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Disability Discrimination Bill welcomed but DRC urges action on housing shortage

A Disability Bill, including much needed changes to the definition of disability and extending new rights to disabled people using transport, was warmly welcomed by the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) today.

But, in welcoming the Bill, the DRC's Chairman Bert Massie voiced concern that the crisis faced by disabled people needing adaptations to their housing would continue unless urgent measures were included in the new legislation.

The DRC estimates that some 18,000 disabled people are living in unsuitable accommodation because of landlords' refusal to agree to vital adaptations that would ensure that disabled people can live independent lives. The DRC is seeking an amendment to the Bill that would ensure that consent to make adaptations could not be unreasonably refused.

Chairman of the DRC, Bert Massie said:

"We warmly welcome the Government's introduction of the new Bill and look forward to its passage through Parliament. However, housing is a vitally important issue, as thousands of disabled people living in unsuitable accommodation have been refused permission to make essential adaptations to their homes. The DRC will seek an amendment to the Bill and with it, eliminate the anxiety, stress and hardship caused to disabled people."

The Disability Discrimination Bill will pave the way for a substantial advance of civil rights for Britain's 10 million disabled people by 2006 and reflects a major step forward in ending the discrimination disabled people experience when trying to travel in Britain.

Mr Massie continued:

"The transport provisions are great news for disabled people and, if implemented by the Government, will close a major loophole in the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). The Government has been committed to introducing basic civil rights for disabled people using public transport since the 1997 manifesto so it's been a long journey that is coming to an end. There is much in this Bill that will significantly improve the lives of Britain's 10 million disabled people and I look forward to working with the Government to ensure the Bill becomes law in this session of Parliament."

Plans outlined in the Bill to remove a major barrier making it difficult for people with mental health impairments to take cases under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) were also welcomed by the DRC today.

"Many people with mental health impairments had to experience embarrassment, ignominy and stress when bringing cases under the DDA. In many circumstances they were legally defined as not being covered by the law and denied their rights because their condition was not clinically recognised. The change announced today, which I warmly welcome, will finally end this perverse injustice and ensure that people with mental health problems are granted the same protection under law as other disabled people."