

Physical Impairment Ireland (PII)

Cathaoirleach, thank you and your Committee for allowing me to make my contribution and that of my Disabled Persons Organisation (DPO) Physical Impairment Ireland (PII) to today's Joint Committee on Disability Matters meeting titled 'Implementation of the UNCRPD'. This opportunity has been a long time coming for me, therefore, pardon me if I sound a little emotional at present.

My name is Leo Kavanagh and I am the National Secretary of Physical Impairment Ireland (PII). I am a 55-year-old citizen of this State with physical impairments from Co. Laois.

Physical Impairment Ireland is a national voluntary Disabled Persons Organisation (DPO) founded on Monday, 29th March 2021 by physically disabled people, family members, carers and advocates of persons with physical impairments from a number of different counties.

Our Disabled Persons Organisation is made up of members with differing Physical Impairments including people with Congenital Disabilities like myself, disabilities that exist at birth or shortly thereafter, Amputees or persons possibly awaiting amputations due to accidents, illnesses or disability and Wheelchair Users mostly again following accidents, illnesses or disability.

In Physical Impairment Ireland's (PII) opinion a Disabled Persons Organisation is one that is managed, regulated and guided by people with disabilities, our families, carers and advocates. It must be open to everyone in its particular constituency as required by General Comment 7, para. 11 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The members of PII have agreed that a clear majority of our DPO must have a physical impairment.

Following legal opinion sought, Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) are the only representative organisations in relation to disability matters, General Comment 7, para. 10 of the UNCRPD and I would like to remind this Committee that DPOs are at 'the heart' of the Convention, (General Comment 7, para. 1).

One of the main aims of our national Disabled Persons Organisation (DPO) Physical Impairment Ireland (PII) is to engage with our Government in relation to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in addressing all human rights issues faced by Physically Impaired people and their families or carers. Furthermore, one of our objectives is the full implementation of all aspects of the UNCRPD in our State without any further delay.

The members of Physical Impairment Ireland (PII) see the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is an agreement in relation to the human rights of all people with disabilities but also their families or carers.

The Irish Government signed the Convention in March 2007, however, it only signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) eleven years after in March 2018. Ireland was the last country in the European Union to do so. In doing so the State has agreed to 'stick' to what it has agreed to under the UNCRPD.

A citizen of this State may make an individual complaint to the United Nations under the UNCRPD's Optional Protocol. Our Government strangely decided not to ratify the Optional

Protocol until 2020 when it was due to make its first report to the United Nations. The State's report was finally published on the 10th November 2021 much to the annoyance of many people with disabilities. To 'rub salt into the wound' the Optional Protocol has still to be ratified almost four years after the UNCRPD was finally ratified by the Houses of the Oireachtas.

In the opinion of PII this State must ensure that people with disabilities can access and exercise all the rights listed in the UNCRPD.

This Government and public organisations must now work alongside people with disabilities so that we can use transport and access buildings, matters that usually do not concern able-bodied people.

They must produce information in was people with disabilities can use and understand it.

This State must make sure people with disabilities have an adequate standard of living and enough money to live on especially in this current economic climate.

People with disabilities must have a choice where the live.

This Government must organise a register of all Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) as required under General Comment 7, para. 61 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in conjunction with people with impairments without any further delay.

The State must provide core official funding for all Disabled Persons Organisations and must offer all possible supports to allow all Disabled Persons Organisations to develop and flourish.

Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) in 2022 have to be prioritised, distinguished, and involved in the design development process in relation to all the States' policies and plans to confirm that they are 'disability proofed'. The must be done solely by people with disabilities, the families or carers.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Irish State must highlight, prioritise and distinguish all Disabled Persons Organisations in all consultations related to disability and to closely consult with and involve people with disabilities in all processes as per Article 4 (3) and General Comment 7, para. 13 of the UNCRPD

Physical Impairment Ireland (PII) the national Disabled Persons Organisation of which I am proud to call myself a co-founder met last Monday night, as we have for over the past year.

My physically impaired friends and colleagues have requested that I respectfully inform this important Committee that a person who requires a made to measure wheelchair should not have to wait six months for it.

People with mobility issues that require an ordinary wheelchair should not have to wait six weeks before receiving one from the HSE.

Medical cards should be made available to all people with disabilities and they should not 'lose' them if they take up either part-time or full-time employment.

Furthermore, the difficulties accessing health services and supports for people with physical impairments is becoming 'a nightmare'.

The cost of prosthetic limbs has increased by 30% since Brexit and the cost of a silicone sock used by amputees is now about one thousand euro in some cases. That equates to five weeks Invalidity Pension in this country, just reflect on that for a few seconds. These silicone socks protect the skin, absorb perspiration from a residual limb, absorb friction, cushion impact, compensate for the shrinkage or swelling of the residual limb and provide a way to adjust to fit the socket. Ladies and gentlemen, these 'socks' are not a fashion statement, they are a necessity.

The tendering process for mobility aids and supports like artificial limbs or devices like wheelchairs must be looked at immediately. Since Brexit the prices of limbs and wheelchairs have 'skyrocketed' and many people with physical impairment cannot afford them, however, they cannot afford to be without them most certainly. Markets for them will have to be sought in mainland Europe.

Our voluntary Disabled Person Organisation often discuss the lack of access to employment for people with physical disabilities. In many cases in 2022 our well educated members still fail interviews due to a visible disability, that ladies and gentlemen is just fact. When a person with a visible disability asks for feedback as to why they were unsuccessful prospective employers still refuse to engage unfortunately.

For many people with physical disabilities there are barriers to participation in the political life of this country, there must be sufficient supports for people with physical impairments trying to enter politics. The lack of people with disabilities in both national and local politics is staggering. Perhaps the Government and members of this Committee need to start seriously looking at a 'quota system' for people with disabilities to encourage them to enter politics as there is a serious underrepresentation of people with a living experience of disabilities in the political and decision-making roles in this country.

Ladies and gentlemen, Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) are too often discounted and at best our expertise in having 'a living experience' as people with disabilities is overlooked. In 2022, based on the findings of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) you have the power to make a significant change to the lives of over a quarter of a million people in this country. Please use the power bestowed upon you wisely.

Go raibh maith agaibh go léir.