

# Sex offender Michael Shine spirited away from prison after serving three years behind bars

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Sex offender Michael Shine has been spirited away from prison after serving three years behind bars for the indecent and sexual assault of seven boys between 1971 and 1992.

Victims of the paedophile and former surgeon are now calling for a public inquiry into how Shine (89), who worked at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda, Co Louth, was able to continue abusing children for decades when his activities were widely known. A group supporting victims of the serial sex offender is pressing the Government to intervene in a row over legal fees which has derailed compensation settlements for more than 100 survivors. Shine was jailed in 2019, but left the Midlands Prison this morning at 10.30am.

Around the same time as his release a vehicle was driven up to a service door in the prison, and waited until it was opened. The vehicle was then reversed into the jail and the solid gate closed over in front of it. It emerged around five minutes later with a man fitting Shine's description in the passenger seat and was driven towards Dublin.

Under normal circumstances prisoners leave the jail through one of two doors and are picked up by a relative or a taxi in a parking area in front of the prison. Allowing a prisoner to be collected out of view would not be the norm. The Irish Prison Service today said it does not comment on individual prisoner cases.

The High Court heard last October that more than 100 civil actions against Shine and the Medical Missionaries of Mary (MMM), which ran the hospital, had been settled, bringing to an end litigation which started in 2012. However, within weeks the apparent settlement had unravelled due to a dispute between the religious order's insurer Allianz and the HSE over who should pay the HSE's costs in the case. The HSE had initially also been a defendant in the actions taken by men who say they were abused by Shine as children. The case against it was struck out, but not before it ran up substantial costs in the region of €1m. In a statement, Dignity4Patients, an advocacy and support organisation helping victims of Shine, called on the Government to intervene and explain why the ongoing row over costs was delaying payment of damages.

The issue was raised in the Dáil yesterday by Labour TD Ged Nash, who said: "This is a case of lawyers differing while survivors continue to suffer. "Many of the men feel they are being re-traumatised as the legal rows rumble on, completely oblivious to their pain and suffering." Public Expenditure Minister Michael McGrath said the HSE and the State Claims Agency was seeking to recover from the congregation and Allianz the costs which the HSE incurred in defending the claims. However, he insisted these costs "are not an impediment" to the settlement of the claims. The minister said both sides had recently agreed to enter mediation on the issue.

Victims hit out at the situation, saying they were being denied justice.

One survivor who has a civil action pending said: "I think it is very unfair that Shine is being released at this time when over 100 of us victims are still in limbo as to what the final outcome for us will be. "I am looking for justice since 2012. That's 10 years of torture. And Shine gets to go back to his big house in Dublin." Another said: "It's disgusting the attitude taken and further torment of victims through the non-agreement for payment. Maybe if it was one of their family members they would look differently at it."

As a result of the impasse, the High Court has agreed to give a priority hearing to a lead case. A date is expected to be fixed next month for the hearing. Ms Justice Leonie Reynold warned lawyers last November their clients would "be looking at much larger bills of costs down the road" due to the turn of events. "The HSE and the MMM row has nothing to do with victims and survivors," said Dignity4Patients CEO Adrienne Reilly. "Time marches on and many survivors are facing serious health challenges as they age. Shine has been tried, convicted, served his sentence, and

is now being released, with no sign yet of restitution for the present group of survivors of his abuse over 30 years when they were children. "This contrasts sharply with other redress schemes established by the State and religious bodies in similar circumstances."

Ms Reilly said the organisation was calling for a public inquiry as it is clear failures in the child protection and criminal justice system had allowed serial abusers to operate with impunity in the health system for decades. She said victims also wanted the Smyth Report to be published. This was a review commissioned by then health minister Mary Harney from retired High Court judge Thomas Smyth in 2010 to examine allegations against Shine and whether a full inquiry should be opened.

It was never published and victims interviewed by the judge have been unable to get access to their interviews. One survivor who unsuccessfully sought the return of his records said the review was "such a disappointment as it delivered nothing but anguish".

**If you have been affected by any of the issues raised in this article, you can contact Dignity4Patients, whose helpline is open Monday to Thursday 10am to 4pm.**