



## *Law Society of Ireland*

**9 April 2014**

### **Law Society welcomes the most significant change in family law in a generation – new law will reflect the social reality of life in Ireland**

The Law Society of Ireland says the reforms proposed by the Children and Family Relationships Bill represent “the most significant change in family law in a generation.”

Speaking at today’s hearing of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality, Dr Geoffrey Shannon, a member of the Law Society’s Child and Family Law Committee, welcomed the Bill as an attempt to reflect “the social reality of contemporary family life in Ireland.”

“It is no longer tenable to assert that Irish law should continue to recognise only one type of family.”

“Until recent decades, family life in Ireland has been synonymous with marriage. However, increasing recognition of marriage breakdown, changes in relationship formulation patterns, economic change and the influences of international law have all contributed to the increasing fluidity and diversification of family forms.”

The Law Society’s submission on the Bill contains a number of key recommendations regarding issues such as children’s rights, parentage in assisted reproduction situations, and guardianship, custody and access arrangements.

Further emphasis is required throughout the Bill on the principle that the best interests of the child be paramount in all aspects of family law. Likewise, the right of the child to be heard could be contained in a stand-alone provision that would underline the importance of that right, according to the submission.

The Law Society is also concerned that it is “arguably easier for a person with no biological connection to achieve the status of parent than it is for the unmarried biological father to do so”, and urged further consideration to be given to that issue.

Dr Shannon concluded by saying that the Bill, “when enacted, will remove several roadblocks within the legal system that stand in the way of children having the best possible family life.”

