



Social Welfare Bill passes all stages of Oireachtas following approval by Seanad - Varadkar

Tuesday, 13 December 2016

The Social Welfare Bill 2016 was approved by the Seanad today and has passed all stages in the Oireachtas, which means that once it has been signed by the President, the Social Welfare measures in Budget 2017 will be law, Minister for Social Protection Leo Varadkar has announced.

The final vote in the Seanad paves the way for the introduction of spending increases of €330 million next year for the Department of Social Protection, which will have a total budget of €19.854 billion.

Minister Varadkar welcomed the passing of the Bill and said Budget 2017 is designed to make sure that everyone benefits from the recovery, whether they are employed or self-employed, living in rural or urban Ireland, carers and those who cannot work or have retired.

“The measures are modest but more than 1.49 million people, including pensioners, will benefit from the increase in weekly payments in March 2017, with those on maximum rates gaining €5 per week. Of this total, some 840,000 benefit recipients such as carers, blind people, widows and disabled people will get their first increase in weekly payments since 2009,” Minister Varadkar said.

“The Social Welfare Bill is prudent, with modest increases across the board and more targeted measures. It ensures that everyone benefits from the recovery, and that work pays through reforms to PRSI benefits. It also includes the first steps in the New Deal for the Self-Employed.”

Some measures will now be able to commence in January as a result of the Bill passing, including the higher income disregard for One Parent Family payments. In addition, people who are receiving Jobseekers Transitional payments will also benefit from a similar increase in the disregard for this payment from January also.

Key measures in the Social Welfare Bill include the following:

- A €5 increase in the maximum rate for weekly payment recipients including pensioners, carers, blind people, widows, disabled people, lone parents, jobseekers, maternity/paternity benefit, and people on CE and other schemes;
- Long-term illness and treatment benefits for the 380,000 self-employed people who pay PRSI at S class, along with access to optical and dental benefits, and access to State income supports if they have a serious illness or injury;
- The total reversal of cuts to the 8,000 families on Farm Assist;
- The return of key dental & optical benefits under PRSI to employees;
- Pro-work measures for lone parents allowing them to keep more of the money they earn;
- Increases in the Back to Education Allowance for young people on welfare;

- Easier access to the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance.

Ends