



MINISTER CULLEN OPENS PARENTING AND EMPLOYMENT SEMINAR

The Minister for Social and Family Affairs, **Martin Cullen TD** this morning (8 November 2007) officially opened *The Workplace of the Future: Reconciling Pregnancies, Parenting and Employment* seminar at the Royal College of Physicians, Kildare Street.

The Seminar, a joint venture between the **Centre for Gender and Women's Studies** at Trinity College, Dublin and the **Crisis Pregnancy Agency**, has brought together Irish and international experts who will outline over the course of the morning, the latest research in this area and provide delegates with practical case studies.

The purpose of the seminar is to raise awareness and understanding of the link between pregnancy, decision-making, parenting and workplace issues. It will also consider what is required in the workplace of the future to support workers who are already parents and those facing parenthood.

In his opening remarks, **Minister Martin Cullen TD** said that issues of work-life balance, workplace culture and maternity and childcare are of especially high relevance to those who face an unplanned pregnancy and may be a key point of influence when deciding whether to continue with a pregnancy. Referring to research commissioned by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency which looked at issues of workplace culture and childcare, the Minister said: "The findings of the research suggests that when women are faced with a crisis pregnancy, workplace policy and culture have an important influence on their decision about whether or not to continue with the pregnancy and whether or not to continue in work on becoming a parent. It is obviously important to look at the implications of these findings for



Department of Social and Family Affairs

workplace policies. Appropriate responses will bring many benefits as well as challenges. Today's seminar is an important step in this process."

Minister Cullen added: "Much progress has been made in terms of legislation and policy which are making workplaces more family friendly and helping to achieve a work-life balance. For this reason, employers need to promote work-life balance options which are available and employees need to be clear on their options - from a workplace point of view - if they find themselves in a crisis pregnancy situation."

The Minister referred to the Government's **National Workplace Strategy**, launched by An Taoiseach, which indicates that workplace change and innovation will be critical to Ireland's future as a dynamic, inclusive, knowledge-based economy and society. The Strategy recognises that addressing issues concerning equality and diversity in the workplace will be critical to meeting the future needs of the economy. Encouraging participation in work, ensuring that all employees have access to choices and opportunities and enabling organisations to benefit from diversity are all key concerns in this context. In relation to childcare, Minister Cullen said that: "The Government's commitment to childcare is evidenced by the **National Childcare Strategy** 2006-2010 and the creation of the new **Office of the Minister for Children** with a Ministerial seat at the Cabinet table. He said: "There is now the unprecedented opportunity to develop and deliver policies and programmes which will help to ensure the well being of our children."

One of the key elements of the Government's National Childcare Strategy is the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010. This Programme is exchequer funded and the Government has committed €575 million to the Programme over the next five years.



Minister Cullen in his concluding remarks, referred to the statutory entitlements in Ireland which are “important in terms of protecting workers,” including maternity leave, adoptive leave, carer’s leave and parental leave, along with all the other employment rights legislation. He also referred to the work of the **National Framework Committee for Work-Life Balance** Policies, which was established under the Social Partnership agreements. The Committee is charged with facilitating the development of family friendly policies at the level of enterprise through the development of a package of practical measures. Examples of such policies include flexi-time, part-time working, annualised hours, teleworking, term time, work sharing, job sharing and other various additional leave options either paid or unpaid.

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