

## [Sample letter to local TDs]

[Insert your own  
address]

Name  
Address  
Address  
Address

[Insert date]

Dear Deputy [insert name],

I am from your constituency and I am writing to express my concern that the human rights framework for implementing Ireland's new mental health policy, *A Vision for Change*, published in January 2006, is not yet in place.

As you know, the first-named core value/principle in the national mental health policy framework, *A Vision for Change*, to guide all service planning and delivery, is:

"Citizenship: The individual is at the centre of the mental health system. The human rights of individuals with mental health problems must be respected at all times ..."

Further details on human rights are in Annex 1.2 of *A Vision for Change*, which states that mental health policies and strategies should promote human rights principles including:

- the right to equality and non-discrimination
- the right to privacy and autonomy
- the right to physical and mental integrity
- the right to participation
- the right to reciprocity
- the right to information
- the right to the least restrictive alternative
- the right to live and work in one's own community as far as possible
- the right to freedom of association
- the right to proportionality in all restrictions imposed on rights
- the right to freedom from inhumane and degrading treatment
- the right to respect for family life
- the right to education
- the right to procedural safeguards and accountability mechanisms

*A Vision for Change* advises: "The realisation of many of these human rights in mental health care requires that these principles should be embedded in legal and policy documents." Yet the HSE National Service Plan 2008, the HSE Implementation Plan published in January 2008 for the mental health services components of *A Vision for Change*, and your Department's *Statement of Strategy 2008 - 2010* do not reference human rights. *A Vision for Change* also advises: "Mental health legislation is essential to underpin the right to respect for the dignity of individuals and the protection of their human rights." This is also the approach advised by the World Health Organisation in its *Mental Health Policy and Service Guidance Package*.

I would be grateful for an answer to the following questions:

- While the Mental Health Act 2001 contains some safeguards for the rights of people involuntarily admitted or detained in in-patient facilities, does the Department of Health and Children plan to publish legislation setting out how the dignity of individuals and the protection of their human rights will be safeguarded in planning and delivering all mental health services, as suggested in *A Vision for Change*? If not, why not?
- What actions has the Department of Health and Children taken to ensure that people responsible for planning and delivering mental health services are familiar with the rights and responsibilities that flow from human rights standards in order that the core values in *A Vision for Change* are to be made meaningful?

I am calling on you to discuss this issue with your party colleagues and raise it with Mary Harney TD, the Minister for Health and Children, and with Prof Brendan Drumm, Chief Executive of the Health Service Executive.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

**[Insert your name]**