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Mercy Law Resource Centre: systematic issues in how local authorities are managing emergency accommodation is impacting vulnerable groups

Colm Keena

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Poor administration of the [homelessness laws](#) in local authorities is affecting some of the most vulnerable people in society, with some underreporting in rural areas, the Mercy Law Resource Centre (MLRC) has said.

The charity, which provides free legal advice to people at risk of homelessness, said systematic issues in how local authorities are managing emergency accommodation is impacting vulnerable groups such as those fleeing domestic violence.

In a statement issued to mark the publication of its 2023 annual report, it said it had dealt with a 157 per cent increase in queries regarding emergency accommodation in 2023 (139 cases) with, for the first time, more than half of the clients being from outside Dublin.

“Casework from these areas revealed poor administrative decision-making by local authorities with discrepancies in their homelessness reporting,” the group said. “They found that some authorities are underreporting official figures despite the evident increase in rough sleeping in rural towns.”

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MLRC solicitor Adam Boyle said clients were facing significant barriers in accessing emergency accommodation.

“Many are turned away despite meeting the necessary criteria, often with no clear explanation. The inconsistent application of rules leaves already vulnerable individuals at greater risk of rough sleeping or precarious living situations.”

The charity received 2,740 calls from people seeking help in 2023, and 758 new requests for legal assistance. It has a team of three solicitors but also works on pro-bona arrangements with A&L Goodbody in relation to

additional legal clinics, and a telephone information service with Mason, Hayes and Curran.

One recurring issue noted was a practice of local authorities refusing to provide emergency accommodation unless the applicant could show a “local connection.” The provision of emergency accommodation does not have such a requirement, the charity said.

The charity also said local authorities were routinely failing to provide people with reasons for the decisions they made, as was required.

The cost of running the charity during 2023 was €378,839, with the money coming from donations, grants and legal cost settlements.

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Homeless Crisis

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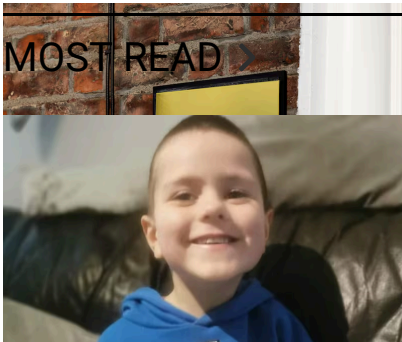


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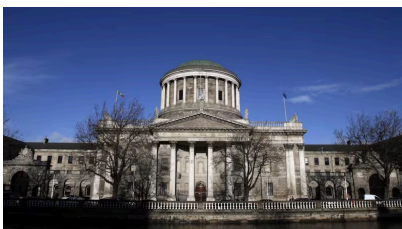
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