 1970;

“the Minister” means the Minister for Health and Children;

“welfare”, in relation to a child, comprises the moral, intellectual, physical, emotional and social welfare of the child.

[No. 49.] *Protections for Persons Reporting* [1998.]  
*Child Abuse Act, 1998.*

S.1 (2) In this Act a reference to any enactment shall, unless the context otherwise requires, be construed as a reference to that enactment as amended, adapted or extended by or under any subsequent enactment including this Act.

Designated officers. 2.—(1) The chief executive officer of each health board shall—

(a) immediately upon the commencement of this Act, and

(b) thereafter from time to time as occasion may require (including a case in which a direction is given under this section),

appoint one or more officers of the board to be a designated officer or designated officers for the purposes of this Act; in making any such appointment the chief executive officer shall comply with any direction under this section for the time being in force.

(2) The Minister may give a direction in writing to the chief executive officer of a health board requiring him or her to appoint to be designated officers each person falling within a category or categories of officer of the board specified in the direction.

(3) The Minister may give a direction in writing to the chief executive officer concerned amending or revoking a direction given to him or her under this section (including a direction under this subsection).

(4) In this section “chief executive officer” includes a person acting as deputy chief executive officer in accordance with section 13 of the Health Act, 1970.

Protection from civil liability of persons who have reported child abuse.

3.—(1) A person who, apart from this section, would be so liable shall not be liable in damages in respect of the communication, whether in writing or otherwise, by him or her to an appropriate person of his or her opinion that—

(a) a child has been or is being assaulted, ill-treated, neglected or sexually abused, or

(b) a child’s health, development or welfare has been or is being avoidably impaired or neglected,

unless it is proved that he or she has not acted reasonably and in good faith in forming that opinion and communicating it to the appropriate person.

(2) The reference in *subsection (1)* of this section to liability in damages shall be construed as including a reference to liability to be the subject of an order providing for any other form of relief.

Protection of employees from penalisation for having reported child abuse.

4.—(1) An employer shall not penalise an employee for having formed an opinion of the kind referred to in *section 3* of this Act and communicated it, whether in writing or otherwise, to an appropriate person if the employee has acted reasonably and in good faith in forming that opinion and communicating it to the appropriate person.

[1998.] *Protections for Persons Reporting* [No. 49.]  
*Child Abuse Act, 1998.*

(2) In proceedings under this section before a rights commissioner S.4  
or the Employment Appeals Tribunal in relation to a complaint that  
*subsection (1)* of this section has been contravened, it shall be pre-  
sumed, until the contrary is proved, that the employee concerned  
acted reasonably and in good faith in forming the opinion and making  
the communication concerned.

(3) If a penalisation of an employee, in contravention of *subsec-  
tion (1)* of this section, constitutes a dismissal of the employee within  
the meaning of the Unfair Dismissals Acts, 1977 to 1993, relief may  
not be granted to the employee in respect of that penalisation both  
under this section and under those Acts.

(4) An employee may present a complaint to a rights com-  
missioner that his or her employer has contravened *subsection (1)* of  
this section in relation to him or her and, if he or she does so, the  
commissioner shall give the parties an opportunity to be heard by  
the commissioner and to present to the commissioner any evidence  
relevant to the complaint, shall give a decision in writing in relation  
to it and shall communicate the decision to the parties.

(5) A decision of a rights commissioner under *subsection (4)* of  
this section shall do one or more of the following:

- (a) declare that the complaint was or, as the case may be, was  
not well founded,
- (b) require the employer to comply with *subsection (1)* of this  
section, and, for that purpose, require the employer to  
take specified steps,
- (c) require the employer to pay to the employee compensation  
of such amount (if any) as is just and equitable having  
regard to all the circumstances, but not exceeding 104  
weeks remuneration in respect of the employee's employ-  
ment calculated in accordance with regulations under  
section 17 of the Unfair Dismissals Act, 1977,

and the references in the foregoing paragraphs to an employer shall  
be construed, in a case where ownership of the business of the  
employer changes after the contravention to which the complaint  
relates occurred, as references to the person who, by virtue of the  
change, becomes entitled to such ownership.

(6) For the purposes of this section—

- (a) subsections (3) to (6) and subsection (7)(a) of section 7 of  
the Act of 1994 shall apply in relation to a complaint  
presented under this section as they apply in relation to a  
complaint presented under subsection (1) of that section 7,  
with the following modifications, namely—
  - (i) the deletion in that subsection (3) of all the words  
from “if it is presented” to the end of that subsection  
and the substitution of “unless it is presented to him  
within the period of 12 months beginning on the date  
of the contravention to which the complaint relates  
or (in a case where the rights commissioner is satis-  
fied that exceptional circumstances prevented the  
presentation of the complaint within the period  
aforesaid) such further period, not exceeding 6  
months from the expiration of the said period of 12  
months, as the rights commissioner considers  
reasonable”;

[No. 49.] *Protections for Persons Reporting* [1998.]  
*Child Abuse Act, 1998.*

- S.4
- (ii) the substitution in that subsection (6) of a reference to a decision for the reference to a recommendation, and any other necessary modifications,
  - (b) sections 8 to 10 of the Act of 1994 shall apply as they apply for the purposes of that Act, with the following modifications, namely—
    - (i) the substitution in those provisions of references to a decision for references to a recommendation,
    - (ii) the addition to section 8 of the following subsection:

“(7) Proceedings under this section before the Tribunal shall be heard otherwise than in public.”,
    - (iii) the substitution in section 9 of the Act of 1994 of—
      - (I) references to the Circuit Court for references to the District Court, and
      - (II) the following subsection for subsection (3):

“(3) An application under this section to the Circuit Court shall be made to the judge of the Circuit Court for the circuit in which the employer concerned ordinarily resides or carries on any profession, trade or business.”,
- and any other necessary modifications.

(7) For the avoidance of doubt nothing in *subsection (6)* of this section operates to confer on the Minister any of the functions of the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment under the Act of 1994 and those functions shall be performable by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment for the purposes of the provisions of the Act of 1994, as applied by that *subsection (6)*, to the like extent as they are performable by him or her for the purposes of the Act of 1994 and the provisions of the Act of 1994 (including section 11) shall apply accordingly.

False reporting of child abuse.

- 5.—(1) A person who states to an appropriate person that—
- (a) a child has been or is being assaulted, ill-treated, neglected or sexually abused, or
  - (b) a child’s health, development or welfare has been or is being avoidably impaired or neglected,

knowing that statement to be false shall be guilty of an offence.

(2) A person guilty of an offence under this section shall be liable—

- (a) on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding £1,500 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to both,

[1998.] *Protections for Persons Reporting* [No. 49.]  
*Child Abuse Act, 1998.*

(b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine not exceeding £15,000 S.5  
or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 3 years or  
to both.

(3) Notwithstanding section 10(4) of the Petty Sessions (Ireland) Act, 1851, summary proceedings for an offence under this Act may be instituted within 2 years from the date on which the offence was committed or, if later, 2 years from the date on which evidence that, in the opinion of the person by whom the proceedings are brought, is sufficient to justify the bringing of the proceedings comes to that person's knowledge.

(4) For the purposes of *subsection (3)* of this section, a certificate signed by or on behalf of the person bringing the proceedings as to the date on which the evidence referred to in that subsection relating to the offence concerned came to his or her knowledge shall be *prima facie* evidence thereof and in any legal proceedings a document purporting to be a certificate issued for the purpose of this subsection and to be so signed shall be deemed to be so signed and shall be admitted as evidence without proof of the signature of the person purporting to sign the certificate.

**6.**—*Section 3* of this Act is in addition to, and not in substitution for, any privilege or defence available in legal proceedings, by virtue of any enactment or rule of law in force immediately before the passing of this Act, in respect of the communication by a person to another (whether that other person is an appropriate person or not) of his or her opinion that—

- (a) a child has been or is being assaulted, ill-treated, neglected or sexually abused, or
- (b) a child's health, development or welfare has been or is being avoidably impaired or neglected.

**7.**—(1) This Act may be cited as the Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998. Short title and commencement.

(2) This Act shall come into operation one month after its passing.