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Sinn Féin call on Minister to meet with families and exempt St Mary of the Angels from national policy

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Killorglin-based Sinn Féin County Councillor Damian Quigg and party colleague TD Martin Ferris are calling on the HSE to make an exception of St Mary of the Angels under the national policy to relocate people with intellectual disabilities from residential centres into 'community settings', ie homes scattered throughout the county.

Sinn Féin's stance on the issue has been among the most forceful of any Kerry representatives so far as they back parents fully in their calls to leave loved ones in the only home they have known.

Families were left reeling by the surprise announcement little

over a fortnight ago when it was communicated to them by St Mary of the Angels management in what was a routine meeting on residents' welfare.

St John of God CEO Clare Dempsey informed The Kerryman this week that St Mary of the Angels is not to close, but also insisted the charity is committed to moving residents into community care homes.

Cllr Quigg echoed the deep concerns of the families he met with party colleague Martin Ferris this week over the shock relocation plans.

"It's deeply unfair to residents and their families," Cllr Quigg said.

"Martin Ferris and I are hoping to table a question in the Dáil on it shortly...people have been resident there from a young age and it would be deeply unfair to suddenly evict them.

"The HSE and St John of Gods is talking about it being 'time to move on' from congregated settings into community ones, but from what I've seen of St Mary's on visits there it is a community, with nine or ten people in one building and everyone else in bungalows on campus.

"They have hydrotherapy facilities and other important services nearby and they already come and go regularly into the community in Killorglin," Cllr Quigg said.

If families are to succeed in securing permanency for their loved ones in St Mary's the centre will have to be exempted from the national 'decongregation' policy for residential centres for people with intellectual disabilities, he said.

"We're now calling on the HSE to exempt St Mary's from national policy because of this."

Cllr Quigg said Minister for Disabilities Finian McGrath - who is backing the policy of 'decongregation' - should meet with St Mary of the Angels' families on their concerns.

Fianna Fáil TD John Brassil has called on the HSE to clarify its proposals for residents of St Mary's and to ensure that 'no one will be involuntarily moved out.'

"There is some concern among the families of residents that they will be moved to a new community-based setting without any fore-warning or consultation," Deputy Brassil said last

week.

"I would hope that the HSE would see the flaws in attempting such a move, and would liaise thoroughly with the residents and their families to determine the best possible plan.

"This issue has arisen because HIQA have rightly decided that all HSE facilities need to meet higher standards, and if they cannot, residents must be located to other settings."

"We need to be very careful about how we deal with vulnerable people. We cannot rush them, as many have been living in these settings for many years, sometimes for all of their adult lives," he added.

Other Kerry politicians have been less vocal on the matter with John Brassil the only TD to release a statement on St Mary's. The Kerryman attempted to contact Independent deputies Michael Healy Rae and Danny Healy Rae as well as Fine Gael TD Brendan Griffin but was unable to get a comment by time of press.

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