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Department of Social Protection**

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Dáil debate commences on Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2010

Minister for Social Protection, Éamon Ó Cuív TD, today (16 June 2010) introduced the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2010 in the Dáil.

Prior to outlining the main provisions in the Bill, the Minister said: "Continuing to reflect the trend of recent years and reaffirming the Government's commitment to the welfare of all those in need of support, €20.9 billion will be spent by Government in 2010 on social welfare provision – €500 million or 2.45% more than 2009."

Minister Ó Cuív said: "One of the priorities I have been given in my Department is to place a particular focus on job activation. The new Department brings a joined-up approach to looking at job activation in its wider context with income support."

The Minister said that a number of amendments to the Bill will be tabled at Committee Stage which will include the transfer of the rural social scheme and the community services programme to his Department. He will also be introducing an amendment to provide him with the necessary statutory powers in relation to the employment services and community services programme of FÁS.

The Minister said: "The biggest concern in many households around the country today is the issue of jobs. Job activation and the provision of meaningful work activity for unemployed people are a central part of An Taoiseach's reasons for setting up the new Department of Social Protection and the amendments involving the work schemes and employment services moving



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into a single Department form part of our commitment to targeting the day to day needs of unemployed people.”

The Bill which commenced debate today in the Dáil contains many technical amendments to existing social welfare legislation.

The Bill provides for a number of measures including a specific disqualification for receipt of Jobseeker’s Allowance where the person refuses an offer of suitable employment. It also provides for a reduced rate of Jobseeker’s Allowance or Supplementary Welfare Allowance for claimants who refuse to participate in an appropriate course of training or to participate in a programme under the National Employment Action Plan.

The Bill also provides for the Minister to appoint persons other than serving staff to be appeals officers. This section will allow for the employment, on a temporary basis, of retired appeals officers, as appeals officers to clear backlogs in the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

The Bill provides for phased changes to the Department’s One-Parent Family Payment.

The Minister said: “The Government believes that the current arrangements, whereby a lone parent can receive the One-Parent Family Payment until their child is 18 – or 22 if in full-time education – without any requirement for them to engage in employment, education or training, are not in the best interests of the parent, their children or society. Despite significant state spending in this area, the results have been poor in terms of tackling poverty with the child of a lone parent being 4 times more likely to be in consistent poverty than the population overall.”



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It is proposed that for new customers, from April 2011, the One-Parent Family Payment will be made until the youngest child reaches age 13 years. The vast majority of new customers for the One-Parent Family Payment are parents of new born babies; therefore the changes in the payment from April 2011 will not affect them until 2024 – until their child reaches their 13th birthday. There will be a 6 year tapered phasing out period for existing customers with the age 13 cut off point coming in to effect for them in 2016. If the child is in full time education there is also a special provision for existing One-Parent Family recipients. In this case payment will continue until the end of the 2012 – 2013 academic year or until the child reaches age 22 – whichever is the earlier.

Under the reformed scheme there will also be special provisions for families with children for whom Domiciliary Care Allowance is paid as well as for both married and cohabiting persons who are recently bereaved and who have children aged 13 years or older.

When the youngest child reaches age 13, if the parent is still in need of support, they will be entitled to claim Jobseeker's Allowance (same basic rate of €196 per week) or if in low-paid employment of 19 hours or more per week, Family Income Supplement.

A cut off point of age 7 years was originally recommended in the Government Discussion Paper 'Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents' 2006. However 13 years is considered to be a more appropriate age for this change as the need for childcare will lessen from that age.

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For Minister Ó Cuív's full speech on the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2010 see the home page of www.welfare.ie

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