

DISABILITY FEDERATION OF IRELAND

Check against delivery

DFI Pre-Budget Submission Launch 2013

Mansion House, Dublin, 4th October, 2012

John Dolan, Chief Executive Officer, Disability Federation of Ireland

This country is in a very uncomfortable place; there are no easy ways for the Government to reconcile the competing needs facing it. Clearly we must get the economy back on its feet and the fiscal deficit into better order. But those objectives alone will not bring success without simultaneously protecting the integrity of our social system to support disabled people and others.

The potential for collateral damage was graphically illustrated when drastic action was announced to cut the HSE deficit this year. This included a total withdrawal of funding for Personal Assistant (PA) services, effectively closing the service for the rest of the year. This decision was in stark contrast to Government's renewed commitment to the value of community services as set out in the VFM and Policy Review of Disability Services, published only weeks prior to the announcement of these cuts. The human cost of our national recovery programme, and the un- thoughtful decisions now being made by this Government were further highlighted through the protest outside Government Buildings and Leinster House in September

A successful economy depends on a successful society; neither without the other. Yet our 'national recovery programme', in its singled-minded focus on economic targets, is destroying the social basis for a sustainable future. There is an alarming pattern to the recessionary measures taken to date. Successive so-called marginal cuts on social programmes in fact target the members of the population who already are the most marginalised.

What we seek from this Budget is the same as what we sought last year. But things are very different a year on.

- The Budget cut for 2012 is twice what it was last year, from 1.8% to 3.7%,

DISABILITY FEDERATION OF IRELAND

- Government admitted that the cuts for 2012 would cause service reductions,
- We are told that the cut next year and the following year will be at least similar or higher for each of those years,
- Budget 2012 cut income support levels very severely to people under 25 on DA and it seriously lowered the Rehabilitative Training Allowance,
- All the demographic pressures, including school leavers, had to be accommodated in the reduced funding,
- A further €10m cut to PA services in August along with the €12.5m cuts to home supports and home care packages,
- Government has recently and repeatedly stated its commitment to the Croke Park Agreement which not only fixes 85% of the cost of service delivery but it ensures that those costs rise year on year,
- Talk of “Croke Park 2” confirms that upward only pay costs will stay for the next two Budgets,
- Legal Capacity legislation has not been enacted, as promised, which

Government considers as a pre requisite to ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities,

Two weeks ago DFI along with Care Alliance Ireland, CIL Carmichael, Genetic and Rare Disorders Organisation, Inclusion Ireland, Mental Health Reform, National Federation of Voluntary Bodies, Neurological Alliance of Ireland and Not for Profit Business Association issued a Joint Statement. It stated that the on-going cutbacks have undermined the independence of people with disabilities and diminished the supports they need to lead ordinary lives. All of us are working with organisations and people with disabilities on a daily basis and are keenly aware of the human cost of these decisions.

At ground level we see individuals and families losing essential services and the standard of living in disability households plummeting in the face of rising retail prices, the levying of new charges, unemployment and reduced benefits. Behind the front door of many households across Ireland shocking levels of hardship are being endured because these people have no room to maneuver, no choice. For some it is someone

DISABILITY FEDERATION OF IRELAND

confined to their bed for too long or for others a child's behaviour and potential regressing due to the lack of therapeutic supports.

Government is well versed in the value of having plans.

- It is executing one to bring national income and expenditure into line,
- it has one to create jobs,
- it has one to provide for the expanding demographic in education

but no plan that is determined to give the protection or support needed by people with disabilities and mental health needs and to support their families.

I want to briefly return to the decision made to cut PA provision. This decision and the manner in which it was reached, provides us with a worrying insight into the current approach of Government. Firstly, it begs the question as to whether Government has either the will, or capacity, to support community living.

Secondly, it raises the question as to the seriousness of the commitment by the Taoiseach and Tánaiste to make disability and mental health their social justice priority.

Thirdly, it raises serious issues concerning information management and decision making in the Department of Health.

Finally, there is a huge and unenviable responsibility on Government, but as never before, there is a great responsibility on the Opposition also; to both hold Government to account and to assist them to also focus beyond the moment and to consider the medium and long term effects of decisions that are being made today. We must now make social decisions thinking five to ten years ahead if we are to do the right thing for disabled people.

With the continued absence of a Government Plan to implement the National Disability Strategy, the supports and services are being eroded on a daily basis.

END