

'I'M FIGHTING FOR MY CARE'



William Devereux, pictured outside his home at Grange Cohan.

A Waterford man who lost both his legs as a result of diabetes and also suffers from conditions of the heart, kidney and liver, as well as cataracts, hearing difficulties and Hepatitis C, has pledged to continue his fight to have his sister appointed as his carer by the HSE.

William Devereux, whose mobility is further impaired since he suffered a stroke, says he relies on his sister Jackie for everything - from shopping, cooking and cleaning to driving him to various medical appointments. After a lengthy appeals process and a subsequent oral hearing, however, the HSE has rejected an application for Carers' Allowance for Jackie on the basis that she does not work enough hours caring for her brother.

William, who resides at Focus Ireland's Grange Cohan development in St John's Park, says he's at his wits' end with the paperwork-laden process. "I have written dozens and dozens of letters, going over the same information again and again and I am worn out from it. I don't know what else I can do. "I am stuck in my house 24 hours a day, depending on a couple of visits from the health nurse for help with my insulin," he told The Munster Express.

"When we originally filled out the form, Jackie stated that she was caring for me for about 19 hours a week but the reality is there are weeks when she could spend up to 40 hours between everything she does for me, be it shopping, cooking, cleaning, driving me to appointments, helping me with my insulin....I depend on her for everything and without her I can't go to my appointments.

"I'm after receiving a letter from the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dublin to go up for an appointment on August 1st but I had to cancel it because I have no way of getting there. My sister has her own family to look after as well and she can't afford the petrol cost of driving me around all the time."

Mr Devereux continued: "I had applied for the mobility allowance but I was two days late, when the Government cancelled it. I don't qualify for the motorised transport grant because I'm deemed to be living in the city centre. "

The attitude from the Department is that I have a bus pass so that should be enough to get around. But I can't get to and from the bus on my own. Since I had the stroke, I can't get around properly in the wheelchair at all. Without the help and care of my sister I am completely housebound and I don't know what I'm going to do."

Mr Devereux first hit the headlines back in May when he threw a bottle of Coca Cola at then Health Minister James Reilly during the official renaming of Waterford Regional Hospital. He says his actions that day were driven by pure frustration. "I had recently heard about millions being spent on a walkway from Waterford to Dungarvan, while the cuts James Reilly was making on healthcare are destroying the lives of sick people like me. I was so angry looking at him that day and I snapped.

"I rang the Minister's office the following day and was put straight through to James Reilly. He asked me to write to him and promised he would look into my case and try to get it sorted. That's the last I heard from him.

"I have been in touch with so many people with this and the only one giving me any help is John Halligan, I have to thank him and the staff in his office for that. They have attended hearings with me and John has raised my case in the Dáil but the Government aren't interested in people like me.

"When I was well, I worked and paid taxes. I was a baker and worked six nights a week and when I finished up doing that I delivered fuel for Tedcastles and then Walshes, out in hail, rain or snow. Now that I am sick, nobody wants to know. The Government certainly doesn't.

After being through so many appeals, my sister has given up on it but I am determined to fight for what I really believe I'm entitled to.

" Deputy John Halligan said the Government's 'dismissive' attitude towards carers and medical card holders was causing serious anxiety amongst already sick people, as well as contributing to high rates of depression.

"William's case is not an isolated one. People don't know where to turn and the Department's tactic of putting William through appeal after appeal epitomises the attitude towards carers and sick people that I am encountering every day of the week."