



Over €228 million saved through Social Welfare fraud control measures in first six months of 2009

- **More than 300,000 individual Social Welfare claims reviewed**
- **Over 2,500 reports of suspected fraud by members of the public**

The Minister for Social and Family Affairs Mary Hanafin T.D., today (24th July 2009) outlined savings of over €228million which has been achieved across the Department's schemes through fraud and control measures.

In the first six months of the year some 328,000 individual claims for social welfare payments were reviewed by Departmental officials.

Reviews of One Parent Family payments accounted for over €55million savings, followed by Pensions savings of over €45million and over €40million through Illness payments. Savings in Jobseekers claims were almost €30million, with over 67,000 claims reviewed while there were over 114,000 Child Benefit payment claims reviewed resulting in savings of almost €39million. In addition to these claims almost 800 employers underwent PRSI inspections to check their compliance, with 77% found to be fully compliant.

Minister Hanafin said **"preventing possible fraud or overpayment from the earliest possible stage in a claim is a key element of the work undertaken by the 620 staff across the Department who are working in areas related to control of fraud and abuse of the welfare system."**

Staff currently engaged in the means testing of new claims, for payments such as Jobseekers Allowance, are ensuring that current scarce resources are being provided for those who most need it. A critical element of putting all claims into payment is ensuring that the right payment is going to the right person only for the period they are entitled to it. This is a vital element of the on-going control work."



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Minister Hanafin said that a major new feature of countering possible fraud was the massive increase in reports of suspected abuse of the social welfare system, being reported by members of the public. **“In the first six months of this year 2,581 reports were received in the Central Control Section of the Department, compared with just 362 in the same period last year. While not all of the cases being reported can be followed up, due to insufficient information or no claim being in payment, each and every report made by a member of the public is followed up by the appropriate area to assess if action is necessary.”**

The Minister said that various state agencies and bodies are continuing to provide information to the Department of Social and Family Affairs which can be used to data match and cross check at initial claim stage and for on-going eligibility for entitlement.

Regular data matches occur with the Revenue Commissioners on commencement of employment and the General Register’s Office on birth, marriages and deaths. Other examples of on-going co-operation include data matching and sharing of information from:

- Department of Justice: Irish Prison Service, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal, Private Security Authority and the Courts Service all provide the Department with data for control purposes.
- The Department of Education & Science: student data is provided
- The Department of Agriculture & Food: data on grant payments is received.
- The Department of Transport: the Commission for Taxi Regulation provide data on taxi/hackney licences.
- Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government: PRTB information on registered landlords is matched against the Department’s payments systems.
- Data from Personal Injuries Assessment Board on claims settled.

Minister Hanafin said **“data matching is a very effective method of identifying high risk claims for review and is an example of good cross-departmental co-operation. Existing legislation provides that relevant information could be matched in particular once off targeted operations in an industry or through one to one data exchanges for a particular case. There is also good cross border co-operation regarding investigations.”**



Department of Social and Family Affairs

In relation to legal proceedings for suspected welfare fraud, up to the end of June 2009:-

- 94 cases were forwarded to the Chief State Solicitor Office to initiate legal proceedings
- 190 cases were finalised in court [of which 174 related to Jobseekers claims, with 126 having fines imposed, in 4 cases a prison sentence imposed, 19 given the Probation Act and 14 cases receiving a suspended sentence] and
- 851 were on hands with the CSSO/Local state solicitors at various stages of the prosecution process.

Minister Hanafin concluded by saying that **"a massive number of claims are being reviewed by staff across the Department. This year 16 additional Social Welfare Inspectors have been appointed, bringing the total number of general Inspectors working across the country to almost 400, of which 87 inspectors are attached to the Special Investigation Unit (SIU) working full-time on control. These additional resources will help continue to tackle abuse of our system which needs to respond to the challenge of ever increasing demands."**

ENDS

NOTES FOR EDITORS

Scheme	Savings achieved 6 months end June 2009 €m	Number of Reviews 6 months end June 2009
Jobseekers	29.920	67,372
Illness	40.975	87,664
OFP	55.701	28,991
Pensions	45.686	16,155
Child Benefit	38.392	114,669
Carers	4.046	1,460
FIS	7.366	11,397
SWA	3.389	n/a
PAYE/PRSI	2.806	798
Total	228.281	328,506



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Recovery of overpayment/fraud

If a customer is in an overpayment situation, money may be recovered in the following ways:

- * a single payment covering the full amount owed
- * regular periodic payments
- * deduction (s) from the customers social welfare payment
- * by taking civil proceedings.

Penalties imposed by the courts include fines, prison sentences, community service, Probation Act, suspended sentences, instalment orders, bound to the peace.

Reporting Possible Fraud in Relation to the Department's Schemes

The Central Control Section of the Department of Social and Family Affairs accepts reports of possible fraud offered by members of the public in relation to the Department's schemes.

Reports are accepted by email, phone or in writing. All reports are dealt with in confidence. A member of the public may give details anonymously. Contact Details:

By email: central.control@welfare.ie

By phone: (01) 704 3000, ask for Central Control Section or
(071) 9672648,

By Post: Central Control Division, Shannon Lodge, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co Leitrim.