



**Mary Coughlan Minister for Social and Family Affairs Says
"Personal Advocates" Will Improve Position of People With
Disabilities Significantly**

Mary Coughlan, Minister for Social and Family Affairs, said today that the position of people with disabilities will be greatly improved by a team of "personal advocates".

The new personal advocacy service will be put in place after the Comhairle Bill is introduced into the Oireachtas next month and passed. Following the publication of the National Disability Strategy this week Minister Coughlan met with the Chairman of Comhairle Mr Tom Daly to discuss the implementation of the personal advocacy service.

"I believe that the position of people with disabilities will be improved significantly through the introduction of the new personal advocacy service.

"This new service will provide for the assignment of a personal advocate to a person with a disability who is unable or who has difficulty in obtaining a social service without the assistance or support of the personal advocate," said Minister Coughlan.

"The main function of the personal advocate will be to assist, support and represent the person with a disability in applying for and obtaining a social service and also in pursuing any right of review or appeal in connection with that service.

"The new personal advocacy service will be run by Comhairle, which already has a statutory remit in supporting the provision of independent information, advice and advocacy services in relation to the broad range of social services. They will be personal champions for people with disabilities," said Minister Coughlan..

Comhairle has been preparing for the introduction of the new personal advocacy service for sometime. Last year it published an important study "The jigsaw of advocacy" which described advocacy models and current services available in Ireland and set out a number of future options for Comhairle in terms of developing its current statutory responsibilities.

Last July Minister Coughlan launched on its behalf, a report on developing an advocacy service for people with disabilities which was commissioned by Comhairle from Goodbody Economic Consultants. That report set out clear options for Comhairle in relation to how the new personal advocacy service might be structured and operated.

ENDS September 27th 2004