

Mercy Law Resource Centre

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Homelessness increases and the law continues to be ignored – Mercy Law Resource Centre

MLRC Annual Report Launch

Media Invite and Press Release

Embargo, Monday November 24th 2025

Mercy Law Resource Centre (MLRC) will be hosting the launch of the 2024 Annual Report on the **24th of November 2025** in the Wisdom Centre of Sophia Housing, 25 Cork Street, **from 10.30 am – 12 pm**. The MLRC 2024 Annual Report will be formally launched by **Chief Justice Donal O'Donnell**.

Findings from the Annual Report tell us that not only are homelessness numbers rising, but multiple groups continue to experience needless additional roadblocks in accessing basic supports. These groups include victim-survivors of domestic violence, members of the Traveller community, migrants and refugees and those dealing with addiction.

In 2024, MLRC opened 351 new advice files, assisting households experiencing legal challenges accessing social housing supports and emergency homeless accommodation. Of these, over half related to issues around emergency accommodation including unlawful refusals of access to this most basic form of shelter by Local Authorities. This marked a further increase of such cases against 2023; a disturbing ongoing trend reflected year on year through our casework.

Where a person is experiencing homelessness, they attend their Local Authority to request a homelessness assessment and access to emergency accommodation. As with any decisions by a public body, decisions must be made in compliance with the fair procedures rights of the households such as a right to be heard and a right to written reasons for a decision. All too often MLRC are contacted by these households or their advocates where a Local Authority has failed to comply with these basic standards, applying unlawful, unpublished policies which restrict access to basic accommodation, or simply refusing to engage with the household in need. In the majority of these cases, the local authority have refused to provide any written reasons for their decision – a breach of administrative law in and of itself.

The result of these unlawful refusals is that numerous households are pushed into hidden homelessness, couch surfing, rough sleeping, or left unable to exit hospitals or

Mercy Law Resource Centre CLG is a company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital, registered in Dublin, Ireland. Co. Reg No: 471072. It is also a registered charity, Chy No: 18698.

Directors: Edward Gleeson, Dr. Sarah Hamill, Rebecca Keatinge, Tom O'Brien, Annette O'Donnell, Helena O'Donoghue, Conor Roe, Liam Twohig.

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domestic violence refuges. These families, left without the most basic of supports, are rendered invisible and do not appear in official, published homelessness statistics.

Additionally, people are frequently unlawfully denied access to the Social Housing list – a process which already takes many years and thus perpetuates a cycle of homelessness.

MLRC Solicitor Adam Boyle said:

“Sadly, we must report that once again our clients face unnecessary, unlawful barriers to access basic housing and homelessness supports. Some Local Authorities actively ignore their legal obligations to respect the fair procedure rights of families seeking their support. We are contacted by families in desperate situations, where their requests for help have been met by refusals to engage, or where they have been bounced between Local Authorities who deny their responsibilities to support them. The stories of these families are heartbreaking. We are aware of mothers leaving their children to sleep on blow up mattresses in relatives' houses, while they themselves sleep in the car outside. We are told of people sleeping rough on the streets, or unable to be discharged from hospitals even though they no longer have a medical need to remain there.

Throughout 2024 we encountered an emboldened approach to these unlawful refusals, where advocates from frontline homeless services report increasing difficulties resolving these situations. It is the experience of MLRC that where these matters are escalated or litigation is threatened, Local Authorities typically reverse their position and provide the accommodation – only for identical cases to present to our office the following week.

This pattern of unlawful decision making should be of serious concern for anyone who values the rule of law.”

You are invited to send a representative.

For further information or to arrange an interview with a member of the MLRC team, please 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. MLRC provides free legal advice and representation for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. MLRC provides the following 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; and policy work. 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., discrimination, addiction, leaving prison, mental illness, and relationship breakdown. For more about our work, see www.mercylaw.ie.
2. 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).
3. In 2023, MLRC published a policy report entitled '*Social Housing, Domestic Violence and the Public Sector Duty*' with support from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC).
4. In 2023, MLRC published a separate policy report entitled '*Mental Health and Social Housing Supports*' funded by the Mental Health Ireland Grants Scheme 2022.

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