

2020.01.21

16 The Deputy of St. Martin of the Minister for Children and Housing regarding the access by disabled children to wheelchair-accessible vehicles: (OQ.2/2020)

Is it the Minister's assessment that families with disabled children have adequate access to wheelchair-accessible vehicles; and, if not, what measures will he take to address this?

Senator S.Y. Mézec (The Minister for Children and Housing):

The honest answer to that is that this matter has not come to my attention as Minister and I have not had members of the public raise this with me as being an issue at the moment. I am not entirely sure I understand exactly what context the Deputy is coming from when talking about access. But since he has raised the issue I am more than happy to hear from him if he believes there is a particular issue or if he has spoken to members of the public and I will instruct my officers to explore it in greater depth, depending on what the issue may well be.

2.16.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

It has come to my attention that families with disabled children are turning up at hospital in vehicles which are not suitably adapted, or worse still not turning up at all because they do not have access to vehicles with which to transport their children. Can I just ask the Minister, I am happy to speak to him afterwards, but would he speak with the Minister for Social Security and the Minister for Health and Social Services to see what can be done about this, because I am aware that in the past charities provided these sort of vehicles but they are becoming increasingly expensive and charities are struggling to meet the considerable expense for the single vehicles.

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

I thank the Deputy for raising that and it is the case that those families would work with their occupational therapists to find solutions and things that would fit in with their particular needs in life and going to charities would have been one option. There is support that comes from the Social Security Department that could also have been used for this. If it is the case that what he said about people travelling in circumstances, which is clearly inappropriate and ending up in a situation where health appointments are being missed, which is clearly wrong, then I would consider that to be a problem and would absolutely want to speak to the Minister for Health and Social Services and Minister for Social Security to see if a better arrangement can be found for those children.

2.16.2 Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Children with disabilities become adults. Will the Minister ensure that it is not left to charities alone to supply wheelchair accessible vehicles to them?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

If that is to be the case then that would have to be done in consultation with the Minister for Social Security and with the Minister for Health and Social Services. As things stand, access to vehicles is a self-funded issue in that some families will be able to afford it because they can and some families will have to have support from Social Security to be able to afford it. Up until now, I have not had that raised as an issue with me, but if it is an issue then clearly a discussion has to be had to find the most appropriate solution.

2.16.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the Minister undertake to talk to the director of Local Services who was on the radio earlier last week talking about pooling minibuses for the various charities and groups in the Island that need to use them to see if a similar scheme can be used, for want of a better word, for disabled-access vehicles, so that people can, without necessarily needing to buy them or hire them, can use them as and when they need them, perhaps for a small cost?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

It is already the case that there are some vehicles that are accessible to children who are in wheelchairs for educational purposes, that is one area I am aware of, and I know there are some discussions being had between schools about how that can be best utilised. If there is a discussion to be had about how perhaps they could be utilised for health purposes or if there is an alternative to enable children to get access to health services they need then that is a discussion worth having and since the issue has been raised I will speak to other Ministers about this.

[12:15]

The Deputy Bailiff:

Final supplementary.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

No, thank you. I am grateful to the Minister for taking this on board.