



NEWS RELEASE

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Hanafin outlines measures to tackle Social Welfare Fraud

The Minister for Social and Family Affairs Mary Hanafin T.D., today (8th December 2009) outlined measures which are in place to help in the fight to tackle fraud and abuse of the Social Welfare system. Speaking today following Deputy Enda Kenny's T.D., comments in the Dail, the Minister said **"there is no evidence whatsoever that fraud is costing the State €2billion a year. The Department takes the issue of fraud very seriously. The level of fraud on most schemes is very low as evidenced by surveys carried out by the Department over the past number of years. However, within schemes, some categories of claimants can be a much higher risk than others and when these are identified the Department moves to address the issue.**

This does not mean that all schemes or all groups of recipients are involved in fraud. The vast majority of people who seek a Social Welfare payment are doing so correctly and within their entitlement. We must however remain constantly vigilant to threats to our schemes, by those who are intent on ripping off the taxpayer at this crucial and difficult time"

The Minister outlined measures which are currently being deployed to tackle fraud and abuse of Social Welfare schemes:

- Some 620 staff across the Department are involved in fraud detection, including dedicated Inspectors operating in Special Investigation Unit.
- Jobseekers now collect their payment in person each week at the post office.



Department of Social and Family Affairs

- Photo ID is required when collecting payments.
- Over 600,000 claims, across all schemes have been reviewed so far this year, including medical checks and certification for non-Irish nationals to prove continued entitlement to child benefit.
- Data matching both within the schemes operated in the Department and with external agencies, such as
 - General Registrars Office on Births, Marriages and Deaths,
 - Revenue Commissioners on commencement of employment
 - Department of Education
 - Taxi Regulator on people with taxi licences
 - PRTB on landlords.
- Inter-agency checks in towns near the border to counter welfare tourism and abuses.
- Social welfare officials have been assigned to the Garda National Immigration Bureau.
- Public Service Card with photo ID to be rolled out from 2010 and will provide a new secure card for some 3 million people.
- Prosecutions – approx 380 cases referred in 2009 – people instructed to repay the money and fined or given prison sentences. Fines are being increased to €2,500 per offence.
- Reports of suspected fraud are made by the Public. All reports, even anonymous, are followed up – over 5,000 anonymous reports so far in 2009.

“Fraud is theft and the Department of Social and Family Affairs takes fraud control very seriously. Savings of €500million have been secured this year by clamping down on fraud and abuse and we will continue to pursue new methods of identifying fraud next year,” said Minister Hanafin.

ENDS

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