



Department of Social and Family Affairs

MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS ANNOUNCES PUBLICATION OF ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SOCIAL WELFARE APPEALS OFFICE OVER 14,000 PEOPLE APPEAL SOCIAL WELFARE DECISIONS

Over 14,000 people made appeals on decisions governing social welfare entitlements last year, said Seamus Brennan, Minister for Social Affairs, as he published the annual report of the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

On the publication of the 2004 Social Welfare Appeals Office Annual Report, Séamus Brennan, Minister for Social and Family Affairs "welcomed the continued commitment of the Office to providing an accessible and independent review mechanism for people who wish to appeal against decisions made by my Department in regard to their statutory entitlements."

"While every effort is made by my Department to deliver entitlements to people in accordance with the legislation, it is understandable that not everyone will agree with the decisions made on their claims", the Minister said.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office is an independent office operating under the auspices of the Minister for Social and Family Affairs. The Office deals with appeals on decisions made in regard to entitlement to benefits under the Social Welfare Acts and questions regarding the insurability of employment. It also provides an appeals service to the Health Service Executive relating to Supplementary Welfare Allowance.

The Report for 2004 provides a detailed statistical analysis of the Office's performance in processing appeals during that year, including:

- In 2004 14,083 people made appeals to the Social Welfare Appeals Office compared with 15,224 in 2003. 13% of those were subsequently withdrawn and of the remainder 46.5% were decided in favour of the appellant while 40.5% were 'disallowed'.
- 69% of appeals determined by Appeals Officers were dealt with by way of oral hearing while the remainder were decided summarily. Oral hearings are held at over 70 venues nation-wide.
- The time taken to process appeals is under constant review. The average time taken to process an appeal has fallen from 23 weeks in 2002 to 20 weeks in 2004 (down from 21 in 2003). However, many cases require longer due to legal matters, medical considerations, additional investigations etc. If the 25% most protracted appeals are disregarded, the average falls to 12 weeks. [Note: The appeals system is judicial in nature and due process must be followed. There is very limited scope for fast-tracking cases.]
- The office processed 14,089 cases comprising 1,843 appeals which were withdrawn, 3,550 which were given the benefit of a revised decision by the Deciding Officers in the Department of Social and Family Affairs and 8,696 which were decided by Appeals Officers.
- Part of the appeals procedure involves a review by the Deciding Officer, who made the original decision, prior to the appeal going before an Appeals Officer. Frequently, new evidence becomes available in the course of an



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appeal and a revised decision is warranted. There were 3,550 such revisions in 2004

- 13% of appeals were withdrawn, 25% were revised by Deciding Officers and 21.5% were allowed, fully or partly, by Appeals Officers while the remaining 40.5% were disallowed. In 2004, 46.6% of appeals had a favourable outcome compared to 43.8% in 2003.
- The Report also provides a number of case histories which serve to give an understanding and an insight into the appeals process. Details of court proceedings and judgements during 2004 are also covered.

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N.B. Social Welfare Appeals Office Annual Report is available at the following web address: <http://www.welfare.ie/appeals/annreps/annrep04.html>