

Heartache of couple who spent €42k on IVF instead of a house deposit

By Niamh Griffin

THE phone rang on Friday morning, just like any other day. The man on the other end was apologetic, he was calling from an IVF clinic with bad news. It's the seventh time Louise Hanlon has been part of a similar conversation.

Struggling with infertility since an operation to prevent cancer, Louise and her husband Anthony say surrogacy is the only option now but the legal situation is still not clear in Ireland.

They are calling on the Health Minister to pass the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill which they believe could help them.

There are currently no laws covering birth using a surrogate mother here.

Two years ago, in October 2017, the Government approved the drafting of a Bill on Assisted Human Reproduction, which includes the legal regulation of surrogacy.

The Bill sets out measures to ensure the health and safety of both donors and surrogate mothers, and most importantly, the children who will be born through surrogacy. Under the proposed law, a regulatory authority would be established to oversee all aspects of assisted human reproduction, from IVF to egg freezing and sperm donation and surrogacy, both at home and abroad.

The Irish law, when passed, will insist that surrogacy can only be arranged on an altruistic basis and the only payment allowed to the surrogate mother will be her reasonable expenses. In July 2019,

**'If Bill was passed I would not have to go through IVF'**

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health completed its scrutiny of the Bill and in its report said it was generally supportive of the objectives of the draft legislation and made a number of recommendations in relation to surrogacy.

The Bill now has to go through further drafting in conjunction with the office of the Attorney General.

But for Louise, 41, reeling after hearing that her post-IVF pregnancy test was negative, the length of time this legislation is taking is unacceptable. She said: 'That phone call is the worst in the world. I felt something snap a little when he said it. It's hard. If that Bill was passed I would not have to go through IVF again.'

Until this summer Louise was reluctant to share their pain, saying people with children think getting pregnant is easy while childless people advise her to forget about babies.

Adoption has been ruled out, as a social worker told them they were unlikely to succeed because they are not home-owners.

'We looked at adoption, but because we don't own our own home we couldn't do it. It's a huge thing apparently. Yes, because of the house basically, we were told by the social worker they would put the application through for us, but because we are renting it's unlikely to be successful.'

'Anthony is an only child so, and I know this will be a sad thing, but

eventually his parents' house will come to him, we told them that but it didn't matter.'

'We've spent nearly €45,000 on the IVF, that has stopped us getting a mortgage.'

But since model Rosanna Davison went public with her foreign surrogacy journey, Louise has become exhausted trying to explain to people why this isn't an option for ordinary people. 'If I had Rosanna's money I could just go do that. In some ways it is just down to money,

that's why having surrogacy in Ireland is so important. When I tell people how much it is [to have a

**'The surrogate is viewed as the natural mother'**

baby by surrogate], they're so surprised.' Reputable clinics abroad can charge over €50,000 for the

surrogacy fee alone with additional costs adding up to at least €70,000 by the Hanlons' estimates.

Six years ago Louise's sister died from bowel cancer, and Louise was found to be a carrier for the same illness. The operation to prevent this has been linked to infertility.

They have spent €42,275 at SIMS IVF using Louise's eggs and donor eggs, leaving Louise bloated and ill after five years. She has endured three tubal surgeries as this can sometimes repair womb damage.

# Social worker told us we can't adopt because we are renting



**DELAYS:** Anthony and Louise are pushing for new law

They have credit union loans and help from family, as well as pouring their wages into this. Anthony works as a golf pro at Stackstown Golf Course while Louise drives a minibus for children with special needs.

Starting at each other after the latest devastating phone call, the couple just don't know what comes next. Anthony said it's not about the money, it's the personal cost.

He said: 'I don't understand the delays in politics. It's just frustrating from our point of view.'

Louise stresses the lack of legal clarity on surrogacy means even though two friends have offered to be a surrogate, the family would face years of stressful litigation.

'It shouldn't be something shameful, something you keep behind closed doors. Why put your child in the shadows for that.'

She contacted the Health Minister's office, started an online petition at Change.org which has over 2,500 signatures and phoned Joe Duffy's Liveline last week to raise awareness of the delays.

Family law solicitor Shiofra Hasset said: 'We have no specific legislation with respect to surrogacy. In Ireland the surrogate is viewed as the natural mother.'

Court action to legalise the child's status must be in the Circuit Court. Ms Hasset said this means costs could run to €10,000. She said that under the Children and Family Act 2015 a woman can apply for guardianship but only after two years.

Dr John Kennedy, group medical director SIMS IVF, said: 'We don't know when the Assisted Reproduction Bill is going to happen, we keep getting told it's definitely in the next year. We'd love to see more movement, and faster movement, on this.'