

HSE cuts will hit Beaufort and Kerry Parents and Friends

€220,000 disability cuts in Kerry



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CANDIDATES FROM all parties have attacked plans by the HSE to slash €220,000 in funding to two vital disability services in Kerry.

BY AIDAN O'CONNOR

Last week, the HSE advised disability services that a 0.7% cut in funding was being applied as a national cost-saving measure.

The cuts mean a loss of €160,000 in funding to St Mary of the Angels, the home to over 70 high-dependency residents in Beaufort and run by the St John of God services.

A further €60,000 would be cut

from Kerry Parents and Friends Association which cares for 270 people with special needs across Kerry.

According to both service providers, the plans would inevitably lead to a cut in wages or cuts to vital day-to-day services.

Parents of adults and children using both services are furious over the plans, accusing the HSE and the Government of attacking the most vulnerable people in society - many of them with no

voice of their own.

The cuts have now become an election issue in Kerry with condemnation coming from candidates of all parties and none.

On Monday, several candidates attended a meeting with parents of residents and management at St Mary of the Angels in Beaufort.

Jack Fitzpatrick - whose son Bernard lives at St Mary of the Angels - said candidates were left in no doubt about the anger the cuts have caused and what needs to be done now.

"We had a good number of the election candidates at the meeting and they are committed to fighting these cuts," Mr Fitzpatrick said.

"This is not the first time we have been forced to fight for the future of St Mary of the Angels. We need the Government and the HSE to understand that disability is not a sickness and the budget has to be taken out of the health

service."

Fianna Fáil TD John Brassil described the cuts as 'petty and small-minded'. He has written to senior HSE officials and demanded an immediate meeting.

"I have been speaking with the families who will be impacted by these cuts and they are furious. They are already running vital services on a shoestring and these cuts are simply not fair. Fianna Fáil have given a commitment to reverse these cuts and to properly fund disability services in Kerry adding a further 20 million euro to the national budget," he said.

Jack Fitzpatrick conceded that with the General Election just two weeks away, it's likely any reversal of the cuts will come about until after a new government is formed.

In 2016, parents of residents living at St Mary of the Angels were forced to launch a huge survival campaign after St John of Gods -

who run the facility in Beaufort - claimed that HSE policy was forcing them to move residents out into the community.

Since 2011, HSE policy has been to move people with intellectual disabilities out of 'congregated settings' to 'community settings'.

The plan for St Mary of the Angels was to move every resident out into the community, into 24 houses and four apartments scattered across the county.

Family members were - and still are - terrified about such a move and what it would mean for their loved ones. Many of the residents have made Beaufort their home for over 30 years and some of them have severe physical and intellectual disability.

Their campaign was successful with HSE agreeing not to force any resident into the community without consent of the resident and consultation with their family.