

Citywide Drugs Crisis Campaign urges public to show support for decriminalisation of possession of drugs for personal use

Possession of drugs for personal use made up 72% of all 2017 drugs offences and ties up valuable resources that could be used to tackle criminal gangs

Citywide Drugs Crisis Campaign will today urge members of the public to show their support for the decriminalisation of people in possession of drugs for personal use by making submissions to the Department of Health's Working Group on Alternative Approaches to possession of drugs for personal use. Due to unprecedented interest from the public, with over 14,000 submissions received to date, the Department of Health has announced an extension of the deadline from 30th June to 13th July for receipt of submissions to the Working Group.

The call for the public to show its support for the decriminalisation of possession of drugs for personal use will be made at a press conference in Dublin's Buswell's Hotel (at 10.00 am). The event will include speakers such as Fr Peter McVerry, Senators Aodhán Ó Ríordáin and Lynn Ruane, journalist Anne Buckley, who made TV documentary My War on Drugs, Gerard Rowe, youth worker with Belong To Drug and Alcohol Service and Ana Liffey Drug Project's Marcus Keane, all of whom will outline their reasons for supporting a change in the law. Also at the event, CityWide will launch a leaflet setting out answers to the most Frequently Asked Questions on the decriminalisation of drug use.

Anna Quigley, CityWide's Coordinator, will explain that recently released figures show that in 2017 there were 12,211 recorded offences for possession of drugs for personal use in Ireland.

"This figure represents 72% of all drugs offences for that year. Significant state resources are tied up in dealing with such offences including police time, legal fees, court time and that of the DPP's Office. Most people would agree that this money and time could be put to better use in providing health and social services to those using drugs and in following up serious criminal gangs who are engaging in violence and intimidation."

"A change in the law will also be a step in reducing the criminalisation and stigmatisation of our most disadvantaged communities and addressing the serious economic and social issues that lead to the devastating impact of drug use and the drugs trade."

Given this context, Anna Quigley will say that CityWide are delighted to see how much the public is engaging with the issue of how as a society we best address the issue of drug use,"

"We all know people – family members, friends, neighbours, workmates – who are using drugs and this consultation process presents us with a choice of continuing to treat them as criminals or instead looking at drug use as a health and social issue that should not be addressed through the criminal law.

“The evidence shows that our current approach of criminalising people for possession of drugs does not reduce the overall levels of drug use in society, but what it does do is increase the difficulties and challenges for a person who is trying to address his/her drug use. The Government recognises the evidence that the health and social outcomes for individuals who use drugs are improved by addressing them through the health system rather than the criminal justice system and has committed to a health-led approach in delivering the National Drugs Strategy 2017-2025.”

Anna Quigley will say that in CityWide’s experience of debating the issue in their communities over the last few years, the vast majority of objections to decriminalisation arise as a result of confusing it with legalisation.

“What decriminalisation means is that a person found in possession of drugs for personal use will no longer be treated as a criminal or given a criminal conviction and will instead be referred to health and social services. This is not the same as legalisation, as the drugs trade remains illegal and subject to all of the criminal laws that currently apply and no drug that is currently illegal will be made legal,” Anna Quigley will conclude.

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