

## **CRIME VICTIMS GET RAW DEAL UNDER NEW COMPENSATION SYSTEM**

A compensation scheme introduced amid criticism may now be failing many of Northern Ireland's crime victims.

In its response to an enquiry by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, to assess the effectiveness of the criminal injuries compensation scheme, the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL) says the system simply isn't achieving what the Government said it would do.

"What the scheme has actually done to improve the claims process is questionable, and we are deeply concerned that victims aren't getting the help they need," said Robert Martin, APIL's representative in Northern Ireland. "When paid legal assistance was withdrawn, extra funds were given to Victim Support of Northern Ireland which, the Government said, could assist with claims. But with only eight branches across the region, we know that many people are not turning to them for help.

"It's very hard to see how public money which paid for legal advice is now being used to bring justice to more victims."

APIL says many people find the application process fraught with difficulty, as the forms are complicated and ask for information the victim is unlikely to have.

"People are asked for details they simply won't know about, such as the as the police incident number," said Robert. "It's a horribly complex process which may leave many struggling at the very first hurdle. mf

“When, or indeed – if – the victim does manage to complete the application, they are subjected to a long, drawn-out process where even the simplest of claims can be extensively delayed.”

APIL says one of the schemes biggest downfalls is the lack of distinction between individuals, for example, a pilot who loses an eye will receive the same amount of compensation as a retired person.

“How can it be right that a healthy, full-time worker, who depends on a monthly wage to support a family, receives the same amount as an older, retired person with only himself to support? Where is the justice in that?” said Robert.

The association is hoping the Government will take notice of the problems highlighted in its response to the enquiry, and take urgent action to rectify them.

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