



24 October 2014

Mr Seán O'Callaghan
Senior Executive Officer
Cork County Council
County Hall
Cork

Dear Mr O'Callaghan,

The Minister for Health, Leo Varadkar, T.D., has asked me to thank you for your recent letter concerning water fluoridation and the issue of consumer choice.

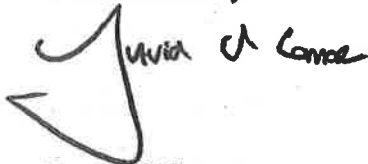
The ethical and legal dimension of fluoridation was considered by the Supreme Court in *Ryan v Attorney General* (1963) and by the Forum on Fluoridation (2002). This was also dealt with more recently in the United Kingdom, by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics (2007). It recognises the tensions between protecting personal autonomy and promoting the welfare of all:

"From an ethical and practical standpoint, an important dimension of public health policy is therefore to balance the liberal emphasis on choice and autonomy with the imperative to support those who do not have the opportunities to choose because of, for instance, poverty or dependency."

Fluoridated water does pose any systemic health risks. It does not not smell or taste differently from un-fluoridated water. Therefore the "consumer choice" argument is essentially a debate about whether individuals who have a personal preference not to drink water containing 0.6 - 0.8 parts per million of fluoride should be provided with such water. As the provision of unfluoridated water would prevent the rest of society enjoying the considerable benefits afforded by fluoridation the Minister's view is that the common good should prevail.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for you.

Yours sincerely



David O'Connor
Private Secretary

