

Embargoed until 4pm, Wednesday 11 December 2019

Families ‘close to breaking down’ due to homeless crisis – Mercy Law Resource Centre

- **Launch of Report of MLRC on “Report on Lived Experiences of Homeless Families” by Deputy Noel Rock;**
- **Three years after *Rebuilding Ireland*, the Government’s commitment to cease reliance on commercial hotels and B&Bs for homeless families has still not been met;**
- **Report is based on MLRC’s extensive engagement with homeless families – MLRC has assisted nearly 800 families since the start of 2018;**
- **Decisive action is now needed on foot on this report to alleviate the suffering and distress of homeless families and children;**
- **The report includes comments by medical professionals assessing a family as “very close to breaking down” and children as “nutritionally deficient”, “falling asleep at their desks” and corroded by “stigma and hopelessness”.**

The Mercy Law Resource Centre (MLRC) has called on the Minister for Housing Eoghan Murphy to take urgent steps to implement the recommendations of a research report it is publishing today on the challenges faced by homeless families. The report – entitled “*Lived Experiences of Homeless Families*” – argues that the Government’s commitment to stop relying on hotels and B&Bs to provide emergency accommodation for homeless families has not been met.

Launched today by Noel Rock T.D, Chair of the Oireachtas Housing Committee, the report comes at a time of desperate crisis in homelessness and as we approach the Christmas holiday season. The crisis has been growing every month since early 2014 and shows no signs of abating. In October 2019, the number of people homeless in Ireland reached 10,514, including 3,826 children, which constitutes the highest number since the Department started recording the figures. MLRC has witnessed, first hand, the detrimental impact this housing crisis is having on children and families.

The report sets out six areas of concern in relation to homeless accommodation provision to families and makes a number of recommendations, including most urgently:

1. To cease the use of one night only homeless accommodation for homeless families, which is on the increase yet is the most detrimental form;
2. For local authorities to cease reliance on commercial hotels and B&Bs as a form of emergency provision to homeless families;
3. To place an upper time limit on the period a homeless family can stay in hotel and B&B emergency accommodation;
4. Introduction of a best interests of the child consideration for local authorities when providing homeless accommodation and supports to families

The report includes voices of MLRC clients, speaking of their experience of homelessness, including one mother who says:

“My children speak all the time about being homeless and ask me when we will have our own home. The younger children say they are ashamed of being homeless and will not have any of their friends to play. We do not have a proper place or set up for these visits and we generally do not go to other people’s houses as it reminds us on what we are missing out on.”

In the report, a social worker comments on the impact of homelessness on one family and their young children:

“The sense of stigma and hopelessness that the children feel is corrosive and damaging to their self-esteem. It makes it hard for them to make friends with other children in school, as they fear being judged or excluded.”

MLRC’s Managing Solicitor, Rebecca Keatinge, said:

“The cases included in this report are distressing and painful to read. As we approach the Christmas season it is distressing that so many families will continue to be housed in inappropriate emergency accommodation. We implore the Minister to do more to give families the only Christmas present they really want – a safe and secure place they can call a permanent home.

The cases cited in the report, are not isolated, but rather are experiences common to many homeless families, and this should set alarm bells ringing. We urgently need to see a shift in Government policy to meaningfully address the dysfunctions and failures in the homeless system, so that children do not continue to experience adversity and damage to their well-being, health and educational attainment.

MLRC believes that the majority of recommendations in the report are achievable and could be implemented quickly. We welcome the recent report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing and welcome the Chair of that Committee’s presence at the launch today. We hope that this will give the urgent impetus needed to bring the reforms that are so clearly needed.”

Whilst welcoming the Government’s recent commitment to addressing the homelessness crisis and the modest progress made further to the Government’s *Rebuilding Ireland* plan, MLRC renews its call today for strong and immediate action to tackle the completely inappropriate emergency accommodation for children and families.

ENDS

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Notes to editors

1. Mercy Law Resource Centre (MLRC) is an independent law centre, registered charity and company limited by guarantee. MLRC provides free legal advice and representation for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. It also seeks to advocate change in laws, policies and attitudes which unduly and adversely impact people who are at the margins of our society. MLRC provides five key services: free legal advice clinics; legal representation in the areas of housing and social welfare law; legal support and training to organisations working in the field of homelessness; policy work; and a befriending service. MLRC’s clients are local authority tenants and people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. They include people who are trying to move away from homelessness who may be struggling with issues often linked to homelessness e.g. addiction, leaving prison, mental illness and relationship breakdown.
2. MLRC has built strong working relationships with organisations working in the field of homelessness, including Focus Ireland, Crosscare Advocacy Service, and the Citizens Information Centres. Since our inception in 2009, MLRC has provided free legal advice and/or representation to over 8,000 individuals and families. In 2018, MLRC provided advice and/or representation to 1,381 individuals and provided support to 100 organisations working in the field of homelessness. For more about our work, see

www.mercylaw.ie.

3. In June 2019, MLRC made a statement on child and family homelessness to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government, raising urgent concerns about the accommodation provision to homeless families and making several recommendations. The submission is available [here](#).
4. In September 2018, MLRC published a report 'Children and Homelessness: A Gap in Legal Protection' identifying failings in the current legal protections for homeless children. The report is available [here](#).
5. In November 2019, The Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing Planning and Local Government launched a report on Child and Family Homelessness based on the aforementioned submissions. The report is available [here](#).