

DÁIL ÉIREANN

Fógra Tairisceanna: Notice of Motion

GNÓ COMHALTAÍ PRÍOBHÁIDEACHA PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

“That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

- there are 218,817 lone parent families living in the State (Census 2016);
- Ireland’s level of lone parent families is amongst the highest in the European Union and growing;
- lone parent families have suffered disproportionately during the economic recession and in the subsequent period of economic growth;
- according to the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, in terms of the impact of social welfare supports, lone parent families are in deep income inadequacy;
- lone parent families experience consistent poverty at a rate five times that of households headed by two parents; and
- according to the latest Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) undertaken by the Central Statistics Office, 39.9 per cent of lone parent families live at risk of poverty (up from 39.4 per cent the previous year) and 44.5 per cent experience deprivation;

further notes that:

- lone parents are obliged to seek maintenance payments from the non-custodial parent as a condition of receiving the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) and Jobseeker’s Transitional Payment;
- there is no State body or agency in place in Ireland to support or assist lone parents in seeking child maintenance for their child(ren);
- many lone parents have to go to court in order to seek child maintenance;
- the use of courts increases stress and conflict within families;
- an order to pay maintenance as determined by a judge does not guarantee the payment of said maintenance;
- child maintenance payments are included as household means in the assessment of social welfare supports for lone parents regardless of whether it is actually paid or not;
- a recent survey by the One Family organisation found that of the 1,068 respondents, 42 per cent of lone parents receive no child maintenance at all; and
- figures from the Maintenance Recovery Unit of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, which pursues non-custodial parents to cover the costs of the OFP, shows that this Unit is ineffective;

acknowledges that:

- the 2017 Indecon report entitled ‘Independent Review of the Amendments to the One-Parent Family Payment since January 2012’, concluded that changes to this payment led to an increase in the percentage of lone parents who could not afford basic items such as a warm waterproof coat, two pairs of strong shoes, or turning on the heating at home;

- lone parent organisations, One Family and SPARK-Ireland (Single Parents Acting For Rights of Kids) have highlighted major concerns with the current arrangements in place for lone parents seeking maintenance;
- the 2017 report by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended that Ireland ‘Consider establishing a statutory maintenance authority and prescribing amounts for child maintenance in order to reduce the burden on women of having to litigate to seek child maintenance orders.’;
- research has also concluded that in countries where maintenance is paid, it plays a role in reducing poverty; and
- research also shows that where maintenance payments are seen as a private family matter alone, without guaranteed maintenance support systems in place, the number of lone parents receiving child maintenance is low;

regrets that:

- Ireland has failed to meet its targets to date on reducing child poverty; and
- citizens can be imprisoned for not paying their television licence, yet parents who neglect their responsibility for maintaining their dependent child(ren) do so without repercussions; and

calls on the Government to:

- fund research into examining best international practice when it comes to determining, collecting, transferring and pursuing child maintenance payments;
- engage and include all stakeholders in this funded project from point of design and establishing terms of reference, to implementation; and
- establish, based on that research, a statutory child maintenance service with sufficient enforcement powers and links to Revenue.” — *John Brady, Gerry Adams, Pat Buckley, Seán Crowe, David Cullinane, Pearse Doherty, Dessie Ellis, Martin Ferris, Kathleen Funchion, Martin Kenny, Mary Lou McDonald, Denise Mitchell, Imelda Munster, Jonathan O'Brien, Eoin Ó Broin, Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin, Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire, Louise O'Reilly, Aengus Ó Snodaigh, Maurice Quinlivan, Brian Stanley.*

[18 October, 2019]