

Dear Ministers Foster and O'Neill, Long, Swann and Ní Chuilín,

Hourglass is the only charity in the UK focused on the abuse of older people and championing safer ageing. We know that the abuse of older people – side-lined in decision-making for decades – is more prevalent in our communities than ever before. With risk of abuse acutely exacerbated by COVID-19 restrictions, the outlook for each of us ageing in Northern Ireland is concerning.

We are writing to make you aware of the findings of our recent polling and calling on the Northern Ireland Executive to join our movement for safer ageing, launching with the first annual Safer Ageing Week on Monday 30th November 2020.

We want you to lead the way in changing how older people are viewed and considered in national policy. Older people face both physical and attitudinal barriers that create circumstances of age-related vulnerability – an environment which puts older adults at risk. Our movement for safer ageing seeks to remove these barriers and to empower older people to age securely and live free from abuse.

In February we conducted a survey - 'Growing Old in the UK 2020' – which explored the experiences, attitudes and perceptions of the abuse of older people. The second round of the survey – Growing Old Under Lockdown 2020 - took place in June, to account for the changes brought on by the pandemic. The outcome in Northern Ireland found that as many as 68,000 people over the age of 65 have experienced abuse in older age – a startling and appalling figure.

The abuse of older people, to the detriment of victims and families, has not been given the consideration it needs. This must change.

Key findings in our polling:

- 1 in 3 respondents in Northern Ireland believe that inappropriate sexual acts directed at older people don't constitute abuse.
- The same proportion, (33 percent) don't see 'taking precious items from an older relative's home without asking' as abuse.
- While nearly 1 in 3 (31 percent) don't view 'pushing, hitting, or beating an older person' as abuse.

The experiences of older people must be represented at the top of Government to close this gap – you can make this happen.

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We call on the Northern Ireland Executive to commit to a safer ageing approach, and work across your departments to ensure that the views of older people are represented at key meetings. Of the utmost importance is in consultation on primary legislation for adult safeguarding. Northern Ireland is the only region of the UK without dedicated adult safeguarding legislation, which the Health Minister promised to consult on by this Christmas. This is vital to the safety of our older community and needs to be advanced as a matter of urgency.

Older people's voices need to be heard, now more than ever. At Hourglass we represent those people and their experiences. Our initiative for Safer Ageing Week, starting on the 30th of November, with your support, will galvanise awareness of the abuse of older people; inform the public of the signs and manifestations of abuse; and trigger a turning point in the national agenda – putting safer ageing at the heart of decision making.

Yours sincerely,



Veronica Gray

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