

**[Sample letter to Michael McDowell TD, the Minister
for Justice, Equality and Law Reform]**

**[Insert your own
address]**

Michael McDowell,
Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform,
94 St. Stephens Green,
Dublin 2.

[Insert date]

Dear Mr McDowell,

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.

Patients with mental health difficulties 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 health problems.

Prisoners with mental health problems also have a right to be treated with dignity and respect.

[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)]

The Mental Health Commission has objected to the location of the Central Mental Hospital at Thornton Hall prison site. So too have organisations like Schizophrenia Ireland and Amnesty International as well as the families and carers of current Central Mental Hospital residents.

The Government-appointed human rights watchdog, the Human Rights Commission, has also said that it is "**gravely concerned**" at this "**highly inappropriate**" proposal. **Why then is the Irish Government ruthlessly pursuing this plan? It has to be assumed that administrative convenience is considered more**

important than the rights and lives of the Central Mental Hospital residents and their families.

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

1. What is your position on the Government proposal to develop a new Central Mental Hospital beside the new Mountjoy Prison site?
2. If you agree that the rights of people with mental health problems matter, what will you do to ensure that the Government pursues other options for the redevelopment of the Central Mental Hospital?

In January 2006, the Irish Government committed itself to a new national policy framework for mental health, *A Vision for Change*. The first principle of this policy is:

“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...”

I urge you to ensure that the Thornton Hall proposal is abandoned in favour of one that respects human rights.

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.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[Insert your name]