



23 September 2011

CAMPAIGNERS ISSUE ACCESS TO JUSTICE WARNING FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

A not-for-profit campaign group has warned that victims of injury in Northern Ireland are at risk of being denied full and proper access to justice after a report recommended restrictions should be made to civil legal cases.

The Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL) spoke out after the Northern Ireland Executive launched a consultation on recommendations to cut legal aid for most personal injury cases and introduce a restricted 'no-win, no-fee' system.

"Victims of needless injury, whose lives have been shattered, should have the same access to justice as anyone else," said Martin Hanna, a Belfast-based lawyer who sits on APIL's executive committee.

"If legal aid is cut and a restricted 'no-win, no-fee' system introduced, some victims of injury whose cases are complex will find it difficult to bring a valid claim. How can that ever be considered fair by a just and moral society?"

The 'no-win, no-fee' system which has been recommended by the Access to Justice Review group involves an injured person paying some legal fees out of his damages.

"People don't choose to be injured, but when negligence happens, the guilty party must surely be held fully to account," said Mr Hanna.

"Damages are calculated to compensate a victim for his pain and suffering. It flies in the face of the principles of justice for an injured person to pay legal costs out of his damages.



“Instead of potentially restricting access to justice, what Northern Ireland needs is a fair system which provides all victims with the opportunity to pursue the full compensation which they deserve.”

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Note to editors:

- APIL (Association of Personal Injury Lawyers) is a not-for-profit organisation whose members campaign for improvements in the law to help people who are injured or become ill through no fault of their own.
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