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Kelleher: Dept of Health ringfence claim “strikes fear into me”

He made the comment while questioning Minister Kathleen Lynch on the axing of the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant.

MINISTER OF STATE Kathleen Lynch was questioned this afternoon on last night’s decision to axe the mobility allowance and motorised transport grant and replace them with an as-yet-undecided alternative.

During topical issues in the Dáil, Deputies Billy Kelleher and Caomhghín Ó Caoláin both questioned the Minister on the decision, with Ó Caoláin saying he believed “the only conclusion to be drawn is this is another cutback by another name”.

Kelleher said:

When I hear the Department of Health saying they will ringfence funding, you know, it strikes fear into me. Because last year we were given a commitment that mental health funding was ringfenced and it wasn’t, it was snaffled and put into the budget

Kelleher added:

If the best brains in the Department of Health couldn’t come up with it in two years, you are now asking an independent review to come up with a solution in four months.

What should have happened was the scheme should have been allowed to continue for time being, and an independent review group would have been set up to come up with the solutions to the problems...

It’s a heartless cut, Minister.

Lynch said the issue should have been dealt with long ago.

Disappointed

Seán Moynihan, CEO of ALONE, said they are “hugely disappointed” and they are demanding that the new scheme to be put in place will allow equal access to all sectors of society where a need has been assessed.

A figure of between €170 – €300million has been quoted in order to allow access to the scheme to over 65s. We're unclear as to how these figures were arrived at, as this would equate to approximately 100,000 older people applying for the scheme, which we completely reject. We work with hundreds of older people on a daily basis and are aware of only two or three people in receipt of this allowance.

Concluding, he commented: "What we're hearing is that there is a slightly ageist agenda, and we're calling on government to allow all those who are assessed as having a need, no matter what age, to have access to the scheme."

Fianna Fáil Spokesperson on Social Protection, Willie O'Dea TD, says the news is "another slap in the face for the most vulnerable".

The Center for Independent Living said it is appalled at the announcement. Michael McCabe, chairperson of Center for Independent Living, described it as "an absolutely outrageous attack on the rights of people with disabilities and flies in the face of the National Disability Strategy".

He said that "instead of accommodating the inclusion of people with disabilities in the community this will lead to greater exclusion and isolation especially for those living in rural areas".

<http://www.thejournal.ie/mobility-allowance-transport-grant-812591-Feb2013/>