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# Confusion over long-term plan for centre for disabled people in Kerry

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There is confusion among parents over long-term plans by St John of God's management for a centre for disabled people in Beaufort, Co Kerry.

In radio interviews and in a letter sent to parents on October 13 by St Mary's, its manager Claire O'Dwyer assured parents "St Mary of the Angels is not closing".

However, in response to parliamentary questions posed by Kerry-based TDs Michael Healy-Rae and John Brassil, the minister with responsibility for disabilities Finian McGrath said "the HSE had met with public representatives and were clear in stating that St Mary of the Angels will close over time". Earlier in the same response, he said under HSE policy to move people with disabilities into the community, the HSE "ultimately want to eliminate all congregated settings" after 2021.

There has been outrage among parents at plans by St John of God to rehouse their children, adults with severe to profound intellectual disability, in regular houses in the community.

Families have also questioned if St Mary of the Angels is a "congregated setting" as per the HSE's decongregation policy document. According to the **Time to Move On from Congregated Settings** document, larger congregated settings are "living arrangements where 10 or more people share a single living unit or where the living arrangements are campus-based".

St Fedelis and St Brendan's wards at St Mary of the Angels have fewer than 10 residents, nine and five in each, while the remaining residents all live in chalets.

Triona Fitzpatrick said to not allow her brother Brendan to live on a campus

was discrimination. “So if Brendan isn’t truly living in a unit with 10 or more people that just leaves ‘campus-based’ arrangements. Yes, St Mary’s is on a beautiful campus. So are colleges, where students live on campus. So are lots of homes for the elderly. Are they saying that campus-based living is fine for everyone except those with disabilities? At best that’s a contradiction, at worst it’s discrimination.”

However, St John of Gods, says the St Mary of the Angel wards are “not up to HIQA standards” and offer “inappropriate accommodation” for some residents who lack privacy. It said in a statement that ‘decongregation’, a stated HSE policy nationwide, “would only be done if it improved the life of the individual”.

Last week, it emerged that the names of some of the St Mary of the Angel residents are on a Co Kerry housing list without their relatives being informed.