

[Sample letter to Dermot Ahern T.D. Minister for Justice]

**[Insert your own
address]**

Mr Dermot Ahern T.D.
Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform
94 St. Stephens Green
Dublin 2

[Insert date]

Dear Mr Ahern,

I am writing to express my concern about the proposed relocation of the Central Mental Hospital facility to a site beside the new prison site at Thornton Hall in North Dublin. **[If wrote/called previously on this, refer to previous letter/call.]**

The Central Mental Hospital was established in 1850 and was the first secure hospital in Europe providing care and treatment for people with mental disorders with offending behaviour. At that time, following much discussion, it was decided not to co-locate the hospital with a prison, in recognition of the distinction between illness and criminality. In the light of such an enlightened decision, it is ironic that, one hundred and fifty years later, we are witnessing a Government decision of co-location.

This week (May 27th), Schizophrenia Ireland and the Central Mental Hospital Carers' Group will publish a report called '*Patients Not Prisoners*' outlining the groundswell of concerns regarding the proposed relocation. The report summarises expert presentations and discussions at a Round Table Meeting on 30th January 2008 to discuss the Government's decision. Dr. Paul Mullen, Professor of Forensic Psychiatry at Monash University, Australia and Clinical Director of the Victorian Institute of Forensic Mental Health, made a presentation drawing on lessons learned from his extensive international experience in running secure forensic psychiatric hospitals. He gave compelling arguments how co-location would be therapeutic worst practice. Mr. Jim Power, Chief Economist with Friends First, presented an analysis of the economics of the proposed move and presented a viable alternative, i.e. redevelopment of the existing site in Dundrum.

The conclusion from the proceedings was that the move to Thornton Hall represented the worst-case scenario and that the Government should take this opportunity to reverse its decision and use its assets and the willing expertise at its disposal to establish an internationally exemplary model. A joint declaration was subsequently signed by a large number of organisations asking Government to reverse this decision. I wish to add my voice to this call.

People who have not committed a crime have a right to be free from stigma and discrimination. Placing them in a facility beside a prison can only lead to greater stigmatisation of mental illness. But, as this report outlines, it also makes no economic or therapeutic sense. It runs counter to the values set out in the national policy framework for mental health, *A Vision for Change*. The Mental Health Commission and Human Rights Commission have also voiced their opposition to this decision. Perhaps most importantly, so too have the families and carers of current Central Mental Hospital residents.

[Insert specific concerns in your own community about people ending up in the criminal justice system rather than begin referred to mental health services, or use your experience as an example of your concern, related to the monthly question(s)]

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

What is your position on the Government proposal to develop a new Central Mental Hospital beside the new prison site?

If you agree that the rights of people with mental ill health matter, what will you do to ensure that the Government pursues other options for the redevelopment of the Central Mental Hospital?

I am calling on you to discuss this issue with your party colleagues and raise it with Ms Mary Harney TD, the Minister for Health and Children, and with Mr John Moloney, Minister for State with responsibility for Equality, Disability and Mental Health.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[Insert your name]