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Calls to overhaul 'retraumatising' compensation scheme for institutional abuse victims



The redress board set up to process applications to survivors of institutional abuse began issuing payments last year

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Chairman of the Executive Office scrutiny committee Colin McGrath

A STORMONT scrutiny committee chair has called for urgent reform of a compensation scheme for institutional abuse victims following concerns the process is "retraumatising".

SDLP MLA Colin McGrath will lead an assembly debate today after receiving evidence from those who had used the Historical Institutional Abuse (HIA) redress scheme and found it "impersonal and judicial".

Mr McGrath, who oversees the Executive Office Committee is calling on First Minister Paul Givan and Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill to listen to victims' testimony and review the "complicated" processes.

The initiative was set up following the HIA inquiry, which investigated decades of childhood abuse across a number of Northern Ireland institutions including church run facilities.

In April, there were warnings it could up to a decade to process up to 5,000 applications for payment, which was branded "unacceptable" as the majority of victims are in their sixties and seventies.

Mr McGrath said: "It was chilling to hear survivors of institutional abuse relate their experience of the redress scheme to the MLAs last month. They have described a process that has made them feel degraded and dishonest and has ultimately retraumatised many. The state failed these victims once; we cannot allow it to happen again.

"If the redress process feels judicial in character, then of course victims are going to feel like they're on trial. If it is too long and complicated, then many will disengage. Following evidence from those involved in the process, we have asked the redress board to assess their current practice. It is increasingly clear, however, that the failure to provide adequate support to victims and survivors needs the immediate attention of the joint first ministers."

Sinn Féin MLA Linda Dillon has also called for a review into the body set up to oversee the redress scheme, saying the system needs to be "victim centred".

"The current approach needs to be reviewed however any review should be short and sharp and solution focused," she said.

"Alongside a review, there needs to be a memorial to victims and survivors in recognition of their experiences as well as an official apology."

<https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2021/07/05/news/calls-to-overhaul-retraumatising-compensation-scheme-for-institutional-abuse-victims-2375390/>