



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Minister Announces Expansion Of Money Advice Services As Thousands Seek Help With Debt Problems

Brennan Says Mabs Support A Vital Lifeline As Debt Situations Can Have Devastating Impact

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D., today announced a further expansion of services and supports offered by the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) which is currently experiencing its busiest year to date throughout the country in dealing with the growing number of people who are finding themselves in debt situations.

Minister Brennan released figures which show that last year alone almost 30,000 people used the MABS service compared with less than 18,000 four years earlier. In that period, 2000 to 2004, the number of new clients availing of MABS has more than doubled.

The Minister announced that the services offered will be further enhanced with the phased rollout within weeks of a newly developed automated software system designed specifically for MABS at a cost of some €300,000. The new system, which has been delivered on time and on budget, will be extended to all 60 MABS offices around the country inside a four week period from the commencement of the roll out.

A key feature of the MABSIS (Money Advice and Budgeting Service Integrated System) is a central payments system that will enable payments to be made centrally by electronic fund transfer on behalf of MABS clients. The system will



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Also provide detailed statistics on the nature of the debt incurred and help to identify trends and profile the categories of clients assessing the service.

Minister Brennan was speaking in Co. Donegal when opening new offices for the North Donegal MABS in Buncrana. He also opened new offices for the Citizens Information Centre in the town.

Minister Brennan said: "MABS is providing a valuable service that is assisting thousands of people with debt problems who would otherwise probably find themselves in the grip of moneylenders or at their wits end when looking for help. Recent reports have highlighted the high level of personal borrowing in this country at present. This is reflected to some degree also in MABS which is experiencing its busiest period ever throughout the country. The service's Money Advisers encounter first hand the human face of people in serious debt situations. These situations can have a devastating impact on individuals, and their families, leading to illness due to stress, poor diet and the consequences of loss of dignity and self-esteem."

The Minister said the evidence from the MABS experience is that the nature of debt is varied and can range from small loans to difficulties with utilities bills such as electricity, gas and telephone bills, credit card debt, mortgage or rent arrears and debt around important life events such as first communions, confirmations, weddings and bereavements.

"MABS is the lifeline for more and more people who find themselves floundering in debt situations. As it is free, independent and confidential, it is very reassuring to a person in debt that they can reveal the most intimate details of their financial affairs to a money adviser in complete confidence", the Minister said. "The new automated software system will bring many benefits. I am particularly interested in the data it will collect and analysis about debt as this in turn will feed into the development of strategies to prevent over indebtedness."

Minister Brennan also officially opened the new premises of Buncrana Citizens Information Centre (CIC).

The centre is part of the national network of citizens information services and centres supported by Comhairle, the statutory body, operating under the aegis of the Department of Social Affairs, with responsibility for the provision of information, advice and advocacy services.



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The national network dealt with almost 680,000 queries last year – 40% more than in 2002. Social Welfare issues accounted for 30%, Employment 13%, Health Services 9% and Health Board Payments 7%. The balance was made up from Family Matters, Law & Justice, Housing, Tax, Education, Consumer Issues and Debt.

The number of queries received by BunCrana CIC has increased by 130% since 2000, with more than 6,000 queries received last year.

In paying tribute to the CIC's volunteers and staff Minister Brennan said: "You can be assured that the enormous contribution you make in assisting people in need, the communities in which they live and work and society as a whole is very much appreciated. The information you provide helps break down barriers, eases anxieties, opens up opportunities and often clears the way for citizens, particularly those who are most vulnerable in society, to improve their situations."

Press Release Ends: