

Cathaoirleach, members of the Committee.

Dia dhíbh agus go raibh maith agaibh as cuireadh a thabairt dom leart os cor tithe an Oireachteas . Is mise Éanna Ó Ceallaigh agus tá mé 13 bliana d'aois agus líofa sa ghealige , chail mé mó chois deas nuair a raibh mé dhá bhliain d'aois ó galar meningitis. Inniu bé mé ag leart faoi dínit an duine agus cearta sna seirbhísí poiblí.

Hello, name is Éanna Kelly, I am 13 years old and I lost part of my right leg from meningitis when I was two years old. I am self-advocating for kids with lower limb amputations. I love my language, fairness and equality. It is relating to fairness and equality regarding human rights and dignity that I want to speak to you today.

Following my amputation, the state provided the first leg but after this, I kept getting refused a medical card to allow me to get more legs. My parents were means tested for the medical card and refused, it took a while before a medical card was given to me based on my condition and then it was only for two years. After two years my parents had to re-apply and go through a means test only to be refused again. This is a very stressful and intensive application process and even the renewal letter asked if my condition changed.

My experience is that prosthetic legs are built to a budget rather than for comfort or function for a person. The impact is that you are denied parts that are useful or can help the leg function better.

More importantly, the budget means you are only allowed one leg at a time. Kids like me want more than one leg because one does not cover all activities we want to do. I have to settle on a best "all-rounder" to meet most of my needs. The impact of settling is I am held back. How I compete in sports, how I manage at school and at home is determined by a HSE budget. My choice is taken from me.

I have represented Ireland at European games for Amputee Football 6 times now and I see how kids from other countries have legs for sport in addition to their day to day walking leg. Ireland is the only country at these games where this is not standard for its kids.

I asked my Prosthetists how long it takes to build a leg and he said it takes a week if they continuously work on it, but in reality it takes months. The biggest part of the delay is sanctioning from the HSE. I am growing and changing shape which often means my leg doesn't fit after a few months and my Prosthetists are always left to patch up my leg to get a longer life out of it. The impact often is injury, my leg get cuts and sores which then leaves me unable to walk, all because the priority is budget over a functioning leg.

My school is not equipped to handle my leg not being useable. There are no crutches or wheelchairs available. This has happened and I am left to crawl on hands and knees to get about school. I could hop, but try that with a school bag and busy corridors not to mind health and safety regulations.

These are my recommendations:

1. I think that amputees should not be means tested for a medical card, ever. Please stop asking if our condition has changed.
2. Amputees should be allowed more than one leg at a time depending on needs and function. Some may need an additional leg or parts and some may not. It is individual and depends on the needs of the person at that time.
3. Schools and should be equipped to manage situations where an amputee student has a leg that is not usable.
4. Prosthetics should not take so long to be sanctioned. We are not being a burden on a budget, we want to grow to be contributing members of society and pay back more than we take.

When I have a leg I get to walk. I know this is a privilege as many people cannot get to walk. I have spoken a lot of talk about legs, different types of legs and about budgets but I need you all to realise that attached to the prosthetic is an actual person. This person has freedoms, choices and rights the same as anyone else but this is overlooked in all I have spoken about so far. Four years ago I was mentioned in name, here, in the Oireachtas about these issues and, despite intentions there has been no progress. Is everyone who makes policy waiting to see if my condition changes?

Go raibh maith agaibh as ag éisteacht liom faoin ábhar seo agus as an gcuireadh leart os coir tithe an Oireachtas .