
DÁIL ÉIREANN

Draft/Motion re: drugs policy

That Dáil Éireann –

notes that:

- during the past 25 years of a law-enforcement approach to drug abuse, drug-related deaths have increased by 225% (compared to a 68% reduction in road deaths in the same period), with the total number of such deaths well exceeding 10,500,
- Ireland now has the joint-highest rate of drug-induced deaths among 16- to 64-year-olds in the European Union,
- the number of people prosecuted for possession for personal use has increased over that period by 484%, with more than quarter of a million convictions recorded for that offence,
- in the same period there has been a substantial overall increase in drug use, with use of cocaine rising by 10,376%, benzodiazepines by 1,824% and cannabis by 263%,
- drug abuse and its harmful effects, including crimes of violence, intimidation and extortion aimed at addicts, their families and their communities, are no longer urban phenomena and are spread across the State,
- despite enabling legislation in 2017, followed by HSE procurement and the selection of a preferred operator to run the State’s first medically supervised injecting facility in Dublin City Centre, this urgent initiative is still stalled,
- although in 2019 the Government announced a health diversion programme, involving mandatory referrals to the HSE, the programme applies only to adults caught in possession for the first time, and progress on the implementation of this very limited initiative is acknowledged as “slow” in the mid-term review of the National Drugs Strategy,
- there is no firm commitment to further progress on drugs treatment courts, to assist offenders with drug-related problems,
- despite the significant number of people who abuse drugs and suffer from a mental health disorder, our mental health services and addiction treatment centres are still not organised to treat holistically people with a dual diagnosis,
- the Programme for Government committed the parties in government to convening a citizens’ assembly on drugs but, despite the Taoiseach’s stated intention to do so in “the

latter part of this year”, there is so far no indication as to whether or when it will be held,

agrees that:

- overall, there has been a lack of visibility at Minister or Minister of State level, a lack of joined up thinking between Ministers and Departments, and a lack of focus, energy and urgency in spearheading the State’s response to drugs,
- the policy of criminalisation has failed, nationally and internationally, the resources of the State are wasted on inappropriately processing medical addiction cases through the courts and prisons, and a health-led and patient-focussed alternative is needed,
- the previous international consensus in the West on a law-enforcement approach to drugs is now collapsing, and over 30 countries have decriminalised drug possession for personal use in some form,
- the worst harms of a criminalisation policy are experienced by people who are already disadvantaged and marginalised, and a reformed approach must operate in the context of strategies to combat poverty and marginalisation,
- a health-led alternative response would target the adverse health, social and economic consequences of drug use and would provide harm reduction services to address disease transmission and overdoses,
- the 2001 Portuguese initiative of decriminalising possession of drugs and introducing a health diversion scheme, with a resulting significant decline in drug deaths in Portugal while they continue to rise across the EU, merits particular study,

calls for:

- a firm date to be fixed for convening the citizens’ assembly on drugs, with the assembly requested by its terms of reference –
 - to make central to its deliberations the lived experience of individuals, families and communities who have directly experienced the impact of drug abuse, so that harm reduction and recovery strategies are developed in collaboration with those most directly affected,
 - to ensure that, while it may legitimately join with other EU countries in considering whether to legalise possession of cannabis for personal use, this question does not distract from the separate and urgent debate about changes in policy and approach needed in order effectively to promote the rehabilitation and recovery of persons addicted to harmful drugs,
 - specifically to consider a policy that continues to tackle organised crime gangs involved in drug trafficking and dealing but offers a non-criminal and comprehensive public health treatment, rehabilitation and recovery alternative for persons in possession of drugs for personal use,

- emergency amending legislation to facilitate mobile supervised injection facilities, for both urban and regional sites,
- a significant increase in funding Drug Task Forces and the conferring of an added educational remit, in liaison with schools and in community settings,
- the expansion of the work of CAB to target and seize smaller assets in local communities. – *Aodhán Ó Ríordáin, Ivan Bacik, Brendan Howlin, Alan Kelly, Ged Nash, Séan Sherlock, Duncan Smith.*