



## **Department of Social and Family Affairs**

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### **100% Christmas Bonus - Minister Coughlan announces at Pre-Budget Forum**

Mary Coughlan, TD, Minister for Social and Family Affairs announced today, as she hosted her Department's Pre-Budget Forum, that she had secured a 100% Christmas Bonus for social welfare customers. The forum was attended by some 28 non-governmental organisations who gave their views and made submissions on social welfare changes and improvements, which they would like to see included in the forthcoming Budget.

"This Government is committed to protecting the least well-off in our society. An indicator of that commitment is the fact that once again, despite straitened economic circumstances, I am glad to be able to say that the Christmas Bonus will be paid this year and at the full 100% rate, as has been done for the last three years," said Minister Coughlan.

Thanking the organisations for attending the forum, Minister Coughlan said: "I greatly value the opportunity of listening to groups like you as we work to develop a social welfare policy that effectively supports, amidst all the changes, those most in need."

"The total cost of implementing the budget proposals I've received is 3 billion, which is likely to be a lot more than what will be available.

"We have to prioritise to make the best use of the available resources to help those in greatest need. But, I can assure you that the ideas put forward today will be very much taken into account when we are finalising our Budget package later this year," said Minister Coughlan.

The Christmas Bonus is paid to certain Social Welfare recipients during the first week of December. It is paid mainly to people such as social welfare pensioners and long-term unemployed people who rely totally on their social welfare payments for financial support. It is also paid to certain participants of FAS, VTOS, Job Initiative and CE schemes and certain income maintenance schemes operated by the Department of Health and Children.

The lowest social welfare rates have been raised by 50% since 1997, pensions by 59% and Child Benefit has more than tripled from €38.10 per month in 1997 to €125.60 today. This Department of Social and Family Affairs will spend over 10 billion in providing supports and services to those less well off this year.

**ENDS**

**October 13th 2003**