



**An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection**

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Minister Burton announces new powers to crack down on Social Welfare fraud

The Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton TD, today (April 20th) announced the new powers she is proposing to give to Social Welfare inspectors to help in the prevention and detection of fraud.

The details of the new powers are contained in amendments to the Social Welfare and Pensions Bill 2012 Second Stage which will be debated in the Dail on Tuesday.

The new powers will enable Social Welfare inspectors to detect and combat social welfare fraud and abuse at ports and airports, to make inquiries of landlords and to require identity checks for social welfare claims.

Minister Burton said: “My Department processes in excess of 2 million applications each year and it makes payments to some 1.4 million people every week. I want to emphasise that the vast majority of people are receiving the entitlement due to them.”

The Minister added: “Social welfare fraud is often perceived as a victimless crime but I am conscious that it undermines public confidence in the entire system as well as being unfair to other recipients of social welfare payments and to taxpayers. It is against this back-drop that I am giving new powers to Social Welfare inspectors.”

Almost 95,000 people receive rent supplement at a cost of €503 million last year and a forecast €437 million this year.

“Given the significant cost of Rent Supplement, I think that specific powers should be available to ensure that expenditure on this scheme is adequately controlled.”

While existing powers allow for the general investigation of Rent Supplement claims - this does not include any specific power of enquiry to a landlord of premises where a Rent Supplement is being paid, so as to ensure that the supplement is being correctly paid.

“I am proposing a new power of enquiry to landlords by Social Welfare inspectors to ensure that Rent Supplement is being correctly paid,” she said.

Minister Burton also announced plans to give Social Welfare inspectors new powers regarding enquiry at ports and airports.

Under Social Welfare legislation a condition of entitlement is that people in receipt of certain payments must be living here.

The Department’s Special Investigation Unit has found an increasing incidence of non-residency in the State by a small minority of social welfare claimants.

“Some people are entering the jurisdiction solely for the purposes of continuing to claim social welfare payments to which they are not entitled. In the last two years, 1,400 people

were found not to be resident and continuing to claim social welfare payments. The detection resulted in Exchequer savings of €13 million. These new powers would be of particular use in tackling this type of social welfare fraud,” she added.

The Minister said she was also giving new powers in relation to the provision of information to establish identity.

The Department has commenced the phased introduction of the new Public Services Card (PSC). The card will act as a key for access to public services in general and for identifying and authenticating individuals.

“In the case of social welfare claims the existing legislation is being amended to make it a condition that a claimant’s identity is appropriately authenticated. This provision also allows for a photograph and electronic signature to be taken, retained and reproduced,” the Minister explained.

ENDS

Department of Social Protection

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