

Minister for Housing must act on Oireachtas Committee recommendations and immediately overhaul provision for homeless families and children

- **Launch of Report of the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs on the “Impact of Homelessness on Children”, and the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government’s “Report on Family and Child Homelessness”**
- **MLRC assisted 452 homeless families in 2018 – this constituted over a quarter of the total number (1,617) of families registered as homeless as of December 2018. In 2019, to date, MLRC have assisted 320 families, 62% of whom were ethnic minority.**
- **MLRC client placed on one night only emergency accommodation for nearly three months with her four children, including a two month old infant, describes it as “hell on earth”**
- **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**
- **Decisive action is now needed on foot on these reports to alleviate the suffering and distress of homeless families and children**

MLRC welcomes the reports on child and family homelessness launched today by the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs and the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government. MLRC welcomed the opportunity to report the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government on family homelessness on 12 June 2019.

We note that the key concerns and recommendations made in our [submission](#) feature prominently in the reports launched today. We welcome in particular the following recommendations that were part of our own submission to the Committee:

1. That the use of one night only emergency accommodation for homeless families, which is increasingly used yet is stated to be the most detrimental form of homeless accommodation, must cease;
2. That the best interests of the child must be taken into account by local authorities when providing homeless accommodation and supports;
3. That there must be an end to placing homeless families in unsuitable hotel and B&B accommodation and an upper time limit placed on the length of time a family can stay in emergency accommodation;
4. That the Housing Act 1988 be amended so as to impose a statutory duty on housing authorities to provide homeless accommodation;
5. That there be a Constitutional right to housing.

Speaking of her experience with homelessness, a current MLRC client noted:

“I was until very recently on one night only emergency accommodation. I had to move every day for nearly three months with my four children, including my two month old infant. We had to leave the accommodation each morning by 10am and could not get in until 7.30pm. I was on the streets all day with my baby while the other children were at school – I could not sterilize bottles or feed him in comfort. I had to go to shopping centres to keep him warm, to prepare bottles and to change him.

The conditions in the accommodation were awful. The toilet on our floor was leaking and we had to queue upstairs to use the bathroom or use a bottle at night time. I asked the local authority for help but they did not listen and they did not take on board my children’s needs.

Without the help of MLRC, I cannot see how I would have got off the one night only. I would still be there.

My situation is better now. We are in a hotel. The five of us are sleeping in one room and have no cooking facilities. It is challenging but I don't want to complain. I'm scared of losing this place and being back on the one night only, which the local authority has told me might happen in December. I hope it doesn't. I can't go back to that."

MLRC notes that our client's experience is not an isolated one and her experience is distressing yet common. As of October 2019, 73 homeless families were on one night only emergency accommodation provision, and up from 54 in July 2019.

MLRC's Managing Solicitor, Rebecca Keatinge, said:

"MLRC is encouraged to see that the Oireachtas Committee in its report has made a number of urgently needed recommendations to improve the situation of homeless families and their children. We particularly welcome the call to end altogether the placing of homeless families for one night only, to end continued reliance on unsuitable hotel and B&B accommodation for excessive periods, and the recommendation to place a statutory obligation on local authorities to provide homeless accommodation.

MLRC sees first-hand in our work with homeless families the devastating impact caused by the State's response to this crisis: it has fallen far short of what is needed and has failed to fulfil even the limited objectives set out in the Government's Action Plan Rebuilding Ireland. There is an imperative to act now to alleviate the suffering and distress of homeless families and to meaningfully respond to their needs."

Whilst welcoming the Government's 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 and welcomes the recommendations in both reports launched today.

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](#).