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21st September 2020

Deputy Costello,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ Ref 22757/20 To ask the Minister for Health the estimated additional cost of ensuring maternity hospital has access to foetal anomaly scanning; and the breakdown in terms of equipment and staff.

Dear Deputy Costello,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

As you may be aware, a maternity ultrasound review undertaken and led by University College Cork, highlighted that as of 2016, foetal anomaly scanning was offered universally to all women in only seven of the nineteen public maternity services, whilst a further seven services offered this service selectively to women if clinical indicated and advised by a doctor.

The HSE recognises that foetal anomaly scanning is a necessary component of good quality antenatal care. With the launch of the National Maternity Strategy in 2016, the HSE's National Women and Infants Health Programme (NWIHP) have, with the support of the Department of Health, invested in this area and supported maternity services to work towards achieving the objective of this service being offered universally to all pregnant women. A key component of this support has been the approval of a significant number of additional sonographers across the 19 maternity units and services and upgrading / replacing and investing in additional US machines in a number of sites.

On foot of this investment, eighteen units and services are now providing all women booked with them with an anomaly scan at the 20 – 22 week mark of gestation, whilst the nineteenth service provides the scan but at a later stage of pregnancy.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary-Jo Biggs'.

Mary-Jo Biggs, General Manager, National Women and Infants Health Programme

