

Single parents to lose welfare payment when child turns 13

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SINGLE PARENTS whose youngest child is over 13 will no longer be able to claim one-parent family payments under the terms of new social welfare legislation published last evening.

The change was described as “blunt and brutal” by Olwyn Enright, the Fine Gael spokeswoman on social protection, who accused Fianna Fáil of a cynical political move in releasing the information late on a Friday.

Under the terms of the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2010 there will also be changes to disqualify people from collecting Jobseeker’s Allowance if they refuse an offer of suitable employment.

The one-parent family payment is currently paid to a parent until the youngest child reaches 18, or 22, if the child is in full-time education.

The Government said the changes would bring Ireland’s support for lone parents more in line with international provisions, where there is “a general movement away from long-term and passive income support”.

It added that the current arrangements, whereby a lone parent can receive the allowance without any requirement for them to engage in employment, education or training, were not in the best interests of the recipient, their children or society.

“Despite improvements made to the one-parent family payment over the years, a large proportion of lone parents and their children are still experiencing poverty,” it added.

There were about 90,500 recipients of the payment at the end of last year, a 53 per cent increase since 1997.

The total cost of the scheme in 2009 was €1.1 billion, compared to €338 million in 1997.

The payment is made up of a personal rate for the parent of €196 a week with €29.80 for each additional qualified child. The amount depends on the weekly means of the parent.

The Bill will be debated in the Oireachtas before the summer recess in early July.

Ms Enright said the announcement had been made without any plan to help those in one-parent families into education and employment.

“The decision to cut the payment is blunt and brutal and, damningly for the Government, is not backed up by a clear plan,” she said.

Ms Enright said Minister for Social Protection Éamon Ó Cúív was ignoring that over 80 per cent of one-parent families were already engaged in education, training or work. She added that Fine Gael was very much in favour of encouraging people into work or training.

“I know that the majority of people in receipt of social welfare want the opportunity to upskill, retrain or work,” she said.

“It is a pity Fianna Fáil didn’t recognise the merits of this when the country had full employment and that they are only belatedly coming around to the notion now they see it as a way of saving money,” added Ms Enright.