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**€283 million saved by anti fraud measures**  
**– Mary Coughlan TD Minister for Social and Family Affairs**

The Department of Social and Family Affairs realised savings of €282.7million last year in combating fraud and abuse. Total savings were up by €14million on 2001.

Total social welfare expenditure for 2002 reached over € 9 billion. More than 925,000 people received a weekly social welfare payment, over 500,000 families received child benefit during the year and more than 1.4million people were recipients of Free Schemes including electricity, travel and phone rental.

The savings were made after normal reviews and investigative work carried out by the Department's staff.

Savings in Unemployment Payments realised the most at €118.5million, followed by One Parent Family €75million and Illness €50million. Approximately ninety percent of the 9,000 employers who underwent PRSI inspections were found to be compliant. A total of 341,000 claim reviews were carried out during 2002.

A total of 245 cases were forwarded to the Chief State Solicitor's office. Some 167 cases were finalised in court – of which five were served with prison sentences, 28 received suspended sentences, 78 were fined, a total of 32 received the Probation Act and the remainder were struck out, dismissed or bound to the peace.

Commenting on the figures, the Minister for Social and Family Affairs Mary Coughlan TD said : “ I am concerned that there are people who would abuse the tax payers who fund the schemes run by my Department which are aimed at alleviating poverty, helping people who have lost their jobs, and those who are genuinely dependent on a basic social welfare payment every week.

”I want to put those who make false claims on notice – we will continue to be vigilant and I will be keeping this issue under review, “ said Minister Coughlan.

**ENDS - 6<sup>th</sup> April 2003**