

**Local Authorities are ignoring the law around emergency homeless accommodation –
Mercy Law Resource Centre**

MLRC Annual Report Launch

Media Invite and Press Release

Embargo Tuesday, October 15th 2024

Families and individuals in dire need of emergency homeless accommodation are being refused access by some local authorities in the country, masking the real extent of homelessness in the population.

In its latest annual report, **which will be launched on Tuesday next (15th)**, Mercy Law Resource Centre (MLRC) states that some local authorities are not allowing people access to emergency accommodation, forcing them into couch surfing, hidden homelessness and, for some, rough sleeping. Some authorities fail to comply with basic legal requirements, such as not supplying written reasons for a decision.

Mercy Law Resource Centre (MLRC) is an independent law centre and registered charity. MLRC provides free legal advice and representation for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. In their frontline work, MLRC staff found inconsistency where laws were applied and sometimes it has seemed that laws are simply being ignored.

MLRC saw a 157% increase in queries regarding emergency accommodation in 2023, dealing with 139 cases, compared to 54 in 2022. Systemic issues in how local authorities manage emergency accommodation highlight the need for greater transparency, fairness, and accountability. Those most heavily impacted by poor public administration across the State often came from some of the most vulnerable groups, such as those fleeing domestic violence.

For the first time, over half of MLRC's clients were based outside Dublin, reflecting its growing national reach and the rising levels of rural homelessness. Casework from these areas revealed poor administrative decision-making by local authorities with discrepancies in their

homelessness reporting. They found that some authorities are underreporting official figures despite the evident increase in rough sleeping in rural towns.

MLRC Solicitor **Adam Boyle** said, *“Our clients continue to face 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.*

People should not need to engage solicitors in order to access emergency homeless accommodation.

The surge in queries reflects the scale of the housing crisis and the urgent need for reform in emergency accommodation services. As we launch this report, we urge the Government to ensure local authorities are sufficiently resourced both in terms of ensuring sufficient emergency accommodation but also in terms of social housing supports which can prevent homelessness. At the same time, we call on the Government to ensure that local authorities apply fair procedures and uphold the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.”

MLRC recorded a 30% increase in phone calls from people looking for help in 2023, with 2,740 calls received and 758 new requests for legal assistance. With a team of three solicitors, MLRC supported 44 organisations and handled significant demand for housing-related legal assistance.

The MLRC 2023 Annual Report will be published on Tuesday, October 15th, in the Wisdom Centre, 25 Cork Street, Dublin D08 YD91, at 4 pm

The Archbishop of Dublin, Dermot Farrell and Mr Justice David Barniville, President of the High Court, will formally launch the report.

You are invited to send a representative.

For further information contact:

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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 established in 2009. MLRC provides free legal advice and representation for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. It also seeks to advocate for change in laws, policies, and attitudes that 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. For more about our work, see www.mercylaw.ie
2. In 2023, MLRC published a policy report entitled '*Mental Health and Social Housing Supports*' funded by the Mental Health Ireland Grants Scheme 2022, available [here](#).
3. In 2023, MLRC published a second policy report entitled '*Social Housing Domestic Violence and the Public Sector Duty*' with support from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), available [here](#).
4. In 2024, MLRC published a qualitative study entitled '*Excluded and Left Behind. The Lived Experience of Long-Term Family Homelessness on Minority Ethnic Families and the Effects on Their Children*' with support from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), available [here](#).