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Campaign to prevent Kerry disability facility's closure

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Kerry County Council has heard five separate motions calling for the Government not to “decongregate” 76 people, some of whom are profoundly disabled, from a much-loved community facility in Beaufort.



Parents who had met earlier with HSE officials in Tralee attended the meeting of the council.

Jack Fitzpatrick from Cahersiveen, whose son Bernard, 40, has lived in St Mary of the Angels in Beaufort since he was five, said it's not that parents fear community living but they fear community “isolation”. Bernard was to be moved to a house in Milltown, Mr Fitzpatrick was told in September.

He told the meeting he had seen for himself where one person had ended up — a house surrounded by fencing and steel gates which, from the outside, seemed a prison.

“We are not against community living for those who are able to benefit from it.

But for those with severe and profound disability like my son Bernard, community living will not meet their needs,” said Mr Fitzpatrick.

Parents are campaigning to have their loved ones retained in the Beaufort facility and not scattered into houses in towns and villages around Kerry. St Mary of the Angels has specialised hydrotherapy, sensory rooms, and acres of trees and parkland where the residents walk, cycle and can feel safe, the meeting was told.

Cllr Norma Moriarty said that for many people with multiple disabilities “a safe setting and a pooling of resources is necessary”. The council would relinquish all moral authority if it allowed the move to go ahead, she said.

Johnny Healy-Rae said: “There’s a perception by some that this is an institution. This is not an institution — it’s a home. With 5,000 on the waiting list for housing in Kerry, where do they [the HSE] think they will get the houses for them?”

The plan by the HSE to “decongregate” the residents is in accordance with policy, and also arises out of an inspection by Hiqa which found over-crowding. The move was defended by Disabilities Minister Finian McGrath in the Dáil two weeks ago when the matter was raised by two Kerry TDs. The minister, who agreed to visit St Mary of the Angels, said he wanted to end the whole idea of persons with disabilities in large institutions.

The residents would not be moved into the communities without services, he said.

The HSE has previously said it wants to assure families and residents there will be full consultation. Parents want the HSE and the Government to recognise that St Mary of the Angels is not the type of “institution” their policy on decongregation is aimed at and want it excluded from the policy.

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