



**Minister Announces Funding Of Eur27m For Extending Of Paid Maternity Leave To 26 Weeks**

***Some 43,000 Women Set To Qualify Next Year For Extended Paid & Unpaid Maternity Leave Entitlements***

The Minister for Social Affairs, Seamus Brennan T.D. has announced an allocation in Government spending of EUR27 million to fund the extending of Maternity Benefit entitlements from 22 weeks to 26 weeks from early next year.

Minister Brennan said the increase of 4 extra weeks to 26 weeks, or six months, for paid maternity leave will commence from 1<sup>st</sup> March 2007.

Based on the increase in the numbers of women claiming the benefit over the last two years and the growth in Ireland's population, it is estimated that at least 43,000 women will qualify for the extended leave during the year between March 2007 and March 2008.

Paid Maternity Leave is presently 22 weeks, with the option of an additional 12 weeks unpaid leave. From next March this will increase to 26 weeks with the option of an additional 16 weeks unpaid leave under the National Childcare Strategy 2006-2010.

The rate of payment was increased in the last Budget by over 10% to a minimum of EUR182.60 per week (from EUR165.60). The maximum rate is now EUR265.60 per week.

Minister Brennan said that while the commitment to increasing Maternity Benefit to 26 weeks was made in Budget 2006, he was now in a position to outline full details, including the allocation in the Book of Estimates of EUR27 million to fund the 4 week extension in 2007.



## **Department of Social and Family Affairs**

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Minister Brennan said: "Overall funding for paid Maternity Leave has more than trebled in recent years, increasing from EUR58 million in 2000 to an estimated EUR175 million this year. Over the same time the length of paid Maternity Leave has increased from 14 weeks in 2000 to 22 weeks this year, extending to 26 weeks from early next year.

"From next March new mothers will be entitled to six months paid leave with an option to access a further 16 weeks unpaid leave. This will result in mothers having the best part of a year from when their baby is born to dedicate to those important early months of their child's growth and infant formation. Considerable progress has been achieved in significantly advancing the rights of mothers to paid and unpaid leave and we will continue to examine how these important entitlements can be further enhanced. Adequate Maternity Leave is a central element of the Government's overall strategy on childcare, in addition to childcare payments, such as the EUR1,000 Early Childcare Supplement for all children under 6 years, and an extensive range of crèche and other supports."

Maternity Benefit was increased from 18 to 22 weeks from the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2006. Between March and the end of October, a total of 27,100 women have so far benefited from the extra four weeks. Overall, between March 2006 and the beginning of March 2007 it is estimated that some 40,000 women will qualify.

**ENDS**