



MINISTER COUGHLAN ANNOUNCES **FAMILY SUPPORT AGENCY CEO**

Mary Coughlan TD, Minister for Social and Family Affairs, today announced the appointment of Mr Pat Bennett as the Chief Executive Officer of the newly established Family Support Agency.

Announcing Mr Bennett's appointment, Minister Coughlan said, " The family, in all its forms, is the bedrock of Irish society and has been in the forefront of the profound changes in Irish society over the last decades, a fact recognised by this government in its Family First approach. The establishment of the Family Support Agency is a groundbreaking initiative in addressing the challenges families face. Mr Bennett's appointment is a major step in bringing the Agency fully on stream," said Minister.

"I look forward to working closely with Mr Bennett, and the Agency, in meeting these challenges over the coming years" added Minister Coughlan.

The main task of the Family Support Agency is to support families, promote the continuity of stability in family life, prevent marital breakdown and foster a supportive community environment for families at a local level. It does so by providing a family mediation service, by developing marriage and relationship counselling, undertaking research and by advising the Minister on its functions and family issues. The Family Support Agency has been allocated a budget of €17.2m for 2003.

Mr Bennett is most recently Assistant Chief Executive Officer of the South Western Area Health Board, where he was responsible for its Children and Families programme. He has 25 years experience in the public sector and has also worked in the private sector.

Mr Bennett has held a number of posts in family, child and community policy development and service delivery, including; Management roles at St. James' Hospital in Dublin, Chairman of the Traveller Health Unit in the Eastern Health Board, Chairman of the National Project Team for E-government and responsibility for the SWAHB Children and Families Programme which includes the areas of child protection as well as residential care.

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Notes for News Editor

The Family Support Agency will:

- provide a family mediation service
- support, promote and develop the provision of marriage and relationship counselling and other family supports and
- support, promote and develop the Family and Community Services Resource Centres programme.

The new Agency will also undertake research, provide and disseminate information about parenting and family issues and provide advice to the Minister on matters relating to its functions.

The Family Support Agency Act, 2001 provided for the establishment of the Family Support Agency to bring together the main programmes and pro-family services developed by the government since 1997.