



NEWS RELEASE

September 14 2009

## Prevention & Detection of Welfare Fraud Remains a Priority - Hanafin

The Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Hanafin T.D. today (*Friday, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2009*) reiterated her commitment to combating abuse of the social welfare system.

The Minister highlighted the fact that over 560,000 social welfare claims were reviewed in 2008. While she acknowledged that the increased numbers of people claiming Jobseeker's payments has put pressure on the Department's resources, she pointed out that despite this over 328,000 individual claims for social welfare payments were reviewed in the first half of this year. Over €228 million was saved for the taxpayer as a result.

According to Minister Hanafin, **"We have over 600 staff working in areas related to control of fraud and abuse of the welfare system. Inspectors are calling to the homes of welfare recipients, people getting illness payments are being sent for independent medical assessments and we are collecting more earnings data from other agencies so that people can't hide their income. We also frequently use mailshots to catch out people who have moved address or left the country."**

The Minister repeated her call for members of the public to play their part in preventing welfare fraud. "Reports can be made anonymously by calling (01) 704 3000 and asking for Central Control Section", she said.

She concluded by warning that the consequences for social welfare fraud can be severe. **"Criminal prosecutions may be taken against persons who defraud the social welfare payments system and employers who fail to carry out their statutory obligations. A person who is found guilty of abusing the social welfare system may be fined or imprisoned."**

ENDS