Mercy Law
Resource Centre

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Providing free legal advice and representation to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness



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Chairperson's Welcome



Welcome to the 2025 Annual Report of MLRC.

Our annual report is the means by which we render account and benchmark from year to year our delivery upon our purpose and mission. Without question the year 2025 was a challenging one for MLRC, most especially for our staff who advised upon, and learned of the pained and awful experiences of our clients in their pursuit of their entitlements to State and local authority supports. Whatever challenges MLRC encounters are as nothing relative to the daily trauma of people experiencing homelessness in Ireland at this time.

Our charitable purpose is to protect and vindicate the rights of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. There are three pillars to our mission, the first being the provision of free, accessible legal information, advice and representation to those who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness; the second being to drive legal and policy change to address injustices in social housing and homeless law; the third being to build social housing and homeless law expertise across our sector, primarily through legal training.

The need for MLRC's existence is driven by failures on the part of local authorities in the discharge of their public administrative duties towards people for whom the pursuit of shelter for the night is a necessary daily grind. Failures on the part of local authorities are bound up in failures on the part of the State in its strategic planning and delivery of housing need. Shamefully, the State's Legal Aid Scheme does not afford legal representation in matters exclusively relating to homelessness. We seek to bridge this gap in access to justice, which is adding significantly to the precarious existence of people in homelessness.

Government statistics tell us that in the last week of December 2024 there were 10,354 adults and 4,510 children in homelessness. In the last week of December 2025, the number of adults in homelessness had risen to 11,546, and the number of children had risen to 5188. Accordingly, the percentage rise in homeless adults during this period was 11.51% and the rise in the number of children suffering homelessness was 15.03%. Most recently, in July 2026, the number of adults in homelessness had risen to 11,868, a rise of 2.79%, and the number of children had risen to 5,659, a rise of 9.08% in the number of homeless children since December 2025. In the space of 19 months an additional 1,149 children have had to experience life changing homelessness.

To gain a sense of the scale of the suffering being experienced by children it is worth reflecting that the number of our children now homeless is the equivalent of the entire populations of more than 32 average sized national schools in Ireland. Published statistics do not inform us of the average duration each child spends in homelessness. According to regional data highlighted by Focus Ireland, six out of ten homeless families in Dublin have been without a home for over one year, and 30% have been homeless for over two years. It is reported that a significant cohort of families are in emergency housing for periods considerably longer than two years. We believe that the State should be transparent about the lengths of time children are spending in emergency accommodation. The placement of children in emergency accommodation for indefinite periods exposes children to a real risk of long-term developmental harm, such are the resultant obstacles and challenges to a child's need for security, love, family, support, warmth, and food.

Government statistics are challenged by some commentators as an understatement of the true position. Our experience of the dramatic rise in the numbers of people seeking our legal assistance in connection with unfairness experienced by them in being refused recognition of their entitlements to be considered for emergency accommodation, is another pointer towards this contention of statistical understatement. Recognising the disempowerment experienced by people in homelessness, and the absence of any centralised appeals mechanism in relation to homelessness decisions generally, we believe that the true number of people being unjustly refused access to emergency accommodation, is significantly greater than is known to our service. During 2025 we were fortunate in being granted philanthropic funding to enable us to examine in greater depth and report

upon the experiences of people who are being unjustly denied their entitlements to be considered for emergency accommodation. This research work has commenced in January 2026 and will continue for a period of three years. Emergency homeless accommodation is not the solution for homelessness. Households need to be able to access secure, long term, appropriate housing. However, access to basic emergency shelter is the minimum provision that we expect for persons experiencing homelessness.

Unsurprisingly given the statistical information, during 2025 our solicitors and administrative staff experienced an increase in demand upon our services – we triaged 57% more phone queries than the previous year, for example. The most significant increase in our workload arose through the unfairness experienced by people who were initially refused recognition of their entitlement to be considered for emergency accommodation. Having seen a rise of 40% in such queries during 2024, we report that during 2025 we have seen a further rise of 22.5% in such requests for assistance, with 218 emergency accommodation related queries received during the year.

Our casework in 2025 is described in considerable detail in this report. In addition to the theme of emergency accommodation, we represented people whose harm experienced through domestic violence was exacerbated by unjust administrative approaches by local authorities which failed to comprehend the complexity of needs and measures that are necessary to safeguard against the recurrence of domestic violence. The use by local authorities of a so called 'Protocol for Homeless Presentations between Local Authorities' as a basis of decision-making has led to unjust decisions and the need for legal challenges to bring about their reversal. A recurrent theme in our work is the failure of local authorities to provide adequate reasons for their decision-making. In some instances, local authorities failed even to record the fact of having rejected applications for homeless supports. A caring State ought not put unjust obstacles in the way of people who are most in need of its support.

During 2025 we adjusted our methods of service delivery to increase our ability to provide low threshold access to legal support to as many clients as possible. Our phone line and queries to our email service were monitored daily and responded to either through referral to other appropriate partner agencies or dealt with by us in accordance with our carefully designed triage system. At its conclusion, our team assisted 589 households, 246 of which became advice clients.

We continued to provide vital training opportunities in housing law, delivering 9 housing law training sessions over the course of 2025. Through such training we increase the capacity of others to understand social housing law and the rights of people facing homelessness, thus enhancing their advocacy skills for their clients. A significant focus of our training programmes is towards individuals on the front line in our local authorities who carry the responsibility of making just and rational decisions when responding to people and families with emergency housing needs. We are especially pleased that there is take up for such training by local authority staff.

We are pleased with the continued success of our long-established housing law clinics, including our pro bono partnership with A&L Goodbody and Focus Ireland, whose clinic provided legal advice and/or representation to 33 families during 2025. The telephone legal information clinic run by volunteer lawyers in Mason Hayes & Curran is a vital outreach and has met the needs of over 99 clients during 2025. We made direct referrals to Arthur Cox for legal advice or representation, resulting in 450 hours of pro bono work, and the firm provided invaluable legal personnel to us through the year. We collaborated with McCann Fitzgerald in co-hosting an event amongst partners and advocates to advance equality and respond to the Traveller Community's lived experience of discrimination, housing and homelessness. We are continuing to avail of the resources of Taylor Wessing whose Domestic Violence Research Project has been a vital tool in our representation to Government regarding the housing supports needed by people who are suffering domestic violence.

We wish to thank the many organisations working in our sector for their collaboration with us through our daily work. We also thank each of our pro bono allies, barristers, law firms, interns and volunteers for their extraordinary commitment, and without whose skilled and compassionate support our work would not be possible. We offer particular thanks to Sophia Housing and its staff for their longstanding support of our operations through the provision of our office accommodation, its upkeep and our use of the Wisdom Centre for special events.



In meeting the ever-increasing cost of delivering our expanded services, we undertook significant fundraising work. We are truly grateful to the many donors who came forward to assist us in response to our appeal. Their generosity and that of our longstanding donors made it possible for us to meet our increased overheads whilst dramatically reducing our budget deficit from 81,836 in 2024 to 3,346 in 2025.

The year 2025 saw considerable change within our staffing arrangements. In the early part of the year, Teresa Kelly graciously facilitated us in continuing as our acting Managing Solicitor. In April, Freda Grealy was appointed as Managing Solicitor and was unstinting in her service to MLRC over the following 6 months. We were very sorry to lose Freda but are grateful for all that she achieved during this time. We were delighted to welcome back Paul Dornan, in his new capacity as Managing Solicitor in November 2025, just in time for the launch of our 2024 Annual Report. Our solicitors Adam Boyle, Kate Heffernan and Erika Hayes ensured that our professional service levels remained undiminished through a transitional period. We are deeply grateful for their dedicated professionalism throughout the year.

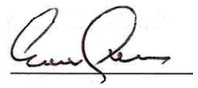
In June 2025, we bade farewell to Clara Dorman and thanked her for her skilled and sensitive service as our Receptionist and Legal Secretary. We were then very fortunate in recruiting Rebecca McKinney to this role in which she has since excelled. Between July and December 2025 Madailein Watters undertook the role of Administrative Assistant, through which she also acted as our communications officer. In a short period, before returning to pursue her legal studies in the US, Maddy made a huge contribution to MLRC and to the advancement of the needs of our clients and wider constituencies. Through all these transitions, I would like to say a special word of thanks to Miriam Nally, our Finance Manager who accommodated with such competence the myriads of demands that arose during the year.

In conclusion, the Board extends its thanks to each of our staff, then and now, for your unstinting dedication to our vital and demanding work. We especially value the personal empathy you consistently show in responding to the needs and interests of our clients and of all others to whom we offer advice and guidance. These qualities were exemplified over the course of more than 10 years by Nuala Monaghan, our retired legal secretary and office manager who very sadly passed away in December 2025. May Nuala rest in well-deserved peace whilst her spirit and determination to achieve justice continues to inspire all of us at MLRC.

We extend similar appreciation to our interns and college placements for their extraordinary generosity in working with us in a highly pressured environment throughout 2025 and to the present. At a time when MLRC was particularly stretched in its staffing levels, we were so grateful for their unwavering enthusiasm, dedication and invaluable contribution to our work.

Throughout 2025, our Board served MLRC with exceptional dedication. I wish to thank each of our members for their generous commitment and service at a demanding time. Ciara McGrath and Jill Farrelly retired during 2025, and we were joined by Rebecca Keatinge and Conor Roe. Collectively we thank Ciara for her magnificent contribution to MLRC, a member of our Board since our foundation in 2009. Importantly, we continue to benefit from Ciara's wisdom in so many unseen ways. We also thank Jill for her great work and the many insights she brought to MLRC during her time on the Board.

Thank you to all who take the time to read this report. I hope that you are encouraged to continue with determination our collective fight to alleviate the scourge of homelessness and to secure appropriate recognition within the State for all persons in, or at risk of homelessness.



Edward Gleeson
Chairperson



Managing Solicitor's Reflections



It was on the launch day of Mercy Law Resource Centre's (MLRC) 2024 Annual Report that I took up the role of Managing Solicitor. A busy day to start a new job, no doubt, but also an excellent opportunity to learn about the work being done by the Centre and to appreciate the outstanding efforts of the team here. A year on from that day, I am pleased to be able to take this opportunity to reflect on the work of the Centre during 2025.

As an independent law centre committed to supporting people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, MLRC works to uphold the rights and dignity of those most at risk of exclusion in our society, ensuring legal support is available when it is most urgently needed.

MLRC's vision is of a society where each individual lives in dignity and enjoys equal rights, in particular the right to a home and I have been struck by the compassion and respect with which the staff here work with clients and colleagues to animate this vision. No one embodied this vision more nor worked harder to uphold the rights and dignity of those at risk of exclusion than our former Legal Secretary, Nuala Monaghan. Nuala was the Legal Secretary at MLRC for over 10 years before retiring. Sadly, Nuala passed away in December 2025. With ever-increasing numbers of people and children recorded as homeless, Nuala was very frequently the first person they would have spoken to, who took the time to listen to their story, to provide practical information and to inform them that they have rights. In this way she helped so many people. She was a terrifically engaged and interested person, always taking a genuine interest in people and becoming great friends with her colleagues here at MLRC and with our neighbours at Sophia Housing. Nuala's indefatigable spirit and championing of the underdog will forever guide us here in the centre.

We drew upon Nuala's spirit in what proved to be a challenging year for MLRC as we provided our services against the backdrop of ever-rising numbers of people and families facing homelessness and the obstacles that many have faced in seeking access to emergency accommodation as a result. While I previously worked as a solicitor with MLRC until 2023, it was noticeable upon my return that both the scale and complexity of the issues we are dealing with have increased. As a consequence, for the second consecutive year we have seen a sharp increase in the numbers of people contacting the service who have experienced difficulty or unfairness when seeking access to emergency accommodation: a 22.5% increase in 2025 as against 2024. We therefore provided assistance to 589 people through our triage service, with direct legal advice provided to 246 clients.

Throughout 2025, significant improvements were made to our IT and telephone infrastructure with the goal of better tracking and responding to our clients' evolving needs. An early indication of this work's results has been to show that in 2025, while we received 6,431 phone calls, we were able to respond to 1,392. MLRC has long been aware that there is a substantial unmet need for legal services in the area of homelessness and social housing and these figures allow us to begin to tell that story more precisely.

Having long campaigned for the inclusion of social housing and homelessness matters within the scope of a modernised civil legal aid scheme, we were pleased to see the Civil Legal Aid Review Group publish their findings in June 2025. The Group's review recognises the need for greater legal supports for those who are experiencing homelessness and we would urge the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration to act on the Group's recommendations.

Throughout 2025, MLRC continued these advocacy efforts on behalf of our clients. Building on our previous research examining the intersection of domestic violence and housing issues, in May, solicitor Kate Heffernan spoke at the Bar of Ireland's conference, '*At the Margins: Three Priorities Through a Human Rights Lens*'. Kate highlighted some of the significant barriers victim-survivors of domestic violence face in accessing safe accommodation, in particular the absence of a clear legal mechanism to remove a perpetrator's name from a joint social housing tenancy.

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Across the year, we also continued to advocate for a robust and independent appeals mechanism for decisions relating to social housing and homelessness. In June, solicitor Adam Boyle, as part of the Irish Homeless Policy Group coalition, presented on the topic at the Oireachtas AV briefing room. This was followed by an appearance at the Oireachtas AV briefing room by solicitor Erika Hayes in November to examine issues relating to the gaps in support faced by migrant families when seeking housing and homeless supports. In December, again in collaboration with the Irish Homeless Policy Group, Adam presented to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, again highlighting the need for an independent appeals mechanism for decisions relating to social housing and homelessness.

It is with deep concern that despite our advocacy efforts, in July 2026, the Housing and Residential Tenancies (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2026 was passed into law. Rather than the progressive reforms to the law around homelessness and social housing that we and others have long called for as necessary, this law will introduce stringent residency requirements for access to social housing and homelessness supports, making it more difficult for people and families, particularly those from minority or excluded cohorts to access essential housing supports.

While the real-life impacts of this regressive new law are yet to be felt, I do have cause for optimism. We know that people in Ireland are committed to the principles of equality and human rights and that this was reflected in the results of IHREC's Annual Poll 2026 with 85% of people believing that everyone should be treated equally regardless of who they are or where they come from. Translating those beliefs into action is what drives our work here at MLRC and I am continuously encouraged by and thankful for the dedication, expertise and compassion of our team at MLRC: solicitors Adam, Erika (who departed in July 2026) and Kate; Finance Manager, Miriam Nally; and Legal Secretary, Rebecca McKinney (who joined in June 2025).

I am hugely grateful to our Chairperson and Board of Directors, whose knowledge and empathy underpins the work that we do.

I am also grateful to our volunteers and pro bono partners who help us to meet some of the need for our legal services and who make such meaningful contributions towards increasing access to justice for all.

A special thanks go to Teresa Kelly, Freda Grealy, Clara Dorman and Madailein Watters for their contributions and commitment to MLRC, as they moved on from MLRC. We wish them all well in all their future endeavours.

Our work would simply not be possible without the very generous support of our many donors and we are deeply grateful for their support and belief in MLRC's work.

I would like to extend our thanks to all of our clients, who inspire us all with their resilience, strength and belief in access to justice even in the face of such adversity.

I will conclude where I began, at the 2024 Annual Report launch, and by drawing upon the remarks of the Chief Justice, Mr. Donal O'Donnell, when he spoke movingly about the need for our work, quoting philosopher Thomas Aquinas: *"Justice without mercy is cruelty, mercy without justice is dissolution"*. I think that these words encapsulate eloquently MLRC's vision of a society where each individual lives in dignity and enjoys equal rights and access to justice in order to uphold those rights.



Paul Dornan
Managing Solicitor

“Through our advice, representation, policy work and training, MLRC works to ensure that people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness can access justice, assert their rights and secure the housing supports to which they are entitled.”

About Mercy Law Resource Centre

Mercy Law Resource Centre (MLRC) is an independent law centre, registered charity and company limited by guarantee. MLRC provides free, accessible and compassionate legal advice and representation to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, with a particular focus on social housing, homelessness and related social welfare law. We work with people in housing crisis to help them overcome legal barriers to accessing safe, secure and appropriate accommodation.

At a time when demand for our services continues to grow in response to Ireland’s worsening housing crisis, ensuring that people can access and assert their rights is more important than ever. MLRC aims to provide a service that is responsive to the complex and often intersecting needs of each client, supporting people to access their legal rights and entitlements.

To complement our casework and bring about wider change, MLRC undertakes policy and law reform work to advocate for changes in laws, policies, practices and attitudes that adversely impact our client group. We also provide legal training in housing and homelessness law to people and organisations working with our client group, including approved housing bodies, local authorities and frontline support services.

Our Purpose

MLRC’s purpose is to protect and vindicate the rights of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Our Ethos

MLRC’s ethos recognises the dignity of each person. We seek to ensure that all people are treated with respect and compassion and are enabled to achieve their full potential as human beings. We are committed to the principles of human rights, social justice and equality.

Our Mission

1

To provide free, accessible legal advice and representation to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

2

To drive legal and policy change to address injustices in social housing and homeless law.

3

To build social housing and homeless law expertise across the sector.

Why MLRC Is Needed

Safe and secure housing is a basic human right. It is essential to individual dignity, wellbeing, family life and participation in society. No person should require legal intervention to access a safe and secure home, yet for many people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity, legal advice and representation are critical to accessing emergency accommodation, social housing supports and related entitlements.

MLRC exists because there remains a significant and unmet legal need in this area. Many of our clients do not have the means to access private legal services, while state-funded legal aid remains unavailable or inaccessible for many social housing, homelessness and related social welfare law issues. In this context, free, expert, accessible and compassionate legal support is essential. MLRC seeks to meet this need by providing a specialist legal service in a critically under-resourced area of law.

As Ireland's housing and homelessness crisis deepens, demand for our services continues to increase. More individuals and families are facing complex and unnecessary barriers to accessing safe, secure and appropriate accommodation, often at moments of acute vulnerability. These barriers can include difficulties accessing emergency accommodation; refusals of social housing support; delays or failures in decision-making; or the absence of clear written reasons for decisions affecting their housing rights.

Through our advice, representation, policy work and training, MLRC works to ensure that people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness can access justice, assert their rights and secure the housing supports to which they are entitled. Our casework also allows us to identify wider patterns of injustice and to advocate for the legal, policy and systemic changes needed to better protect people in crisis.

How MLRC Delivers

In successive annual reports, MLRC has highlighted both the growing demand for our services and the increased geographic spread of those seeking assistance. In 2025, these trends continued.



People who come to MLRC for assistance do so from a wide range of backgrounds and with diverse legal, personal and housing-related challenges. We recognise that there is no one-size-fits-all approach and are committed to delivering a service that is responsive to the individual circumstances of each client. Our support is provided through a variety of channels, including telephone, online and in-person clinics, helping to ensure that legal assistance remains as accessible as possible. We also work closely with a broad network of partner organisations, including domestic violence services; disability, migrant and Traveller organisations; homelessness providers and housing advocacy groups, to provide coordinated and effective support.

Snapshots of 2025



The MLRC Team at the launch of the 2024 Annual Report



The Chief Justice, Mr Justice Donal O'Donnell launching the 2024 Annual Report



Carolann Minnock, Pro Bono Practice lead at Arthur Cox LLP, with Kate Heffernan, MLRC solicitor, at a training event for Arthur Cox: 'Housing, Homelessness and the Law'



Saying Goodbye to Boston College Interns Grace Kirtland and Isabelle Thorpe



Long-time collaborator, Professor Gerry Whyte, School of Law, Trinity College Dublin, visiting the MLRC team with his new book 'Social Inclusion and the Legal System'



Noel Neenan, Senior Information and Advocacy Officer with Crosscare, presenting as part of an MLRC roundtable with Crosscare



Ms. Justice Sara Phelan and Kate Heffernan participating in the Bar of Ireland conference 'At The Margins: Three Priority Areas Through a Human Rights Lens'



Adam Boyle, MLRC Solicitor, speaking on behalf of the Irish Homeless Policy Group (IHPG) before the Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government & Heritage



MLRC interns, Grace Kirtland and Isabelle Thorpe, busy at work



An MLRC/Crosscare roundtable: 'Migrant Access to Social Protection and Entitlements in Ireland'



Freda Grealy, former MLRC Managing Solicitor with Kate Heffernan, Erika Hayes and Adam Boyle at a Bar of Ireland conference on human rights



MLRC solicitor Erika Hayes addressing the issue of 'Family Reunification' at an Oireachtas briefing for TDs & Senators, alongside MLRC's IHPG colleagues across the Irish Refugee Council, Nasc and the Migrant & Refugee Rights Centre

Our Team

At the heart of MLRC is a dedicated team of legal and professional staff who work each day to uphold the rights of individuals and families experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.



For over 12 years, Nuala Monaghan was at the heart of the team at MLRC and truly lived our ethos of treating everyone with respect and compassion, while encouraging everyone to achieve their full potential as human beings. Sadly, Nuala passed away in December 2025. She is sorely missed by all at MLRC.

In 2025 our core services were largely delivered by a team of 7 staff, including a managing solicitor, three full-time solicitors, a finance manager, a legal secretary and a temporary administrative assistant.

We were assisted in providing our services by a cohort of passionate, talented and dedicated paralegals, interns and volunteers.

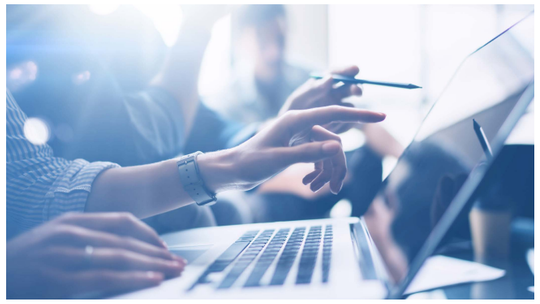
In June 2025, we welcomed Rebecca McKinney to the team, who took up the role of Legal Secretary.

We were also grateful to have had Freda Grealy act as Managing Solicitor in 2025, taking over from Teresa Kelly. MLRC would like to extend a warm thanks to both Freda and Teresa for their valued leadership and contribution during this time.

We also extend a warm thanks to Madailein Watters, Administrative Assistant, and Clara Dorman, Legal Secretary, for their dedication and commitment throughout 2025.

In November 2025, Paul Dornan returned to MLRC as Managing Solicitor. Paul previously spent four years as a solicitor with the organisation before taking up a community solicitor role at Ballymun Community Law Centre. We were delighted to welcome Paul back to the team.

MLRC's achievements in 2025 were made possible by the remarkable commitment of our staff and volunteers, to whom we extend our heartfelt thanks.



Volunteer & Internship Programme

Volunteers and interns have been integral to our success, and their involvement remains central to MLRC's service delivery. The support provided by our legal and administrative volunteers enhances our work, expands our capacity and helps us meet growing demand for our services.

Through our internship programme, MLRC seeks to develop future legal professionals while providing valuable experience in public interest law. Interns contribute across many aspects of our work, including casework, legal research, policy initiatives, communications and administration. We remain deeply grateful for their energy, professionalism and dedication to the organisation.

We were pleased to welcome the following students and interns during the year:

Bethany Stanley (Trinity College Dublin)
Martha Roe (Trinity College Dublin)
John Mulhall (Trinity College Dublin)
Jordyn Dart (Arizona State University)
Adam Balmer (Dublin City University)
Grace Kirtland (Boston College)
Isabelle Thorpe (Boston College)
Kate Fennell (Trinity College Dublin)
Ella Delanty (Trinity College Dublin)

Our Impact

The core of MLRC's work is providing free legal advice and representation to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Since we began this work in 2009, MLRC's network of legal advice clinics and outreach in collaboration with partner organisations, has had an outsized, positive impact given our size and resource pool as an organisation. Our legal casework connects us to the real needs of those experiencing homelessness and housing distress. It allows us to understand the key challenges faced by some of the most vulnerable households in Ireland as they seek to access necessary, and at times emergency supports from local authorities.

These insights inform everything we do as an organisation. They guide our work, our advocacy and our policy focus as we strive to communicate the needs, the experience and the often-harsh reality of our clients to figures in positions of power.

In 2024, MLRC adopted our new organisational strategy, the *"Mercy Law Resource Centre Strategy 2024–2029"*. This Strategy reiterates one of the key elements of our organisational mission: to *"provide free, accessible legal advice and representation to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness"*. This mission statement reflects our desire to remain "low threshold" to access, ensuring that we do everything in our power to meet an otherwise unmet legal need with the utmost professionalism, resourcefulness, dignity and compassion. The Strategy also reflects the need for MLRC to create maximum impact and to positively influence the areas of highest need.

An area of concerning need is the requirement for and allocation of emergency accommodation. 2025 marked a noted increase in the number of emergency accommodation-related queries received by MLRC and a 22.5% increase on the previous year, with a total of 218 queries. This figure reflects the ever-increasing number of people recorded as homeless and relying on emergency homeless accommodation, and it increased month on month throughout 2025, with the exception of December.

In 2025, MLRC sought to adjust our service delivery methods to increase our ability to provide low threshold legal support access to as many clients as possible, whilst creating maximum impact.

In line with our 2024–2029 Strategy, MLRC is committed to effectively measuring our impact and leveraging technology to enhance this work. As such and throughout 2025, we initiated a series of measures that will have a significant impact on how we generate future reporting.

A project was designed to migrate to a cloud-based file storage system to ensure that our data is stored as securely as possible. In conjunction, necessary upgrades to our IT infrastructure and telephone systems commenced. The full delivery of these upgrades runs into 2026.

The team also made significant progress in case management optimisation. Reconfigured use of our case management software, for example, allowed us to more accurately track client issues, enabling us to report on trends and to more quickly adapt to emerging issues. Again, this system optimisation will have a significant impact on reporting into 2026 and beyond.

Our Triage Process

Throughout 2025, individuals and households seeking assistance could contact our daily phone line or email us. This was once again an extremely busy year for MLRC, with 6,431 phone calls placed to the service, and 1,408 phone queries and 11,348 emails responded to throughout the year – this marks a 57% increase in calls received, upon the previous year, for example.

Where a caller's query fell outside the strategic focus areas of MLRC's work and expertise, these callers were referred with respect to relevant partner organisations and services that could better assist them.

Each week, a list of all new queries relevant to our strategic focus areas is created for review by the solicitor team at our weekly casework meetings. In 2025, 589 such queries were triaged by the solicitor team.



WHO WE HELPED IN 2025

REACH

6,431 phone calls received

11,348 emails received

1,392 phone queries triaged

+57% increase on 2024

CASEWORK RESPONSE

589 legal queries responded to

246 advice clients

80 legal information emails

113 referrals to appropriate service

CLINICS AND PRO BONO

Drop-in and family clinics

16 Focus Ireland clinics

6 Crosscare clinics

MLRC family clinics

35 homeless families assisted

82 children among those families

20 families needing follow-up representation

Pro bono partners

150 clients receiving **legal support**

218 emergency accommodation-related queries

+22.5% increase on 2024



Advice Clients

In 246 cases, triaged queries were taken on directly by one of our solicitors and became 'advice clients' of MLRC. Our solicitors went on to provide advice, advocacy, and in some cases full representation before the Superior Courts for such clients.

While it was not always possible to take on every querist as an advice client, our team worked to ensure MLRC's specialist skills were used where most impactful, while not turning callers away with no assistance. This included more formalised referral pathways to other services, as well as the preparation of bespoke legal information emails provided to callers who needed an educated steer, but whose query did not necessarily require direct legal intervention at that time.

In total, 80 households who could not be taken on as clients were provided bespoke legal information emails to assist them with the issues that they were experiencing. These legal information emails were prepared by MLRC support staff under the supervision of the solicitor team, aiming to provide important bespoke context, legal information, and signposting for households navigating a complicated system of housing and homelessness supports.

In a further 113 cases, our solicitor team identified that the issue the household was experiencing would be better addressed through alternative supports, such as advocacy or wrap-around services. In each of these cases, following a review by an MLRC solicitor, the household was referred to the appropriate service.

Drop-in Clinics

Throughout 2025, our team sought to refine service delivery to maximise the positive impact of our work and one such outcome was the introduction of 'drop-in clinics' for staff working in frontline homeless services. These clinics were established at regular intervals throughout the year and were always well attended. They permitted advocates working with clients to bring their cases to the solicitor team for guidance or for a legal steer without needing to formally refer them to our service as clients. Each clinic allowed MLRC solicitors to offer direct guidance on multiple ongoing cases. We received very positive feedback from attendees, who felt the guidance and support of the MLRC solicitors often allowed them to clear administrative burdens without requiring direct legal intervention. Where this was not possible, clients were referred directly to MLRC to be taken on as advice clients.

In partnership with our dedicated colleagues in A&L Goodbody LLP, MLRC solicitors established drop-in clinics for the staff of the Focus Ireland Advice & Information teams which were held every three weeks.

In April 2025, MLRC and the Crosscare Housing & Welfare Teams agreed to establish a similar clinic. These occurred monthly, with 6 clinics taking place in 2025.

Throughout 2025, with funding from Community Foundation Ireland, we also held either in-person or remote legal clinics with 35 homeless families and provided 2 additional consultations to support workers of homeless families. 20 of these families required follow-up legal representation and intervention by MLRC. The families assisted included 82 children.

In conjunction with the clinics, we authored a report based on the issues faced by each of these families and noted key legal challenges that families face in situations of homelessness. Publication and launch of the report occurred in 2026.

Pro Bono Partnerships

MLRC is proud of the development of our pro bono partnerships. These collaborations bring together legal expertise, frontline homelessness services and a shared commitment to justice, and demonstrate how the legal profession and the charity sector can work side-by-side to respond to one of the most pressing social challenges facing Ireland. Through these pro bono collaborations, complex legal problems can become solvable problems and cases that might otherwise be beyond the reach of our small team become manageable. Most importantly, people who might otherwise fall through the cracks are able to access the legal support and information they need.

These partnerships also send the powerful message that the legal community in Ireland recognises that access to justice must extend to everyone – including those who are experiencing homelessness or living on the margins of our housing system. They also affirm that the law can and should play a role in protecting the most vulnerable in our society.

Throughout 2025, the incredible support of our dedicated pro bono partners once again provided an invaluable support to MLRC and those seeking access to our services. In line with our Strategy, we increased the numbers of referrals from triaged queries to dedicated pro bono volunteer solicitors from three main partner firms – Mason Hayes & Curran LLP, A&L Goodbody LLP, and Arthur Cox LLP.

A&L Goodbody LLP

Since 2018, MLRC has operated a hugely valuable pro bono partnership with A&L Goodbody and Focus Ireland. This partnership is facilitated and supported by the Public Interest Law Alliance (PILA), a project of FLAC (the Free Legal Advice Centre). A&L Goodbody solicitors staff the clinic, with support and training from MLRC, to serve Focus Ireland customers who need legal assistance in relation to social housing and/or emergency accommodation. The clinic makes an enormous contribution to servicing the unmet legal need in this area.

33 In 2025 ALG worked on 33 families' housing files

In conjunction with Focus Ireland and A&L Goodbody, we review how the clinics and referrals are working, to seek to continually improve and evolve the service based on our learnings and host drop-in meetings for Focus Ireland staff with A&L Goodbody's Pro Bono team and an MLRC solicitor every three weeks. The A&L team also expanded their support beyond the Focus Ireland clinic and began taking referrals directly from us. This resulted in 33 families receiving legal advice from their pro bono solicitors.

Arthur Cox LLP

Arthur Cox LLP provided invaluable collaborative and pro bono support to us, including 450 pro bono hours dedicated to referrals. They also facilitated secondments with two trainee solicitors, Grace Itofa-Ivarah and Aliya Jordan. Grace and Aliya's contributions were immensely valuable to MLRC, ultimately enabling our team to do more client work.

450 pro bono hours dedicated to referrals

My Time with MLRC

BY GRACE ITOFA-IVARAH
(then Trainee Solicitor, Arthur Cox LLP)

My secondment at the Mercy Law Resource Centre was an eye-opening and rewarding experience. Every Friday, I worked on the frontline of the housing crisis, answering calls through the helpline and listening to people in very difficult situations. Many callers were families who had nowhere to go, and each conversation reminded me how vital access to housing is for dignity and safety.

In the mornings, I handled housing queries from members of the public. I guided people to organisations like Focus Ireland, Threshold, and Crosscare when they could help, and for others, I uploaded their details into the case management system so they could be reviewed during triage with the solicitors. This process taught me how important it is to act quickly and accurately when someone is at risk of homelessness or homeless.

My Time with MLRC (cont'd...)

I also worked on preparing briefs for counsel in judicial reviews and in cases where local authorities had failed to meet their obligations to protect housing rights. One case that stands out was drafting a complaint to the Ombudsman for Children for a family of six who had been treated unfairly by the council. They were given a €130 voucher per night for seven nights of emergency accommodation, which was completely inadequate. Preparing that complaint felt meaningful because it gave the family a voice and a chance for accountability.

Another moment that I will never forget was advocating for a mother with a four-month-old baby and a three-year-old child who was refused emergency accommodation. She was on the verge of sleeping rough with her children over the weekend. Through persistent advocacy and coordination, we secured emergency accommodation for her at 6pm on a Friday evening. Knowing that those children had a safe place to sleep that night was one of the most rewarding parts of my secondment, and my traineeship.

I also contributed to advocacy for people who were denied homeless supports or ignored by local authorities. Through our efforts, we helped individuals and families secure places on the social housing list after initial refusals caused by misapplication of the law or unfair assessments. These experiences showed me how complex and urgent housing issues are, and how much of a difference legal support can make.

The team at MLRC was incredible. They were hands-on, encouraging, and excellent at what they do. They are small but mighty and working alongside them was a privilege that made this experience even more impactful.

My time at Mercy Law Resource Centre strengthened my legal skills and deepened my understanding of the impact lawyers can have on real lives. I have learnt the value of persistence, empathy, and practical problem-solving, and it has shaped my corporate practice, reminding me that every legal skill can be used to create meaningful change when applied with purpose. I am grateful to have been able to do this as part of my Pro Bono Rotation and to play a part in helping people find safety and stability.

Mason Hayes & Curran LLP

Mason Hayes & Curran (MHC) have been a consistent and long-term supporter of MLRC and our work. Our jointly launched pro bono initiative, establishing a clinic (in the summer of 2023), continues to thrive.

The clinic is a telephone information clinic staffed by volunteer solicitors from MHC. The service focuses on callers to MLRC who are seeking information regarding social housing or homelessness matters but who do not appear from the initial query details to require urgent legal representation. The clinic operates weekly, serving 2–5 callers per session.

At the heart of this initiative are the volunteer solicitors from MHC who generously donate their time and expertise. As the demand for MLRC's services continues to grow the telephone clinic continues to be of huge value and assistance, ensuring callers to MLRC can access timely legal information. This also assists in relieving pressure on our solicitor team, as

99 households provided with legal assistance

demand for our services continues to increase. In the period from January to December 2025, MHC volunteers assisted 99 clients – an invaluable contribution to meeting the needs of those in or at risk of homelessness.

McCann Fitzgerald LLP

As part of our ongoing partnership with McCann Fitzgerald LLP, we co-hosted an event entitled "Legal Aspects of Traveller Advocacy: Housing, Homelessness and Discrimination" at McCann's offices. The programme featured MLRC solicitor Erika Hayes on social housing and homelessness law, Sinéad Lucey (FLAC) on common housing issues facing the Traveller community, Christopher McCann of McCann FitzGerald with an overview of relevant case law and Anna Sheehan (IHREC) with an overview of equality legislation and discrimination complaints. In addition, a film screening addressing interfamilial conflict was facilitated by Michael Cawley and Caroline Boyle of the Travellers Transforming Conflict Initiative.

This event was a valuable coming together of partners and advocates to advance equality and respond to the Traveller community's lived experience of discrimination, housing and homelessness.



The team behind the successful "Legal Aspects of Traveller Advocacy: Housing, Homelessness and Discrimination" event

"MLRC supports those navigating some of the hardest moments of their lives, and we are proud to contribute to that effort via our clinics since the summer of 2023. Hearing the relief of a caller when a way forward is found, or gratitude even where the options are limited, is extremely rewarding. MHC are grateful to MLRC for providing guidance and support to our 25 volunteers who have contributed over the past few years, which makes the MHC/ MLRC partnership seamless. We look forward to continuing this work together."

Aislinn O'Shea,
Partner, Mason Hayes & Curran LLP

Taylor Wessing LLP

In 2025 we were pleased to further build our relationship with Taylor Wessing (now Winston Taylor). We were able to leverage the 'Domestic Violence Research Project' previously carried out by Taylor Wessing for us in both advocating for our clients, and to help inform our engagements with officials from the Department of Housing in relation to housing supports available to victim-survivors of domestic violence.

Taylor Wessing also produced a briefing paper for us on relevant cases and updates to legislation.

The success of our relationship was reflected in Taylor Wessing's Responsible Business Impact Report 2025 and we look forward to building upon our partnership.

Our Casework in 2025

In 2025, MLRC's casework continued to demonstrate the critical importance of specialist legal advice and representation for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Across the year, clients presented in urgent and often highly complex circumstances: families being separated in homeless accommodation; families facing homelessness after leaving refuge or international protection accommodation; individuals refused emergency accommodation despite having nowhere safe or lawful to stay; households affected by domestic violence, disability or medical need; and tenants at risk of losing secure accommodation because of flawed administrative processes. Indeed, a recurring theme was the legal framework that governs homeless and social housing supports not always being properly interpreted or applied by local authorities. In many cases, clients were not refused assistance because they failed to meet the legal test for support, but because additional barriers, policies or assumptions were introduced into the decision-making process. These cases required urgent legal correspondence, pre-litigation engagement, sustained advocacy and, where necessary, legal proceedings being commenced.

MLRC has continually recommended that local authority homeless and housing staff be provided with appropriate training on the key principles of administrative law, constitutional law and human rights law. Such training, with a focus on the human rights that are relevant in the context of homeless assessments and social housing assessments will enable local authorities to meaningfully fulfil their obligations under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 to eliminate discrimination; promote equality of opportunity and treatment; and to protect the human rights of staff and their service users.

"I just want to inform you that I'm back on the housing list for social housing … I got a letter stating I'm back on the list. Thank you so much for everything you have done for me and my daughter. I'm very grateful."

Unlawful Restrictions on Access to Emergency Accommodation

A significant theme in MLRC's 2025 casework was the refusal of access to emergency accommodation based on criteria not contained in the Housing Act 1988. In several cases, local authorities appeared to unlawfully treat access to homeless supports as conditional on matters such as a household's status on the social housing list; previous rent arrears; or the ability to demonstrate a 'local connection' with a local authority area. These cases examined by MLRC raised rule of law concerns. As public bodies, local authorities must act within the limits of the powers conferred on them by legislation. Local authorities cannot introduce additional eligibility barriers which the Oireachtas has not provided for.

In other cases, dealt with by MLRC, local authorities failed to exercise their discretion under the 1988 Act in line with constitutional and administrative law principles, resulting in unlawful refusals of emergency accommodation. For example, it is an established principle of administrative law that an opinion of a public body must be factually sustainable (Fagan v Dublin City Council & Ors [2019] IESC 96). However, in cases examined by MLRC, local authorities refused emergency accommodation on the perceived availability of accommodation which could not reasonably or lawfully be occupied.

The consequences for clients were immediate and, in many cases, severe. Refusals of emergency accommodation directly resulted in hidden homelessness, with clients sleeping on blow-up mattresses, in cars, tents and on the street. MLRC also recorded cases where local authorities did not provide emergency accommodation even where they were aware that this refusal created a risk of rough sleeping, including for households with children. In MLRC's experience, legal intervention generally resulted in local authorities resiling from those positions and agreeing to provide emergency accommodation.

In one case, the client had been sleeping in a car for almost three months. MLRC wrote to the local authority on five occasions over the course of a month before obtaining leave from the High Court to take judicial review proceedings. Within days of service of the proceedings, the client was approved for social housing supports and placed in night-by-night emergency accommodation while the local authority reviewed its position.

MERCY LAW | ANNUAL REPORT 2025

Case Study

LOCAL AUTHORITY UNLAWFULLY STATED TO FAMILY THAT THEY MUST BE ON THE SOCIAL HOUSING LIST TO BE CONSIDERED ELIGIBLE FOR HOMELESS SUPPORTS

A family with six children reported that they were offered a private rental tenancy. When the landlord discovered that the property would be overcrowded due to the number of children, they were told they had to leave and the family subsequently self-funded temporary accommodation as they could not find another available rental property. This became financially unsustainable and they contacted their local authority to seek homeless supports. The local authority told the family that they did not have any open social housing application with them at the time and that they could not provide homeless supports to them.

The family then reached out to MLRC. Due to their location outside Dublin, a MLRC solicitor invited the mother of the family to join an initial phone clinic. She was deeply distressed and repeated that she did not want to *"end up on the street"* with her children. MLRC subsequently issued written legal correspondence to the local authority on an urgent basis. We stated that the 1988 Act does not require a household to have an open social housing application before being considered for emergency accommodation. We pointed out that this local authority's website contained the following incorrect and unlawful information in relation to homeless supports:

> *"Qualifying Criteria for Homeless Supports*
> *The following criteria applies:*
> *You must be on [X] County Council's housing waiting list."*

We cited the Minister for Housing's confirmation that any household assessed as homeless may be placed into temporary emergency accommodation without the requirement to undergo a social housing assessment.

Following this correspondence and further engagements with the local authority, emergency accommodation was provided. The local authority also removed the incorrect content on its website which claimed that an open social housing application was required to access homeless supports. Having the incorrect content removed is significant in having a potential positive impact for future applicants.

Domestic Violence and Homelessness

Domestic violence continued to be a major factor in homelessness among MLRC clients in 2025. Victim-survivors and their children frequently presented in circumstances where they had fled their homes for safety reasons, entered refuge accommodation, and faced homelessness again when their refuge stay came to an end. Often families required assistance when they were approaching the end of a refuge stay, had no move-on option, or were remaining in refuge beyond their discharge date because they had nowhere else to go.

These cases showed the continuing gap between national policy commitments on domestic violence and the reality experienced by victim-survivors seeking housing supports. Refuge accommodation is essential crisis accommodation – it is not designed to provide long-term housing. Where a person cannot safely return home because of abuse, housing authorities must assess their position under the homelessness framework and ought to do so in a way that reflects the risks inherent in domestic violence.

In practice, MLRC continued to encounter cases where local authorities appeared to misunderstand or under-apply the relevant Department of Housing guidance on assisting victim-survivors of domestic violence with emergency and long-term accommodation needs. That guidance recognises that victim-survivors may need to flee to another local authority area for safety reasons, and that where a victim-survivor's accommodation needs cannot be met by a refuge, including where they have been required to exit refuge accommodation, housing authorities must assess a victim's homelessness status under Section 2 of the Housing Act 1988.

Domestic violence cases also brought into sharp focus the danger of rigid administrative approaches. Some clients were told, explicitly or implicitly, that they should return to the county, property or tenancy from which they had fled. Others were refused support because they had a tenancy in place, despite the fact that it was unsafe for them to return. A person fleeing violence should not be placed in a position where accessing homeless supports depends on returning to the area, household or relationship where they are unsafe. This remains a central issue in MLRC's casework, policy work and law reform advocacy.

"Thank you very much for your continued support. The children and I are doing well, and we have been taken to a safe and suitable place... I sincerely appreciate your kindness and your help is deeply appreciated and cannot be fully repaid. I will keep you updated with any new information that comes in. Thank you once again for everything."

Case Study

LOCAL AUTHORITY CLAIMS IT HAS NO 'DIRECT ROLE IN PROVIDING ACCOMMODATION FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE'

A mother and young daughter were facing discharge from a refuge and required further homeless supports. The family was initially refused these supports, without being provided with written reasons. Following a consultation with this mother and her support worker, MLRC issued written correspondence to the local authority. This correspondence set out why it appeared that this woman and her child met the definition of homelessness and explicitly requested provision of emergency accommodation under section 10 of the 1988 Act. The letter also referenced the Department of Housing guidance for local authorities in relation to victim-survivors of domestic violence.

MLRC received a letter on the relevant local authority's headed paper which stated that it wished to advise that *"the Council do not have a direct role in providing accommodation for victims of domestic violence"*. This was a troubling example of a local authority failing to properly understand that victim-survivors of domestic violence generally cannot stay in refuges for more than 12 weeks and that they often face extended periods of homelessness beyond this. Thankfully after further intervention, including a constructive phone call with the local authority, the client and her daughter were placed in emergency accommodation. We are hopeful that this case widens local authorities' understanding of the frequent need to support victim-survivors in accessing emergency accommodation once their stay in refuge has come to an end.

Unlawful Refusals of Social Housing Support

When a household applies for social housing supports, it must meet certain eligibility criteria under the Housing Acts and the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011. Among these eligibility criteria are Regulations 5 and 6, which provide clarity on which local authorities a household may apply to. When applied correctly, these rules should give households meaningful options about where they can apply, and be accepted, for social housing supports and build a stable long-term home.

Under the Regulations, a household may apply to the local authority for the area in which it normally resides by completing a simple assessment to confirm where the household lives at the time of application. Where a household wishes to apply somewhere it does not currently reside, it may do so if it has a 'local connection' to that area. This 'local connection', as defined in the Regulations, is expansive, meaning many households may have a choice of local authority to which to apply. In addition, local authorities have broad discretion in accepting applications from households who neither live in the area nor have any local connections to it. The Department of Housing has provided some guidance on the types of appropriate circumstances in which this discretion may be employed, including where a person is fleeing domestic violence or moving out of IPAS accommodation.

In 2025, MLRC saw a concerning number of cases where these rules were misapplied. Some applicants were refused social housing supports because they were said to lack a local connection, even where they were proven to be normally resident in the local authority area. Others were asked to prove both normal residence and local connection, although the Regulations do not require this. In further cases, households were informed that they needed to live in an area for several years to prove 'normal residence', which directly contradicts both legislation and Departmental guidance notes.

This confusion is particularly concerning because the Department and Minister for Housing have made repeated attempts to clarify these rules. Departmental guidance issued in 2013 made clear that there is no minimum period of residence required to demonstrate a household normally residing in an area. It also recognised that people in emergency accommodation may struggle to provide proof of address, and that evidence such as a social welfare payment in the area may be sufficient. In 2016, the Regulations were amended to further clarify that local connection is only relevant where a household does not normally reside in the local authority area to which they are applying.

In many cases, once MLRC intervened and explained the correct interpretation of these Regulations, the local authority withdrew or revised its decision. However, in some local authority areas a concerning pattern emerged, where the local authority continued to render the same unlawful decisions and only resiled from them following legal correspondence. This pattern raises serious concerns about whether compliance with these clear legal requirements by some local authorities is contingent on the threat of legal intervention by MLRC.

The consequences for clients are serious. An incorrect refusal can delay access to housing supports, prolong homelessness, and leave households in unsuitable or insecure accommodation. Indeed, incorrect decisions may also lead to families becoming homeless and unable to access crucial social housing supports, including the Housing Assistance Payment, which would enable them to secure accommodation or pay rent. In late 2025, MLRC raised these concerns with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, both in writing and in a meeting with senior officials.

"I feel you have gone above and beyond and I really appreciate all your hard work."

Unlawful Application of 'Local Connection Test' in Homeless Assessments

When a family becomes homeless and seeks access to emergency accommodation, they must be assessed as homeless by their local authority. At law, pursuant to Section 2 of the Housing Act 1988, this assessment must determine whether the household has accommodation available to them, or the means to provide for their own accommodation. No other criteria for homeless assessments exist at law.

However, the unlawful application of a form of 'local connection' test in homeless assessments remained a persistent and concerning issue in MLRC's 2025 casework. MLRC continued to see clients being told to return to another county or local authority area, even where those clients had compelling reasons for seeking assistance where they presented.

Where a local authority seeks to apply a 'local connection test' as part of a homeless assessment, it raises concerns that the local authority is incorrectly applying a protocol published by the County and City Managers Association (CCMA), entitled "Protocol for Homeless Presentations between Local Authorities (October 2025)" (the "CCMA Protocol"). A previous 2023 version of this CCMA protocol was titled the "Local Connection Protocol for Homeless Presentations outside county of origin". As neither version of this protocol is contained in primary or secondary legislation, it does not form part of Irish law. Further, it does not appear that the CCMA has the necessary legal authority to introduce eligibility criteria for homeless supports over and above those in the relevant legislation.

The CCMA Protocol is a key challenge in these cases as it seeks to require those requesting access to homeless services to present in their 'county of origin' for such services. In practice, we have often seen local authorities conflating language from the 2025 CCMA Protocol in relation to 'county of origin' with a requirement to prove a 'local connection' to a local authority area before accessing emergency accommodation. This is not a requirement at law. As a result, MLRC assisted several households who had been refused access to emergency accommodation and were bounced between local authorities, with no authority accepting responsibility for supporting them. In many cases, households 'normally resided' in one area, with 'local connections' to multiple others, yet MLRC encountered local authorities disputing responsibility, indicating that the household had a 'better' local connection to a different area and refusing to assess them as homeless for this reason.

This issue has particularly serious consequences for people who cannot safely or practically return to another local authority area or who may have links with multiple local authority areas. It is particularly concerning for survivors of domestic violence, members of the Traveller community, people fleeing intimidation or conflict, migrants, people exiting international protection accommodation, and people whose medical, addiction, social or family supports were located in the area where they sought assistance. In many cases, MLRC's intervention resulted in the relevant local authority reviewing its position and providing access to emergency accommodation. However, the persistence of this issue indicates the need for clear national direction, training and accountability, and is clearly interfering with the rights of the most vulnerable.

"It was a pleasure to work alongside Mercy Law Resource Centre in 2025 and to witness the organisation's commitment and dedication to providing high-quality legal services for persons experiencing housing issues. MLRC lawyers are experts in housing law, and their steadfast attention to detail, and practical, strategic approach is evident in all of the work that the organisation does. There is an enormous and growing need for housing and homelessness-related legal services in Ireland, and all supports should be provided to MLRC to continue this vital work.."

Céile Varley BL

Case Study

UNLAWFUL APPLICATION OF 'LOCAL CONNECTION TEST' IN HOMELESS ASSESSMENTS

A client with two children, one of whom has autism, was refused emergency accommodation following the incorrect application of a local connection test by the local authority.

This case also involved serious domestic violence issues as the client was abused by her ex-husband and fled her home. She relocated to a domestic violence refuge in a new county as she was considered in severe danger.

As refuges offer short-term, crisis accommodation only, our client was given a discharge date to leave the refuge. She proceeded to apply to the local authority in the area where she resided for a homeless assessment (and for social housing supports), as she had no accommodation to return to. She submitted a letter from her key worker in the domestic violence refuge explaining the background to her case. Despite this, the local authority refused to provide her with a homeless assessment, stating:

> *"As your last known address is [in a different county …], you will need to contact them for homeless supports."*

The local authority also referred to the fact that the client's social housing application had not yet been processed. As set out in detail earlier in this report, a person's status on the social housing list ought not to be considered relevant to an assessment for emergency homeless supports.

MLRC intervened on this family's behalf and wrote to the local authority, challenging their refusal to assist further. MLRC emphasised that for this client, being told to return to the county she came from would put her in grave danger.

Following correspondence from MLRC, our client was assessed as homeless by the local authority and provided with emergency accommodation. This case highlights the vulnerability of victim-survivors of domestic violence and the danger they could face if they are unlawfully subjected to a local connection test when accessing homeless supports.

The CCMA Protocol: A Cause of Confusion and Hidden Homelessness

In 2025, the confusion created by the CCMA Protocol also impacted on how applications for social housing supports made in conjunction with applications for access to emergency accommodation were processed by certain local authorities.

MLRC's casework in 2025 highlighted several instances where the Protocol appeared to produce outcomes directly at odds with its stated objective. Following MLRC intervention, several local authorities accepted that refusing social housing applications on local connection grounds from applicants who could clearly demonstrate such a local connection, would be inconsistent with the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, and the applications were subsequently approved. At the same time however, some of those same local authorities sought to direct the households concerned to seek emergency accommodation in different counties. The consequence was a situation in which families could be considered eligible for social housing supports in one local authority area while being directed elsewhere to access emergency homeless accommodation. These outcomes raise questions about the intended purpose of the Protocol and broader concerns regarding its practical effect in the administration of homelessness services.

Case Study

FAMILY FLEEING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FACED CCMA PROTOCOL CONFUSION

Our client, a single mother with a minor child, fled domestic violence and was resident in a domestic violence refuge in the functional area of a local authority.

After some time in refuge, our client sought to apply for social housing supports with a local authority and therefore sought a homeless assessment. During her homeless assessment, the local authority advised her that she was not entitled to access services within their functional area and directed her to a neighbouring local authority. The local authority did not make any record of this homeless assessment taking place.

The second local authority refused to provide emergency accommodation until our client was approved for social housing supports. This second local authority refused to consider our client's "normal residence" under Regulation 5(a), nor use their discretion under Regulation 5(c).

The second local authority repeatedly asked for additional information outside the scope set out under the Social Housing Assessment Regulations. It also failed to render a decision on the application within the timeframe required under Regulation 12. The second local authority instructed our client to seek documentary evidence from her ex-partner, the perpetrator of domestic violence, to prove a local connection under Regulation 5(b). Ultimately, they refused to provide our client with access to social housing supports or emergency accommodation. The first local authority also refused to engage further, instead indicating that responsibility lay with the second, neighbouring local authority.

Extensive advocacy from domestic violence support workers did not result in a change of position, meaning that our client and her daughter would have entered a state of rooflessness but for the refuge refusing to discharge her without access to emergency accommodation.

> "The matter only serves to highlight the confusion and contradiction associated with the Protocol and amounts to a significant barrier for vulnerable clients."

Initial intervention from MLRC did not result in a change of position but following Freedom of Information requests being lodged, we were able to highlight flaws in the decision-making process. This ultimately resulted in the first local authority providing the household with emergency accommodation.

This matter only serves to highlight the confusion and contradiction associated with the Protocol and how it presents a significant barrier for vulnerable clients.

Ineffective Homeless Supports: Local Authorities' Use of Accommodation 'Vouchers'

MLRC continued to encounter cases in 2025 where local authorities sought to respond to homelessness by providing households with accommodation 'vouchers' or letters stating that the local authority would reimburse the cost of private emergency accommodation up to a set amount. While presented as a form of homeless support, this approach often failed to secure accommodation in practice.

The voucher system places the burden on homeless households to source their own emergency accommodation, often in circumstances of extreme stress and urgency. Families may be required to contact multiple hotels, B&Bs or private providers, only to discover that providers will not accept the voucher, that the amount is insufficient, or that no suitable accommodation is available for the family size or needs. This is particularly difficult for larger families, families with children, people with disabilities, people with limited English, and households already experiencing crisis.

MLRC has long raised concerns about self-accommodation and voucher-based systems. Emergency accommodation must be effective and functional. Where a family is accepted as homeless, the provision of a voucher that cannot realistically secure a safe place to stay does not meet the urgency of the need. MLRC continues to advocate that local authorities should directly secure emergency accommodation placements for families rather than shifting responsibility onto households already in crisis.

Case Study

FAMILY WITH SIX CHILDREN PROVIDED WITH A 'VOUCHER' THAT WAS INADEQUATE

A family of two adults and six children were provided with a 'voucher' from their local authority to the value of €130 per night, valid for 10 nights, to cover accommodation for the entire family. On the day that the voucher was provided, although inquiries were made by the family to as many B&Bs as possible, they were unable to secure accommodation with these vouchers.

MLRC contacted the local authority and argued that the voucher was inadequate to allow for the provision of homeless supports to this family. After initially pushing back by stating that there was no accommodation available which the local authority could directly book, the local authority eventually directly booked a placement for this family.

"Thank you for your time and thank you so much for your team's help and assistance. Both women I spoke to have been so absolutely fantastic and genuinely seem concerned and care for me as a person. They're very understanding and patient. It's the most help I've gotten recently and I just really appreciate it. It is really great to feel like your voice and issues matter after being dismissed by everyone else… Two very amazing women. Thank you so much."

Failure to Provide Adequate Reasoning for Decision-Making

Another recurring theme in 2025 was the failure of local authorities to provide adequate written reasons for decisions affecting access to homeless and social housing supports. Clients frequently reported that refusals were communicated orally, or that written explanations were vague, incomplete, or based on legally incorrect reasoning. This was particularly concerning in emergency accommodation cases, where the consequences of a refusal could be immediate and severe.

The duty to give reasons is a fundamental element of fair and lawful public decision-making which has been upheld as a legal requirement by the Supreme Court. It enables a person to understand why a decision was made, to correct misunderstandings, to provide further evidence where appropriate, and to assess whether the decision can be challenged. Without adequate reasons, clients and their advocates are left in a position of uncertainty and disadvantage at precisely the moment when urgent action may be required.

Households affected by the CCMA Protocol were regularly unlawfully refused written reasons for decisions. In the course of our work on these cases, MLRC identified failures to give adequate reasons as one of the key legal challenges facing homeless families. In many cases clients reported that when they requested written reasons for refusals, they were informed that this was not allowed or not required of the local authority. This position by local authorities is without clear legal basis and an abdication of their administrative law responsibilities.

Indeed, the importance of rendering written reasons in these types of cases is reflected in the explicit requirement of the 2011 Regulations, that reasons be provided when a social housing application has been rejected. Despite this, MLRC encountered several cases in 2025 where local authorities returned completed social housing applications to households, orally directing them to go elsewhere instead of rendering a written decision as has been held to be a legal obligation by the High Court.

Case Study

FAMILY NOT GIVEN REASONS FOR SOCIAL HOUSING APPLICATION REFUSAL

MLRC worked with a family who were residing in a domestic violence refuge. They attended their local authority for a homeless assessment and to submit a social housing application.

On determining that the household used to reside in a different county, the local authority handed back their completed social housing application and directed them to attend a different office. No clear reasons were provided for the refusal to process their social housing application, in breach of the statutory requirements of the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011. In addition, the household were informed that they were not eligible for a homeless assessment, with no written record being made on the Pathway Accommodation Support System ("PASS") and no written reasons provided to our client.

When MLRC queried this, the local authority initially denied that any such meeting had taken place, or any such decision had been made. When third party evidence of such a meeting was presented, the local authority reversed their position, approving the family for both social housing supports and placement in emergency accommodation.

In the absence of a clear and robust statutory appeals mechanism for homeless supports, the provision of reasons for a refusal to provide access to emergency accommodation is all the more important. It is a basic safeguard against arbitrary decision-making and an essential part of ensuring that people in housing crisis can vindicate their rights. MLRC's 2025 casework showed that where reasons were absent, vague or legally flawed, specialist legal intervention was often required before decisions were reviewed or corrected.

Legal Training for Organisations Working in the Field of Homelessness

An ongoing strategic priority of MLRC is the provision of training to individuals and organisations across the social housing and homeless sector. Providing both general and bespoke training, we aim to equip participants with the core legal knowledge needed to navigate Ireland's complex housing system and better support their clients and work.

In 2025 we delivered 9 housing law training sessions to a variety of organisations, state bodies and individuals such as housing officers, social workers, community advocates and legal professionals.

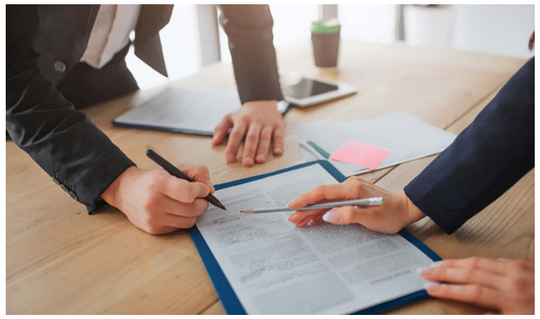
2025 Training Events

February	**'Domestic Violence in Joint Social Housing Tenancies'** Training for COPE
February	**'Fundamentals in Housing Law'** Training for DePaul, in collaboration with A&L Goodbody LLP
March	**'Fundamentals in Housing Law'** Open Training
June	**'Overview of Law Applying to Social Housing'** For A&L Goodbody LLP
July	**'Fundamentals in Housing Law'** Open Training
October	**'Fundamentals in Housing Law'** Open Training
October	**'Housing, Homelessness and the Law'** For Arthur Cox LLP
November	**'Introduction to Social Welfare Law'** A series of seven online training workshops, in collaboration with Professor Gerry Whyte, School of Law, Trinity College Dublin
December	**'Legal Aspects of Traveller Advocacy: Housing, Homelessness & Discrimination'** In collaboration with McCann Fitzgerald LLP

"Thank you for the excellent and comprehensive presentation you gave on housing law ... I found it extremely useful".

Policy and Law Reform Work

Throughout 2025 MLRC continued to use the insights garnered from our casework to shape our policy and law reform agenda. We are committed to advancing systemic improvements to laws, policies and practices that negatively affect our client group. At the time of writing, 5,830 children in Ireland are homeless. This figure reflects far more than a number; it represents children whose lives have been disrupted, families under pressure, and the denial of fundamental rights. Through our work, we strive to promote equal and effective access to justice for people experiencing homelessness.



Housing Instability and Domestic Violence

The intersection of domestic violence and housing instability remained a key policy priority for MLRC in 2025. Throughout 2025, we built on the work of our 2023 report, *Social Housing, Domestic Violence and the Public Sector Duty* and on the issues raised by MLRC in our submission to the Department of Housing in December 2024, entitled *"Domestic Violence in Joint Social Housing Tenancies: Pressing Need for Legislative Reform"*. Awareness-raising work in this area included the following:

- In February 2025, MLRC solicitors, Erika Hayes and Kate Heffernan held a briefing with staff members in COPE on the key issues involved.
- In May 2025, Kate Heffernan spoke on domestic violence and homelessness at the Bar of Ireland Human Rights Conference, on a panel chaired by Ms Justice Sara Phelan, entitled *"Housing, Homelessness and the Law"*.

The following is a summary of key issues highlighted in this policy work.

Joint Social Housing Tenancies

The first key issue is that there is currently no satisfactory legal mechanism to remove a domestic abuser from joint social housing tenancies. While the law allows for victim-survivors to seek various orders under the Domestic Violence Act 2018, these orders are not immediately available and are not permanent.

While a previous Minister for Housing had tried to suggest that local authorities could deal with domestic abuse in joint social housing tenancies by using their powers in relation to anti-social behaviour, this is a mischaracterisation of the current legal framework for a number of reasons including the following:

- The 1997 legislation, which includes the definition of anti-social behaviour applied by local authorities, was published alongside a Government Circular (H5/97) which expressly states that local authorities should not consider domestic violence as falling under the definition of anti-social behaviour: *"Cases of domestic violence, as distinct from anti-social behaviour as defined in the Act [1997 Act], fall to be dealt with under the Domestic Violence Act 1995."*
- Some local authorities have included statements in their policy documents to the effect that domestic violence is *"different from anti-social behaviour"* and will not be dealt with by the local authority. For example, the anti-social behaviour strategy of one local authority states that: *"Circular H5/97 […] states cases of Domestic Violence are different from anti-social behaviour […] Domestic Violence is intentionally excluded from the legislation to prevent Local Authorities from taking legal action with the matrimonial/relationship disputes of its tenants."*

The current legal framework does not provide a satisfactory mechanism for dealing with the removal of a domestic abuser from a joint social housing tenancy and this ought to be urgently addressed by Government.

Consequences for Escaping Domestic Abuse

A second key issue highlighted in our policy work in this area relates to local authorities classifying the act of fleeing a social housing property to escape domestic abuse as a *"voluntary surrender"* of that property by the victim-survivor. This issue arises in cases wherein victim-survivors flee abuse and subsequently seek social housing supports in their own name. In cases which MLRC have dealt with, victim-survivors have been required to surrender the tenancy that they shared with their abuser before being considered for fresh, independent social housing supports. Furthermore, and in some cases, local authorities then apply provisions in their allocation schemes to exclude these victim-survivors from a further social housing allocation for a period, on the basis that the local authority considers them to have *"voluntarily surrendered"* a previous tenancy.

MLRC commenced a strategic judicial review on behalf of a client facing this issue in 2024. This case was resolved in our client's favour in early 2025, and the legal proceedings were rendered moot. MLRC continues to engage with the local authority involved to try to bring about a permanent change to its current policy on this issue.

Homelessness and Domestic Violence

One of the main points of breakdown in coordination between State actors when it comes to dealing with victim-survivors of domestic violence, occurs when a victim-survivor is facing discharge from a refuge. Domestic violence refuges generally provide crisis accommodation for short periods of time, with the maximum stay typically in the region of 12 weeks. At the point of exiting a refuge, often a victim-survivor would continue to meet the definition of homelessness under section 2 of the Housing Act 1988 and would be entitled to request local authority-funded homeless supports. Indeed, guidance issued in 2017 by the Department of Housing to local authorities explains this, stating that the legislative definition of homelessness is *"sufficiently broad to include those that can not return to their homes for fear of violence."*

Unfortunately, MLRC's experience has been that there is a general lack of awareness of this guidance. The reality we often observe is that where victim-survivors face discharge from a refuge and do not feel that they can safely return to their homes, they frequently face barriers in getting a local authority to agree to provide emergency accommodation.

The approach taken by local authorities in these cases is often at odds with wider state commitments to improving outcomes for victim-survivors. This comes despite the fact that Ireland has now ratified the *Istanbul Convention*, which is the Council of Europe Convention on Domestic Violence. While the fourth pillar of the Istanbul Convention calls for *"co-ordinated policies"* among State actors, the current approach of the State continues to feel fragmented and requires overhaul.

The Need for an Independent, Centralised Appeals Mechanism in Relation to All Local Authority Social Housing and Homelessness Decisions

In 2024, MLRC made submissions to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage (the "Oireachtas Housing Committee") during their Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2024 (the "2024 Bill"). Amongst our submissions was the iteration of a point echoed by partners across the sector: a lack of consistent, clear decision making on issues related to social housing across local authority areas. This position was supported by the Committee, which recommended that a robust and independent appeals mechanism be placed on a legislative basis, and that this mechanism operate via a central body rather than local authorities.

Throughout 2025 MLRC worked with colleagues across the sector, primarily in the Irish Homeless Policy Group ("IHPG"), to advocate for the introduction of a such an appeals mechanism. MLRC established the "Appeals Subgroup" of the IHPG which we chaired throughout

the year. This group brought together experience and learnings from organisations working across the sector, including organisations with specialism working with those experiencing housing insecurity, members of the Traveller community, migrants, and victim-survivors of domestic violence.

Throughout the summer of 2025, MLRC wrote to the newly formed Oireachtas Housing Committee for the 34th Dáil and 27th Seanad. In this correspondence, we sought to reiterate our concern regarding the need for a robust, independent appeals mechanism to be placed on a statutory footing. We invited members of both Houses to attend a briefing in July 2025, delivered by MLRC with our colleagues from the IHPG, entitled "The Need for a Robust Independent Appeals Mechanism for Decisions Related to Social Housing and Homelessness". This work sought to highlight the concerning disparity in how decisions are made depending on the local authority area concerned. We highlighted broad challenges in accessing emergency homelessness supports, approval for social housing supports, and priority statuses for allocation or transfer.

In December 2025, MLRC was invited to appear before the Oireachtas Housing Committee and once again raised these concerns with Members, calling for a robust, centralised appeal structure to be placed on a legislative basis.

The Committee's report published in 2026, contained many of the recommendations MLRC outlined at the Committee hearing. It is therefore regrettable that the Housing and Residential Tenancies (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026 will not introduce such an independent appeals mechanism.

Habitual Residency and Access to Housing Supports

MLRC has consistently highlighted issues with regards to Housing Circular 41/2012, which purports to provide guidance to local authority decision-makers on access to social housing supports for non-Irish nationals. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage announced an intention to reform this area and to place access to social housing supports for non-Irish nationals on a statutory footing. As part of this plan, the Department of Housing announced an intention to introduce a requirement that households prove lawful, habitual, and reckonable residence in Ireland, in order to be approved for social housing supports.

Throughout 2025, MLRC and our colleagues in the IHPG raised concerns about the potential unintended consequences of such a legislative change. MLRC twice wrote to the Oireachtas Housing Committee to highlight these concerns. Issues were raised regarding the complexity of a "Habitual Residency Assessment" and the need for procedural safeguards to be introduced to ensure applicants were not unreasonably refused access to social housing supports. In addition, MLRC and our colleagues in the IHPG raised concerns that such legislative changes could result in households who become homeless being refused access to emergency homeless accommodation, despite lawfully residing in the State.

Much of the work of the IHPG Appeals Subgroup also addressed issues related to the mooted legislative amendments raised by the introduction of a Habitual Residency Condition. In September 2025, MLRC and our colleagues from the IHPG met with senior members of the Department of Housing to be briefed on legislative plans in this area and shared our collective concerns. At this point, Department officials made clear their intention to proceed with legislation very similar to the 2024 Bill in relation to access to social housing supports. In positive developments, the Department indicated an intention to introduce an appeals structure, however, it was made clear that such a structure would operate on a local basis only and would be limited in nature.

Concerningly, the Department also indicated an intention to bring forward separate legislation to introduce a 'different form' of habitual residency as a requirement for access to emergency homelessness supports, fundamentally amending the Housing Act 1988. While these plans were clearly at an early stage, MLRC and our colleagues from across the IHPG raised serious concerns regarding their implementation. MLRC highlighted the widespread and growing issues our clients were facing in accessing basic, emergency homeless accommodation as was, noting that further administrative barriers amplified the risk of families needing to sleep on the streets. MLRC reiterated these concerns by both writing to and appearing before the Oireachtas Housing Committee in December 2025.

In June 2026, MLRC were notified that a Bill had been introduced by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage entitled the "Housing & Residential Tenancies (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026. This Bill replicated elements of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2024 which had raised concerns across the sector and which Pre-Legislative Scrutiny had recommended be removed. The Bill also included substantial additional elements which had not previously undergone pre-legislative scrutiny, including a limited, local statutory appeals structure. At the final stage in the Dáil, additional amendments were introduced to extend these additional eligibility criteria to decisions made related to homeless services pursuant to the Housing Act 1988. MLRC expressed concern at these changes and that the Bill *"may have unintended and wide-reaching harmful consequences for large numbers of households in need of State support, while also potentially operating in breach of EU law, human rights obligations, and potentially Constitutional requirements of fair procedures."*

The Bill was signed into law on 22 July 2026 as the Housing and Residential Tenancies (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2026. MLRC continues to raise concerns in relation to the potential negative impact of such strict residency requirements.

Launch of 2024 Annual Report



In November 2025, MLRC's 2024 Annual Report was launched at the Wisdom Centre, Sophia Housing, by the Chief Justice, Mr Justice Donal O'Donnell. The event brought together supporters, partners and stakeholders from across the legal, housing and community sectors to reflect on another year of unprecedented demand for MLRC's services and the growing challenges facing those experiencing homelessness.

In his address, Mr Justice O'Donnell recognised the vital role played by MLRC in providing access to justice for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, particularly in circumstances where civil legal aid is unavailable. He highlighted the significant increase in demand experienced by MLRC, the growing complexity of the issues faced by its clients, and the importance of compassionate, community-based legal services in responding to social disadvantage and housing insecurity. He also acknowledged the contribution of MLRC's staff, volunteers, pro bono partners and supporters in ensuring that vulnerable individuals and families can access expert legal assistance when they need it most.

The launch was followed by a roundtable discussion on MLRC's casework, chaired by MLRC board member Rebecca Keatinge and featuring MLRC solicitors Erika Hayes, Kate Heffernan, as well as Ciara McGrath from Crosscare and Nicola Stewart from Focus Ireland. Drawing on examples from the year's casework, the discussion explored the realities facing individuals and families navigating homelessness, including unlawful refusals of emergency accommodation, domestic violence, disability, migration-related challenges and the barriers many encounter when seeking housing supports. These themes

echoed the wider findings of the Annual Report, which documented a substantial increase in demand for MLRC's services, rising levels of family homelessness and ongoing concerns regarding access to emergency accommodation and social housing.

A recurring theme throughout the event was the importance of access to justice as a fundamental safeguard against exclusion and inequality. The Chief Justice reflected on the role of law as a tool for protecting rights and ensuring fairness, while also recognising the need for legal assistance to make those rights meaningful in practice. The discussion highlighted the way in which MLRC's casework not only assists individual clients but also helps identify systemic issues requiring policy and legislative reform.

The Chief Justice also quoted Seamus Heaney and his writing of the need to "believe that the further shore is reachable from here", in expressing his view that Mercy Law Resource Centre embodies that belief – through its sustained and compassionate approach, navigating steadily towards that 'further shore', even with the increasing, fast-paced, urgent and highly-responsive nature of its daily work. MLRC is extremely grateful to the Chief Justice for formally launching the report and for his thoughtful reflections. We also extend our sincere thanks to all speakers and attendees whose contributions helped make the event such a valuable and engaging occasion.

Partnership and Collaboration

MLRC recognises that meaningful change is achieved through collective action. Collaboration therefore remains a key element of our work, and we continue to play an active role within Ireland's pro bono and civil society networks. As members of the Home for Good Coalition, the Legal Aid Board External Consultative Panel, the Irish Homeless Policy Working Group, the Independent Law Centres Network, the Children's Rights Alliance, the NGO and Charity Helpline Network, The Wheel and the Charities Institute of Ireland, we contribute to and participate in a range of collaborative initiatives.

Over the course of 2025, we partnered on submissions, policy briefings and events that support our common ambition of advancing rights and improving outcomes for those most affected by homelessness.

Further Contributions by MLRC to Publications, Submissions and Training

- The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's Strategy Statement 2025-2027
- "10 Key Actions on Homelessness for New Government" by the Irish Homeless Policy Group
- Publication of a piece on Family Homelessness in Ireland in UNANIMA International's 3rd volume of their published series of works on "The Hidden Faces of Homelessness: Global Insights and Pathways Forward", at pages 110 to 111.
- Presentation by MLRC solicitor, Erika Hayes at the Oireachtas AV Room Briefing to elected representatives and stakeholders on Migrant Issues – November 2025
- MLRC meeting with the Department of Housing re application of Reg 5(a),(b), (c) of 2011 Regs – November 2025
- Participation by MLRC solicitor, Erika Hayes in CEELI Institute Training in Strategic Litigation (Prague)
- Participation by five members of MRLC team in "Foundations of Trauma-Informed Practice" course, facilitated by the Law Society of Ireland.

MERCY LAW | ANNUAL REPORT 2025

Governance

Mercy Law Resource Centre CLG is registered as:

- An independent law centre with the Law Society of Ireland
- A charity with the Revenue Commissioners (CHY No: 18698) and with the Charities Registration Authority (Charity Registration No: 20072254)
- A company limited by guarantee and not having share capital with the Companies Registration Office (Co. Reg. No: 471072)

MLRC was proud to retain its 'Triple Lock' status from the Charities Institute of Ireland, signifying our commitment to good governance, best practice in fundraising and transparent financial reporting.

MLRC continues to be in full compliance with the requirements of the Q Standard for Independent Law Centres. We are appreciative of the support we get from the LQSI throughout the accreditation process and beyond.

MLRC is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors. The Board of Directors meets with the Managing Solicitor every six to eight weeks. In 2025, MLRC held 5 Board meetings. MLRC has two specialist Board sub-committees that meet between Board meetings: the Finance & Risk Committee and the Policy & Communications Committee. The Finance & Risk Committee comprises at least 2 Board members with expertise in finance and risk matters and met 5 times in 2025. The Policy & Communications Committee comprises 3 Board members and is attended by the MLRC Managing Solicitor and solicitor team.

The Directors of the MLRC Board in 2025 were:

Edward Gleeson – Chairperson since May 2022
Annette O'Donnell – Director since June 2023
Ciara McGrath – Retired September 2025
Conor Roe – Director since September 2025
Helena O'Donoghue – Director since September 2024
Jill Farrelly – Retired September 2025
Liam Twohig – Director since 2011
Rebecca Keatinge – Director since February 2025
Dr Sarah Hamill – Director since September 2023
Tom O'Brien – Director since June 2023

MLRC and the Board wish to sincerely thank Ciara McGrath and Jill Farrelly for their invaluable dedication and service and indeed, to all of our Board members, past and present.

Strategic Plan

In 2024 MLRC introduced its new 2024 – 2029 Strategic Plan. Our Strategic Plan continues to set a clear and ambitious direction for the next four years. It is grounded in our commitment to human rights, dignity and equal access to justice and it sharpens our focus on systemic change, ensuring that our direct legal and advocacy work not only addresses individual needs but also challenges the structural barriers that produce inequality.

Over the next four years we aim to further strengthen our impact in tackling homelessness and associated legal issues.

Charities Governance Code

MLRC is registered with the Charities Regulator and is listed on the Public Register of Charities. The Charities Governance Code is the standard that a community, voluntary or charitable organisation is expected to maintain in order to effectively manage and control its affairs. MLRC operates in compliance with the Governance Code and is committed to ongoing optimisation of procedures and policies.

Finance

MLRC's financial year runs from 1st January to 31st December. The accounts are prepared in accordance with FRS 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland" and "Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice" (the Charities SORP) and are consistent with MLRC's commitment to best practice in financial reporting and accountability.

MLRC are committed to best fundraising practices, promoting high levels of accountability and transparency, and providing clarity and assurances to donors and prospective donors. MLRC adheres to the Charities Regulator's Guidelines for Charitable Organisations on Fundraising from the Public. MLRC also complies with the Charities Institute of Ireland's standards across all relevant areas.

This annual report incorporates the Balance Sheet as an extract from the audited accounts for the years ended 31st December 2025 and 2024 respectively.

Cost of Our Service

MLRC's financial resources are directed towards delivering free, specialist legal advice and representation to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, alongside the policy, training and organisational infrastructure required to support that work. As demand for our services continues to grow, sustainable funding is essential to maintaining our capacity to respond to urgent legal need and to advocate for wider systemic change.

The cost of running MLRC for the financial year 2025 amounted to €503,084, seeing an increase of approx. 9% on the running cost from the previous financial year. MLRC's total income for 2025 was €499,648 which was up by approx. 31% on the comparable period for 2024.

MLRC's 2025 income comprised donations of €252,673, grants of €110,962, legal cost settlement of €115,220 and the remainder derived from delivering training on housing and social welfare law.

The value of our service far exceeds the cost as a result of the many in-kind donations we receive, for example:

- Reduced rent & utilities
- Free conference and reception facilities
- Pro bono legal services by barristers
- Pro bono expert reports from doctors/engineers etc.
- Volunteers & interns

Our Main Costs Include:

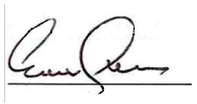
- Payroll and associated employer costs for legal & administration staff
- Office expenses including rent, light & heat; telephone & broadband; postage & courier costs; stationery & office supplies; photocopying & printing; cleaning & maintenance
- Insurance (Professional Indemnity, Employer & Public Liability)
- ICT Expenditure
- Project costs to include:
  - Client outlay
  - Volunteer & Intern Expenses
  - Training
  - Casework Research
  - Policy Research
  - Publication and launch of policy reports & legal resources
  - Training materials

Appendix: Finance Report

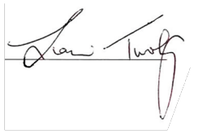
	1st January to 31st December	
	2025	**2024**
Fixed Assets		
Tangible Assets	2,757	1,708
	2,757	**1,708**
Current Assets		
Debtors	5,678	19,403
Cash at bank and in hand	454,665	454,715
	460,343	**474,118**
Current Libilities		
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	(99,401)	(108,691)
Net Current Assets	**360,942**	**365,427**
Total Assets less Current Liabilities	**363,699**	**367,135**
Total Net Assets	**363,699**	**367,135**
Charity Funds		
Restricted Funds	0	0
Unrestricted Funds	**363,699**	**367,135**
Total Funds	**363,699**	**367,135**

** The 2025 & 2024 financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the Companies Act 2014, FRS 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland" and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their financial statements in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102).*

Signed on the Board's behalf by:



Edward Gleeson, Trustee and Chairperson



Liam Twohig,Trustee

Funders

MLRC would like to acknowledge and thank our funders for their generous support in 2025. MLRC's funders are a combination of corporations, philanthropic organisations and individuals.

In particular, we would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the Sisters of Mercy who have substantially supported our legal service from inception, and to our other major donors in 2025.

We are extremely grateful to every organisation and individual who supported our work in 2025, whether through financial or in-kind donations, pro bono services or volunteering.

Our Main Funders in 2025 Included:

- Pobal SSNO
- The Sisters of Mercy
- Religious of Christian Education
- Archdiocese of Dublin
- Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
- Irish Jesuits
- The Presentation Sisters, Monasterevin
- The Daughters of Charity
- The Little Company of Mary Sisters
- The Sisters of Charity
- The Vincentian Fathers
- The Loreto Sisters, Rathfarnham
- Saint Patrick's Cathedral Fund
- Mason Hayes & Curran LLP
- A&L Goodbody LLP
- Community Federation Ireland

Acknowledgments

The value of our services far exceeds the cost because of the large number of donations and pro bono support that we receive. MLRC would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank all those who provide services to us.

Sophia Housing

We are particularly grateful to Sophia housing, who support our service in several ways, including provision of free conference and reception facilities and assisting with maintenance.

Barristers and Pro Bono Support

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the following barristers who provided us with pro bono opinions, drafting and advocacy before the courts and tribunals:

- Alan D.P. Brady SC
- Nuala Egan SC
- Sunniva McDonagh SC
- Helen Callanan SC
- Colin Smith SC
- Cathy Maguire SC
- Eoin Coffey BL
- Sharon Dillon-Lyons BL
- Cillian Bracken BL
- Céile Varley BL
- Seán Beatty BL
- Michael Kinsley BL
- Rachael O'Byrne BL
- Hilary Hogan BL
- Mema Byrne BL
- Kane Kavanagh-Baer BL

We would also like to thank Michael Nolan, and his team at Mason Hayes & Curran for their support in relation to IT upgrades.

Auditor

Thank you to RBK, who audited our Financial Reports.

Annual Report Design

Our thanks to Kieran Nolan at Oldtown Design.

Providing free legal advice and representation
to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

Mercy Law Resource Centre
25 Cork Street, Dublin 8, D08 YD91
Website: www.mercylaw.ie

Phone: 01 453 7459
Email: info@mercylaw.ie
Linkedin: @mercy-law-resource-centre



Mercy Law
Resource Centre