

To:

Minister for Justice and Equality, Charles Flanagan

CC:

Minister for Disability Issues, Finian McGrath;

Councillor, Jennifer Carroll McNeill;

Senator, Lynn Ruane;

National Platform of Self-Advocates.

Re:

Closure of the National Platform of Self-Advocates

Date:

06.12.2019

Dear Minister,

My name is Des Aston and I am the National and Schools Coordinator located in Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities, School of Education, Trinity College Dublin. Additionally, I am the current chairperson of the Inclusive National Higher Education Forum [INHEF] which is a national interest group comprised of representatives of higher education providers and diverse stakeholders interested in supporting access routes and inclusive education initiatives to students with intellectual disabilities in Ireland.

I am writing to you, to voice my concerns regarding the closure of the National Platform of Self-Advocates, a national organisation run by people with intellectual disabilities, for people with intellectual disabilities. It is currently the only Disabled Persons Organisation (DPO) for people with intellectual disabilities in Ireland. The organisation was set up to make sure that the voices of people with intellectual disabilities are heard at all levels of policy and practice. Under the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), groups such as the National Platform are essential to the implementation of the UNCRPD in Ireland.

Article 29 of the UNCRPD states:

“To promote actively an environment in which persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in the conduct of public affairs, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others, and encourage their participation in public affairs, including: Forming and joining organizations of persons with disabilities to represent persons with disabilities at international, national, regional and local levels”.

The National Platform have been delivering high quality advocacy on behalf of their members since 2011 through public consultations, research projects, training practitioners around the Assisted Decision-Making Act, campaigned for rights to housing, homelessness supports, & employment for people with disabilities, and more.

Despite their many successes over the past eight years, the National Platform have been forced to cease operations as there are no sustainable funding streams available for them to access. The work that the National Platform have the ability to do, is unique and complements government policy initiatives. Furthermore, the organisational infrastructure for such a successful DPO is already in place – if action is not taken to support the National Platform to continue operating, it will be extremely difficult, not to mention costly, to re-establish a new DPO after this infrastructure, knowledge and skills of the individuals involved have been lost.

For far too long, people with intellectual disabilities have been absent from contributing toward important conversations and debates on matters that relate to them, directly. They have historically been silenced within society and often spoken for, by “experts”. The National Platform gave their members hope that they would be heard. It gave them a voice when it came to important issues such as education, employment, housing, human rights and relationships. With this sad news of the closure of the National Platform, I worry that we as a nation are failing, as we silence the voices of people with intellectual disabilities once more. We must do more for this population to ensure they can play an active role in all aspects of society. Without the good work of the National Platform, their manifesto falls on deaf ears.

Yours Sincerely,



Mr Des Aston

INHEF, Chairperson