

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN ROGHCHOISTE UM GHNÓTHAÍ FOSTAÍOCHTA AGUS COIMIRCE SHÓISI- ALACH

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT AFFAIRS AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Déardaoin, 22 Samhain 2018

Thursday, 22 November 2018

The Select Committee met at 10 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy John Brady,	Deputy Tom Neville,*
Deputy Regina Doherty (Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection),	Deputy Willie O’Dea,
Deputy Alan Farrell,*	Deputy Bríd Smith.
Deputy Martin Kenny,+	

* In the absence of Deputies Joe Carey and Maria Bailey, respectively.

+ In the absence of Deputy John Brady for part of meeting.

In attendance: Deputy Willie Penrose and Senator Ray Butler.

DEPUTY JOHN CURRAN IN THE CHAIR.

Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2018: Committee Stage

Chairman: I welcome the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Deputy Regina Doherty, and her officials for consideration of the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2018 which was referred to the select committee by Dáil Éireann on 14 November. Deputy Neville is replacing Deputy Bailey. If any other substitution occurs during the course of the meeting, the clerk should be notified.

Deputy John Brady: A number of amendments have been ruled out of order. Will the Chairman refer to them now or as they arise?

Chairman: I will refer to them when we get to them.

Sections 1 to 4, inclusive, agreed to.

Chairman: Amendment No. 1 has been ruled out of order.

Amendment No. 1 not moved.

Section 5 agreed to.

Chairman: Amendment No. 2 has been ruled out of order.

Amendment No. 2 not moved.

Section 6 agreed to.

SECTION 7

Deputy Willie O’Dea: I move amendment No. 3:

In page 8, line 23, to delete “25 March 2019.” and substitute “7 January 2019.”.

I am aware that the amendments were ruled out of order as they involved a potential charge on the Exchequer. I merely tabled them to highlight the fact that there was a basic inequity in that the budget provided for tax reductions and concessions and increases in social welfare payments. The tax concessions will kick in in January, while the social welfare increases will not kick in until March. That seems to be inequitable. I know that the Minister will probably respond by saying the last increase provided for of €5 will only run out in March, but the increases in social welfare payments come into the reckoning for 2020. Therefore, the Government is holding back an increase for persons in receipt of social protection payments until March, but it will have to be counted in the Estimates for next year in any event. It is simply deferring the cost. We have arrived at a stage where tax concessions and increases in social welfare payments should kick in at the same time.

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I acknowledge that what the Deputy is saying is factual, but given that his party was involved in the negotiations on the budget, he is well aware that we attempted to spread a finite amount of money to as many people as we could. That is how we arrived at the agreed budget that is before the House.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: We were party to the negotiations on the budget, but that does not mean that we wrote it. We obtained as many concessions as we could. The reality is that for the

average person in receipt of social welfare payments, the increase is not €5 but €3.80 per week.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Section 7 agreed to.

Section 8 agreed to.

SECTION 9

Chairman: Amendments Nos. 4, 7 and 8 are related and may be discussed together.

Deputy Regina Doherty: I move amendment No. 4:

In page 10, to delete line 9.

In the ordinary course, a claimant must have paid 520 full rate social insurance contributions, which typically would be class A PRSI contributions in the private sector or class S if one was self-employed, in order to qualify for the contributory State pension. However, the Social Welfare Act 2017 provides that claimants who have paid at least 260 but less than 520 full rate social insurance contributions and who have also paid modified rate contributions may be assessed for what is known as a mixed insurance pension. Modified rate social insurance contributions are PRSI contributions at classes B, C and D and typically paid by public servants.

In practical terms, the mixed insurance contributory State pension will typically enable people who have worked in both the public sector and the private sector or in self-employment to secure a reduced rate contributory State pension to supplement their public sector pension. The amendments I am introducing have been designed to ensure the wider provisions of section 9 which provide for the introduction of aggregated contribution methods will be extended to pensioners who receive the contributory State pension based on mixed insurance records. Consequently, such pensioners will also be in a position to benefit in those instances where they can demonstrate an entitlement to home caring periods.

Amendment agreed to.

Chairman: Amendments Nos. 5 and 6 in the name of Deputy Broughan are out of order.

Amendments Nos. 5 and 6 not moved.

Deputy Regina Doherty: I move amendment No. 7:

In page 11, line 2, to delete “Schedule 2.” and substitute “Schedule 2.”, and”.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Regina Doherty: I move amendment No. 8:

In page 11, between lines 2 and 3, to insert the following:

“(c) in section 109(17), by the substitution of the following paragraph for paragraph (a):

“(a) be payable at a rate less than that specified in Schedule 2, and the rate specified by the regulations may vary in relation to the proportion to which the number of—

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(i) employment contributions paid in respect of or credited to the insured person which are reckonable for State pension (contributory) purposes,

(ii) self-employment contributions paid by him or her which are reckonable for State pension (contributory) purposes,

(iii) voluntary contributions paid by him or her which are reckonable for State pension (contributory) purposes, and

(iv) home caring periods to which he or she is entitled for the purpose of a calculation under subsection (6A),

bears to the total number of those employment contributions, self-employment contributions, voluntary contributions and home caring periods, but any increase of pension in respect of a qualified child shall be paid at the rate specified in Schedule 2, ”.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 9, as amended, agreed to.

Chairman: Amendments Nos. 9 and 10 are in the names of Deputies Bríd Smith, Gino Kenny and Boyd Barrett but as none of the Deputies are here, the amendments fall.

Amendments Nos. 9 and 10 not moved.

Section 10 agreed to.

NEW SECTION

Deputy John Brady: I move amendment No. 11:

In page 11, between lines 22 and 23, to insert the following:

“Report on reduced jobseekers payments

11. The Minister shall prepare and lay a report before the Houses of the Oireachtas on the financial and social effects of the reduced rates of jobseekers payments to young jobseekers aged between 18 and 25 years since 2009, taking into account poverty rates among young jobseekers, and homeless figures and that the report shall be presented to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Employment Affairs and Social Protection within 6 months of the enactment of this Bill.”.

This amendment provides that a report be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on the financial and social effects of discriminatory cuts on our young unemployed people. This needs to be carried out because we know the impact these cuts are having. The Minister repeatedly denies it has any impact. All the evidence, however, from all of the organisations representing young people, cites the poverty levels these cuts are imposing on young people. I refer also to the homeless statistics. All of the non-governmental organisations, NGOs, are pointing out that these discriminatory cuts are adding to all of those problems. It is about time that these cuts were reversed.

I have called repeatedly on the Minister to do that. My hands, unfortunately, are tied. We

cannot bring forward any amendments that will have a cost to the State. We need a report because I believe it will show that these cuts are not having the impact that the Minister frequently cites. These cuts were brought in when youth unemployment was about 24% and it is down now to about 12%. The Minister stated in the Dáil last week that she does not want to see our young unemployed people sitting at home watching “Judge Judy”. I do not think any young people watch that programme, by the way, and they do not want to sit at home either. The impact these cuts are having on young unemployed people is real.

I welcome Deputy O’Dea now also starting to raise concerns on this issue, although we know it was Fianna Fáil that instituted these discriminatory cuts which are affecting young unemployed people. I hope I will have the full support of the committee in requesting this report to examine all of the core issues, such as poverty and homelessness, on which these discriminatory cuts have an impact. They are adding to the difficulties of young unemployed people.

Deputy Regina Doherty: The Deputy is right. As members are aware, in line with other EU and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, countries, reduced rates for jobseeker’s allowance were introduced by the Fianna Fáil-led Government in 2009 to tackle high unemployment. The measures were to guard against the development of long-term welfare dependency by providing jobseekers with a strong financial incentive to engage in education, training or employment opportunities. The Department is already finalising a report examining the impact of the reduced payment rates on jobseekers between the ages of 18 and 25, as we already committed to in the Pathways to Work 2016-2020 initiative.

As part of this process, the Department is also considering the contents of research undertaken by the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. I understand this research will be published shortly in *The Journal of Human Resources*. The research examined the effectiveness of the reduced rates in encouraging jobseekers to avail of education, training and employment opportunities and programmes. The university examined the data for 18 and 19 year olds, as the reduced rates were first introduced for those age categories.

The findings reported positive results and noted an overall reduction in unemployment durations. The ambition of Fianna Fáil and the continued ambition of the Government to assist unemployed young people into education, training and employment opportunities is working. The reduced percentage rates of our young people on long-term unemployment backs that up. I am minded to not put this in legislation but to point out that a report has already been committed to and is being prepared. It does not need to be restated in legislation.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: I noticed Deputy Brady could not resist the temptation to mention Fianna Fáil. I wonder who he would talk about if we did not exist?

(Interruptions).

Deputy John Brady: The Minister also referred to Fianna Fáil.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: I will put this in its full context. As far as I am aware, in many countries throughout the OECD there is a differential between the rates of pay to people under a certain age and those over a certain age. That is a fact. In 2010, when these changes were made in Ireland, we were just coming into line with international practice. That includes practice in the UK, including Northern Ireland, where Deputy Brady’s party presided over that system when they condescended to sign up to government for a number of years. In any case, the fact of the matter was that the initial differential was introduced by a Fianna Fáil-led Government

in 2009. I cannot recall the figures at the time but the difference was marginal. It has been widened considerably since.

The Minister mentioned the rationale for it. There was robust debate on the matter at the time. That will be shown in time when Cabinet minutes are released etc. The Minister has said that the wisdom of the policy is proven by the results. I do not think this is necessarily a case of cause and effect. The question must be asked as to whether, had this change not been introduced, we would be in roughly the same position in respect to youth employment as we are today. There is no definite proof of that and as far as I know, that is what Deputy Brady is trying to ascertain in his amendment.

He wants the study to see if the differential rates of pay have had the desired impact and what type of downside consequence it has had. There are always going to be downside consequences when one cuts social welfare benefits to whomever. I am not totally convinced, being mindful of the arguments made at the time, that the policy actually achieved the results it was brought in to achieve. We have a record low rate of youth unemployment now but I do not know whether that policy has anything to do with it. While I am open to correction, my understanding from the Minister's reply, to bring the matter up to date, is that she is doing this anyway.

Deputy Regina Doherty: Yes, I-----

Chairman: I will let in Deputy Brady first.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I am sorry. That is what I thought the Minister said. I ask her to clarify that.

Deputy Regina Doherty: May I-----

Chairman: I will call the Minister in a minute. I will let Deputy Brady in first as he had indicated. He might also indicate if he is pressing the amendment given the comments made by the Minister that she is already doing a report.

Deputy John Brady: I will press the amendment. The Minister said a report is being carried out. Maynooth University is carrying out a report which is not, however, looking at the issues in the areas I want looked at. I refer to the financial impacts, the poverty impact and the issues with homelessness. We know that in August this year, youth homelessness increased again. There were 893 people between the ages of 18 and 24 who were homeless. The organisations representing young people and the homeless have stated that these discriminatory cuts are adding to that. I am asking for something specific. Pathways to Work clearly stated that such a report would be carried out in the second quarter of 2016.

Deputy Regina Doherty: It is.

Deputy John Brady: It is not. It is being carried out by Maynooth University but it is not specific to the areas I am talking about. The report being carried out by Maynooth University - we have seen the drafts - is looking at the impact these measures have had on unemployment levels. When Deputy O'Dea is explaining the rationale of bringing in discriminatory cuts he is losing. The right thing to do is to do now is to reverse these discriminatory cuts and this report will be the evidence that we need. All the evidence is out there from the organisations but our hands are tied because we cannot bring amendments which will have a cost on the State. A report is needed and I will be pressing this amendment.

Chairman: Before I come to the Minister, Deputy Smith wanted to come in.

Deputy Bríd Smith: I am taking a small liberty here and it is something of a point of order. I want to support Deputy Brady but clearly I have missed being able to move the amendment prior to his which is amendment No. 10, and the one prior to that, amendment No. 9. By way of explanation, my absence was not my fault. The Business Committee has changed the Order of Business for next week to do with the legislation around the eighth amendment to the Constitution, which I am also very involved with because our group is so small. I had to have a discussion with our group to ensure that is sorted out today. This House has stopped me from being able to move two amendments; it is not due to my negligence or tardiness. I am asking that I be allowed to move those two amendments.

Chairman: We have disposed of those two earlier ones and they have already been put to the committee. Everything prior to-----

Deputy Bríd Smith: They could not have been put because I was not here to move them.

Chairman: They fell because the Deputy was not here.

Deputy Bríd Smith: I am asking the Chairman if he will take them.

Chairman: No, they have already been disposed of, in the sense that they fell. I acknowledge-----

Deputy Bríd Smith: We could pick them up again, could we not?

Chairman: No. To be fair to the Deputy, I acknowledge the difficulties she has. I started the meeting asking in particular if there were substitutes for anybody because that is permissible. There was nobody, however, to move those amendments at the point in the meeting they arose. We are on Deputy Brady's amendment which is amendment No. 11, and I acknowledge that it is similar. I will permit the Deputy to contribute to that before I return to the Minister if she-----

Deputy Regina Doherty: Can I make a suggestion that the Deputy retable the amendments on Report Stage if she so wishes? We have already disposed of the sections, as in we have agreed them, and her amendments were not included. We cannot go back to them today but she can bring them back on Report Stage.

Deputy Bríd Smith: Okay, I thank the Minister.

Chairman: I am sorry about this Deputy.

Deputy Bríd Smith: If it was my own fault, and I was dying with a hangover or I missed a bus I would accept it, but it is this House's fault that I was not able to be here.

Chairman: At the start of the meeting I deliberately asked specifically if there were substitutes, as I am mindful of the challenges that people have with multiple committees and so forth.

Deputy Bríd Smith: Okay.

Chairman: That being said, the Deputy has the option on Report Stage. Does the Deputy wish to contribute to Deputy Brady's-----

Deputy Regina Doherty: I just want to back him up and support him.

Chairman: I call the Minister who was anxious to speak on the amendment.

Deputy Regina Doherty: I am sorry, Chairman/ I did not want to interrupt you and wanted to ensure that the Deputy could retable the amendments.

I might not have been clear when I made my first contribution so my apologies if I was not. There is a research piece of work and study that is being undertaken by Maynooth university. The Deputy has alluded to it and has seen drafts of it which is more than I have seen, to be honest. They are very close to publishing that research for everybody's benefit. That has nothing to do with me. It is not my report. I did not commission it. It is not my research. It has nothing to do with the Department.

The Department's document and commitment has already been made on numerous occasions in public, in private and in writing. We are ready, practically, for the finalisation of our report that was committed to under the Pathways to Work programme 2016-2020, which will examine exactly what the Deputy is looking for today. I have no problem committing to that as the report is very nearly ready to be published. I am very happy, Chairman, that this committee be the first place that we have a conversation about it. I do not need to recommit in legislation to something that is already practically completed. I can assure the Deputy that at the earliest date after it is completed, we will come back here and have a conversation about it. I am not against the report. We do not need to provide in new legislation today for something that is already practically completed.

Chairman: Deputy Brady can come back in briefly if he so wishes.

Deputy John Brady: It needs to be included because this sets a distinct six month time-frame within which it would be produced and brought before the House. We cannot allow this to drag on. Unfortunately, that appears to be the *modus operandi* of the Department. This was committed to and was supposed to be published in the second quarter of 2016. That date was missed and in the meantime youth homelessness and poverty is increasing. The impact of these discriminatory cuts is devastating. Six months will tie the hands of the Department and ensure that this report is commissioned, carried out, produced and brought before the House.

Chairman: Can I have a final comment from the Minister?

Deputy Regina Doherty: I enjoy working with this particular committee because the people are incredibly co-operative - 99% of the time we all want the same thing which is what makes it so enjoyable, particularly if we can deliver desired outcomes. The Deputy, however, needs to check his language. The comment that the *modus operandi* of the Department is to delay and its aim is to tie people's hands is not the way the Department works. I ask the Deputy to withdraw the comments that he has just made about 6,000 hard-working people who week-in week-out to serve the State. It is not on. This is not about political cheap shots.

Deputy John Brady: This is not a slight on the individuals working in the Department.

Deputy Regina Doherty: That is what he has just done. Who is it a slight on, is it me, Deputy?

Deputy John Brady: Deputy Doherty is the Minister with responsibility.

Deputy Regina Doherty: Have I a *modus operandi* to delay?

Deputy John Brady: Why has this report not been published?

Chairman: Deputy Brady should address his questions through the Chair, please.

Deputy John Brady: In 2016 it was supposed to be-----

Chairman: I call Deputy O’Dea.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: I will ask the Minister two questions. The amendment states that the report would include consideration of the financial and social effects of this policy. Will the Minister’s own report include the financial and social effects that the reduced rate has had on the people affected? Second, can she give the committee a commitment that her report will be published within six months?

Deputy Regina Doherty: The answer to the first question is “Yes” and I can tell the Deputy that the report will probably be issued in the first quarter of next year. We got into the habit of putting reports into legislation in a manner that is not required. We have a commitment to issue the report and there is no need for this amendment, given that the report is going to be published in the first quarter of 2019. I am not against the information which is going to be made public. I am happy to come back here, Chairman, and talk about the outcomes of the report.

Chairman: Is Deputy Brady pressing the amendment?

Deputy John Brady: I am.

Amendment put.

The Committee divided: Tá;, 2; Níl, 5.	
Tá;	Níl;
Brady, John.	Curran, John.
Smith, Bríd.	Doherty, Regina.
	Farrell, Alan.
	Neville, Tom.
	O’Dea, Willie.

Amendment declared lost.

Section 11 agreed to.

SECTION 12

Chairman: Amendment No. 12 is in the name of Deputy Broughan but as he is not here his amendment falls.

Amendment No. 12 not moved.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: I move amendment No. 13:

In page 12, in line 16, to delete “child,.” and substitute the following:

“child,

(ec) In circumstances where the parents of the child are separated and have been awarded joint custody, the domiciliary care allowance shall be paid to the parent who is in receipt of Child Benefit in respect of that child regardless of the time spent by each

parent with that child, ”.”.

My amendment relates to cases of joint custody. Sometimes parents, in accordance with the terms of the custody agreement, have equal time with their child. In order to qualify for the domiciliary care allowance, the relevant legislation and regulations provide that one of the parents, or the applicant for the domiciliary care allowance, must spend not less than five nights per week with the child. In practice, and in some cases, this does not happen so I have designed my amendment to deal with the anomaly. Let me outline a particular case. Two people have joint custody and each spends exactly half of his or her time with the child. Therefore, neither can claim the domiciliary care allowance, which is very unfair in the circumstances.

Deputy Regina Doherty: I totally agree with the Deputy. I thank him for raising the issue a second time. He raised it in the Dáil the other day. I agree with him that there is an anomaly in the system. The domiciliary care allowance, DCA, scheme works incredibly well, particularly after the reformation of the application form a number of years ago with the DCA Warriors. I acknowledge the tremendous work done by the DCA Warriors to simplify the scheme. As a result it now only takes five weeks from the time an application is made to when a person receives the award. The scheme is working and is very positive but the Deputy is right that there is an anomaly.

Under the conditions of the scheme a parent needs to satisfy that he or she has a continuous period of five days caring for his or her child over and above what normal parents do with normal, healthy and happy children. Unfortunately, we are all aware that family life today differs from what it was heretofore. I ask the Deputy to consider withdrawing his amendment with a view to working with us over the next couple of days to provide a formula of words to do exactly what his amendment seeks to do so that we can recognise the caring arrangements of week-on, week-off, a three or four weeks revolving rota, etc. We must ensure that if a child has care needs then, regardless of who provides the care on a rota basis, that the DCA is awarded. I want to put in a proper formula of words that will make it simple for us to administer.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: I appreciate the Minister’s response. The resources available to her are far greater than what are available to me. I am happy to withdraw my amendment on that basis.

Deputy Regina Doherty: I thank the Deputy and ask the Chairman for his indulgence. Deputy Broughan is not here and I know his amendment has not been moved. I want to assure the committee that the legislation never contained the word “unforeseen”. A number of years ago the word was inserted in departmental guidelines for practical purposes. Due to a particular case, and I think we all know the case, the word or set of words were removed from the guidelines by myself and my Department in January of this year and we now have reverted to the spirit of the legislation. Deputy Broughan’s amendment was attempting to do something but there is no need for it as the words have been removed from the guidelines and the practice has reverted to individual deciding officers making individual assessments on somebody’s presentable needs.

Chairman: I thank the Minister. Amendment No. 12 was not moved because the Deputy concerned was not here.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Section 12 agreed to.

NEW SECTION

Deputy John Brady: I move amendment No. 14:

In page 12, between lines 17 and 18, to insert the following:

“Review of carer’s allowance payment

13. The Minister shall conduct a review and lay a report before the Houses of the Oireachtas on the financial hardship faced by carers who must provide full-time care in order to receive carer’s allowance restricting them from taking up other work to supplement their income, examining their access to pension entitlements as well as the barriers to the labour market they face after a period of caring and that the report shall be presented to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Employment Affairs and Social Protection within 3 months of the enactment of this Bill.”.

This amendment seeks a review of the carer’s allowance in light of numerous issues that have been raised time and again by carers in this State. In particular, it relates to priorities set out by Family Carers Ireland in its pre-budget submission, which I am sure the Minister received and read. The Minister will be well aware of the issues facing full-time carers across the country who provide a phenomenal service and enable the State to save millions, if not billions, of euro on an annual basis through their caring duties. There are significant issues for carers, including financial constraints. They have to provide full-time care for a minimum of 35 hours per week but receive a mere €16 in addition to social welfare rates so they are providing a service for little or nothing. They are prevented from working or studying for more than 15 hours per week so they are unable to even complement the money they get to provide that care.

The report will be in line with what Family Carers Ireland have asked for. It would be beneficial if it was produced and brought before this committee so that we can see what we can do to address the issues carers have raised continually. The Minister needs to acknowledge the concerns of carers and can do so by accepting this amendment and carrying out this review.

Deputy Bríd Smith: I support the amendment. It would be a useful report for us to have in general. I do not have the figures in front of me but carers provide significant service to the State by providing full-time care at home. If we treated them better and took them more seriously, we would get a lot more out of the population in terms of minding those who need to be minded. It is far better to be minded at home than to be minded in a healthcare facility or hospital. I cared for my mother for a couple of years and was able to work 15 hours per week. I was doing some part-time work for my union at the time in the form of tutoring. It all worked well for me. My mother has since died but, following the care I provided, my sister cared for her for 15 years. My sister is now in her early sixties and has nowhere to go in the labour market. She has been discarded, which is depressing for her. A report could tell us a great deal about the role of women in society as well. It could have a more holistic vision of what we want to do for women and family carers. I worry that people like my sister could suffer ill-health because of the sense that having sacrificed so much of their lives doing something that is valuable to society, they are now useless and nobody cares about them. I am sure the Minister recognises the value of the work they, as do all of us, but the consequences of not having the facts, figures and an insight into it are that we will miss out on something.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: I am supportive of the final point made by Deputy Smith because one in 20 people in Ireland is a carer. The projections are that by 2030, that figure will increase

to one in five. A significant volume of unpaid caring work is provided free to the State. Various figures have been bandied around but the volume of unpaid caring carried out is a significant boon to the State. Only 25% of carers are in receipt of the carer's allowance, which means that 75% of carers do not get any payment for it or any recognition from the State. It is a rapidly growing phenomenon with which we must come to grips. A report like this would certainly be useful in formulating policy in that direction.

A number of points have been made to me and a number of points have been made by Family Carers Ireland in its various submissions, which we all read. First, carers, many of whom I know, and many of whom are working literally around the clock and hardly have time to go to mass, are only paid €16 per week more. I know they are paid the annual allowance of €1,700, which would enable them to take a break for a short time. I assure members that this break is badly needed in every case.

Second, there are concerns regarding the rigidity of the rules surrounding carers' ability to work. I have come across cases where somebody is working on a flexible basis. For example, they might work 12 or 13 hours per week, which means they are within the requirements for carer's allowance, but some weeks, they might work 17 hours. When one adds it up over the year, the person comes in with an average of less than 15 hours, yet because he or she worked more than 15 hours on one or two weeks, he or she is barred. That is wrong. I understand that if somebody is judged by the Department to be a full-time carer, there must be restrictions on his or her ability to work. Few people have the stamina, energy and time to be full-time carers and work at the same time but there is a need for flexibility and discretion. A report, as suggested by the amendment, could explore that. I have come across a number of case studies where poverty traps are beginning to emerge because of the rigidity of the 15-hour rule. I have one person in mind but I am sure I have several others on my books. This person came to me last week. She is a very active woman in her thirties who works as a special needs assistant, SNA. She is getting the carer's allowance for her disabled child and taking on SNA positions as they are offered to her. She has had to turn down work even though she badly needs the money and could work because she is young and wants to work as much as she can. She would be able to work more and thereby increase the family income, which is badly needed, but she is prevented from doing so by the rules.

Another point averted to in the amendment is the fact that sometimes when a middle-aged or elderly person is caring for somebody else and the caree dies, an easy and recognisable pathway back into the workforce is not there. On balance, a report along the lines suggested in the amendment would be useful. We must formulate policy because of demographics, etc., and we need all the help we can get. I do not know if a report along the lines suggested in the amendment could be done in three months. I would be flexible about that. However, such a report would be useful and we should have one.

Deputy Regina Doherty: I thank the Deputies for their contributions. Everybody in the Dáil or Seanad recognises and appreciates the caring that is provided by friends, family members and people in our communities up and down the country. All Members recognise that the country's common good could not survive without the thousands, if not millions, of hours given by those people to other neighbours, friends and family members every week of the year. The carer's payment is unique insofar it is an allowance towards an income; it is not a payment. Since arriving in this Department, I have often wondered how it ever came about over and above the provision of services on behalf of the State because that is the only reason it is in existence. It is not a payment because if it was, we would be paying pretty poorly for the volume

of work that is being done. That needs to be stated and recognised.

My Department has made changes in the past number of years. The income disregards have been increased. Deputy O'Dea mentioned the rules but there must be rules. If the rule did not involve 15 hours, it would involve 14 or 17 hours. There is a reason for rules. I know what he is saying and I agree with it.

We have tried to move in the last number of years to provide different supports. We now have health and safety training so we spend a couple of million euro every year trying to provide training courses and specific supports for carers so they can improve their safety, health and well-being during their caring years. We provide bereavement counselling after the person who is being cared for passes away. They are only small things but it is an effort to appreciate and recognise that wraparound support is needed for these people. There is also special training in our Intreo service for people who have been caring for a number of years and then, as Deputy Smith said, find themselves isolated or removed from the workforce. The training will help to integrate them back into the workforce.

I do not have a problem doing the report but it might not be exactly what the Deputy is seeking. When we do the report the Deputy might then say that the Department is doing X, Y and Z and the Department of Health is doing A, B and C, which will not look at where the gaps are. Rather than the Department doing a report in isolation, would the Deputy consider us having a series of hearings and perhaps have a body of work done, to which I will contribute, by the joint Oireachtas committee? The committee could have oral hearings and invite not only carers' associations and advocates but also carers themselves to hear at first hand what they are experiencing daily and what they would like us to do for them. It is not always just about increasing the payment each week. There are many more complexities involved. However, I do not have a problem doing a report. Deputy O'Dea is right that three months is probably pushing it a little given that there are other reports to be done. This might not work exactly the way we want it to in isolation and I believe there is value in opening it further if that is possible.

Deputy John Brady: Everybody here acknowledges the work carers do, the savings for the State and the issues that affect them. I have been struck over the last number of years by the number of young people who are providing a caring service for family members. The restrictions there are affecting them over the long term as well because they cannot study for more than 15 hours a week. There are also long-time carers who might be caring for over 20 years. That has an impact in terms of their pension entitlements. The impact of all that must be examined. Deputy O'Dea is correct that there is the carer's support grant but that amounts to only approximately €4.65 per day. It is welcome but when one boils it down it is not even half of the minimum wage per day, although I realise the intent of the grant was not to provide a wage but to give carers some respite.

The Minister said the committee could do a piece of work on it by inviting carers to appear before it and by examining this in a holistic way. That would be welcome. However, the difficulty is that we have done that already in numerous areas. The committee went through an exhaustive process in the case of lone parents. We invited in all the groups representing lone parents and we produced a comprehensive report which made clear recommendations on how to address the issues facing lone parents. The report had cross-committee support but, unfortunately, the vast majority of the recommendations have fallen on deaf ears. While that approach would be welcome, the difficulty is not having it in the legislation. I will press this amendment because enshrining it in the Bill will ensure the report is carried out. That does not preclude the committee carrying out work in parallel with that. The timeframe of three months might be a

little tight but we can look at that.

Deputy Regina Doherty: The work the committee did on lone parents was one of the committee's biggest successes. It provided a platform for lone parents to talk about the difficulties they have and particularly the prejudices they face in society. I disagree with the Deputy because the recommendations in the report were heard and heeded by the Department, particularly since I took office a couple of years ago. In every speech I have made in the Dáil, the Seanad and this committee I have spoken of the difficulties lone parents and their children face arising from the changes that were made in 2012. There are significant financial differences in the dis-regards as a result of changes in the last number of years, as recommended by the committee, and the qualified child increases warranted the improvements in the financial circumstances of lone parents, as recognised by the committee. The Deputy should not put himself down-----

Deputy John Brady: I am not putting myself down.

Deputy Regina Doherty: A tremendous amount of work was done by the committee and that was heeded by the Department and me. I am not sure what the Deputy wants. We will do the report but three months is not feasible given that there are other reports to be done. There are only so many people who can do reports in the Department. Is the Deputy concerned that if the committee does a report we will not heed it? If that is the case, there is the same concern if the Department does the report. What does the Deputy think will be different if the Department does the report or the joint committee carries out that exercise? I am not sure where his concern lies.

Deputy Bríd Smith: We should do both. The Department should produce a report in line with the amendment. This request is based on financial detail, hours of work and the like, whereas the committee could examine the issue in a more holistic way. We could invite representatives of the Carers Association, Age Action Ireland and various experts from different academic fields. I do not see how one precludes the other.

Chairman: It would be a matter for the committee to decide if it wishes to make it part of the work programme. The way the amendment is drafted means that the report is to be presented and then the committee would decide, as is the normal course of events.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I have no difficulty supporting the amendment but I am worried about the timeframe. Can the Deputy amend it to six months?

Deputy John Brady: Does the Deputy want me to amend it now?

Chairman: No, you can withdraw it and resubmit it on Report Stage with a reference to six months.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I will support it on Report Stage if it is six months rather than three.

Deputy John Brady: I will withdraw it and resubmit it with six months on the understanding that we will receive the Deputy's support. Otherwise, we will have to press it. To respond to the Minister on lone parents, some of the issues have been addressed but one of the key recommendations in that report was the establishment of a child maintenance service, and I have tabled an amendment regarding child maintenance which we will discuss shortly. That would deal with many issues that affect lone parents. I realise the Minister will kick that key recommendation over to the Department of Justice and Equality and say that is where the responsibility lies-----

Chairman: We can have that discussion in a moment. Amendment No. 14 is being withdrawn and is to resubmitted with a reference to a six month period on Report Stage.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Section 13 to 15, inclusive, agreed to.

Chairman: Amendment No. 15 is out of order as it involves a potential charge on the Exchequer.

Amendment No. 15 not moved.

Section 16 agreed to.

NEW SECTION

Deputy John Brady: I move amendment No. 16:

In page 14, between lines 11 and 12, to insert the following:

“Benchmarking of social welfare payment rates

17. The Minister shall consult with stakeholders on examining ways in which social welfare rates are increased with the aim of ensuring adequacy for all recipients and shall do so in quarter 1 of 2019.”.

This asks the Minister to engage with the key stakeholders when setting social welfare payments each year to ensure they are based on evidence and adequacy for recipients. Every year we seem to get to a point where certain rates are a political football. The approach is a fiver for all.

It does not look at how adequate the payments are and is not based on evidence. It is a political football, as we have seen over recent years. It must be evidence-based. As the Minister is aware, I have produced a Social Welfare Commission Bill 2018 which would remove the setting of rates from the Department and give them to the a social welfare commission which would oversee the whole area, engage with the key stakeholders and ensure any increases are evidence-based and are based in their adequacy for recipients. The amendment asks that the Minister meets with the key stakeholders so we can ensure that happens.

Deputy Regina Doherty: Every summer, and this predates my time as Minister, the Department holds a pre-budget forum in Dublin Castle where it listens to views of 45 different representatives of community, voluntary and employer representatives. They discuss their priorities and wishes for the budget the following year. The priorities that emerged in this year’s consultation included a higher rate of payment for dependent children aged 12 years and over. That message came through loud and clear and we were happy to examine it. Establishing a benchmarking of social welfare rates was an area that emerged from several people at that meeting. The budget 2019 €5 increase in the maximum weekly rate of social welfare payments to pensioners, lone parents, people with disabilities, workers on maternity or paternity leave and jobseekers are all above an inflation-rate increase, which is for the third year in a row.

As I said in my speech on budget day, now that the core rates have been restored in the main, it is time to fundamentally examine how we approach how they are set annually. The Deputy might be surprised, therefore, to find that I very much agree with him.

Other countries have shown that by doing this and instituting a process of benchmarking welfare rates typically use a system where the core rates are fixed each year, with reference to either market earnings, particular prices levels and indices, and this works very well. On a very snowy day in March this year, we launched the roadmap for pension reform. The Government had already committed to adopted benchmarking for pensions. I indicated that day that we would develop proposals to develop this commitment before the end of this year and we are on target to do this. My view, as I said on budget day, is that we should extend this to all core welfare rates. If a system was implemented, it would provide the context and the framework and it would be informed, measurable and evidence-based as to why a determination is reached on what a new social welfare rate should look like.

There are some concerns that we would have both an evidence-based determination of welfare rates and an additional political input, and that rather than having one new system there might be an amalgamation of the two. However, the system of the Low Pay Commission which was established several years ago works very well. I refer to its establishment and its composition of employers, employees and independent people. How the Oireachtas respects and carries out its wishes each year is a very good model that we could use in the future. I am very happy to say that while this amendment does not fulfil what I think the Deputy wants me to do, namely, to consult, which we already do. I do not need to be told in legislation to do what I already do, but it would be very worthwhile if we moved towards establishing a body which would do a proper analysis annually on what welfare rates should be and to be mindful of it. Therefore, I am happy to accept the amendment.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: I am heartened to hear this from the Minister because her predecessor, who is now Taoiseach, seemed wedded to the idea of linking social welfare increases to inflation. One cannot do this because many studies have shown that for people who are wholly or mainly reliant on social welfare, a different rate of inflation applies. They spend their money on the necessities of life, such as heating and food, where the inflation rate has far exceeded the overall inflation rate which includes the cost of yachts and Ferraris. Some formula must be worked out and I am glad that the Minister is thinking in that direction.

Deputy John Brady: I welcome that fact the Minister will accept the amendment. We need to move away from that system for all the reasons I outlined. All the organisations and, more importantly, the people who are in receipt of any type of payments, not simply pensions, want certainty. Phenomenal work is being undertaken by groups such as the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice to examine minimum essential standards. All that must be taken on board by the Minister. I am heartened to hear her reference the Low Pay Commission. She will be aware that the legislation I brought forward for a social welfare commission is based on the Low Pay Commission. Its composition is similar and it would consist of nine members who would take account of all the evidence and research by all the organisations. We need to move to that system. Has the Minister looked at this legislation? I think it would provide the basis to move forward. I must take her at her word that she wants this to be put in place and make the changes. She needs to give serious consideration to the legislation that is already there. Exhaustive work has been undertaken on it.

Chairman: The Deputy should stay on the amendment.

Deputy John Brady: Yes. This is also important and I would like the Minister to comment. All the non-governmental organisations with which I have engaged support the establishment of such a commission. I realise it is moving away from the amendment-----

Chairman: It is.

Deputy John Brady: -----however, it cuts to the heart of it.

Chairman: Let us stay with the amendment.

On the amendment, it is all fine benchmarking the increase in payments but, as I said on Second Stage, it is also important there is a whole-of-Government review of income thresholds for grants and other schemes which are effected by these increases which must be included overall.

Amendment agreed to.

Section 17 agreed to.

NEW SECTION

Deputy John Brady: I move amendment No. 17:

17. In page 14, between lines 20 and 21, to insert the following:

“Review of means testing of child maintenance payments

18. The Minister shall conduct a review and lay a report before the Houses of the Oireachtas on the financial effect of the consideration of child maintenance payments as household income in the means test for various social welfare payments and that the report shall be presented to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Employment Affairs and Social Protection within 3 months of the enactment of this Bill.”.

This refers to child maintenance being regarded as means in relation to social welfare payments which the Minister and I have discussed in the House. These payments should not be means tested.

Deputy Regina Doherty: I cannot accept this amendment for several reasons. Firstly, the Department does not distinguish between child maintenance and adult maintenance generally. The purpose of means testing social welfare payments is to ensure that when resources are targeted, they hit the targets at whom they are aimed, that is, the people who need them most. Social welfare legislation provides for the means testing of social assistance schemes to take into account all income into households and all assets belonging to the people who seek support from the State. Any income into a household must be seen as income, therefore, we do not differentiate between child and adult maintenance. However, we very much recognise that there is a cost associated with providing accommodation which is why there is an income disregard of €95 weekly towards housing.

We do not differentiate between child maintenance and adult maintenance but what we very much recognise is that there is a cost associated with providing a roof over one’s head. That is why there is an income disregard of €95 per week towards housing. Whatever is left in the maintenance payment is divided by 50% before we take the remaining portion as reckonable income into that household. Ironically, Deputy Brady has a later amendment relating to errant people who are not paying financially towards their children. We want to ensure that we have a system that is easier and more efficient for parents and we want to place it on a legal footing. In the main, it is women who have to chase the other parent for maintenance payments. I know other people in this chamber have an interest in that. At the same time, when somebody makes

a payment towards his or her child's welfare, Deputy Brady thinks the State should disregard that payment as if it is not being made and thereby diminish and discount the value of the parent who is contributing towards their child's upbringing support, care and maintenance. The Revenue Commissioners, the State and the laws of the land indicate that income is income. We have tried to be as flexible as we possibly can when determining disregards of that maintenance income into a household. We have what the Department believes is a fair system that recognises the contribution of both parents towards the upkeep of their children.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I am somewhat confused. Surely the amendment just seeks to commission a report. Deputy Brady is not entitled to propose a disregard of maintenance payments. He is simply proposing that there would be a report. I do not see why there would be any great difficulty with that. He has a fairly ambitious timeframe but, nevertheless, it is a problem that has been ongoing for some time. There seems to be a misunderstanding. I think the Minister misunderstood what I said as well on Second Stage. There is a disregard in place for a certain amount. I think it is €97.

Deputy Regina Doherty: It is €95.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I am sorry, it is €95. I have a few questions on that. The point I was trying to convey, perhaps badly, on Second Stage is that the rates of poverty among lone parents are dramatic, with deprivation levels of more than 50%. If one had a situation whereby maintenance was disregarded in the calculations for lone parent allowance, that would mean a family would be €95 a week better off. Surely that is the sort of targeting we are talking about.

Deputy Regina Doherty: They are €95 a week better off because it is disregarded.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I am sorry. I refer to the balance. They would be better off by the balance, by what the Minister is counting. Does she follow that?

Deputy Regina Doherty: Yes.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: Their net income would be more because the maintenance would be entirely disregarded. Is that not the sort of targeting we are talking about to lift that sector? If one wants to focus on poverty, then one should look at people with disabilities and lone parents. They are the two groups that especially stand out in terms of the statistics. By disregarding maintenance payments entirely one would increase the level of income of those very low income families. That would be a very good targeting measure. I do not know what it would cost but I imagine it would be very little in the overall context.

I do not know whether it is still official policy but some people in the Department seem to be of the view that if a woman - it is usually a woman - goes to court and goes through all the hassle and confrontation involved in getting a maintenance order, yet the order is not obeyed and the maintenance is not paid, why does the Department insist on assessing that as income? In practice, it only deters and discourages people from seeking maintenance. If one seeks maintenance, one's lone parent allowance is either not payable at all or payable in a diminished form and one might not be getting the compensating payment. Sometimes it can be very difficult to get money from some of those people. Surely that is a deterrent to seeking maintenance in the first instance.

What is the situation with maintenance recovery? Leaving politics out of it, all independent observers are of the view that some sort of independent maintenance recovery agency is necessary. What is the exact position in that regard?

Deputy John Brady: The Minister and I will probably never see eye to eye on this. When one looks at the statistics, it is evident that Deputy O’Dea is correct. People on disability payments and those in lone parent families are two of the categories where we have the highest poverty levels. It is difficult for a one-parent family to even try to get maintenance in the first instance. I will deal with that in due course. I take issue with the fact that maintenance is taken as income. Difficulties arise when maintenance is awarded and then not paid yet it is still taken as income even though the lone parent does not receive it. Significant issues arise in that regard and it would be helpful to have a report carried out which would set out clearly the impact that is having on parents and children in those situations. I acknowledge that the timeframe might be a bit tight but I will push the amendment.

Deputy Regina Doherty: I will answer two questions from Deputy O’Dea. First, that used to be the case but the practice was changed earlier this year for a number of reasons. We started looking at lone-parent families and the conditionality that was set and some of the precarious situations some women were put in and we addressed that. We also looked at the practice, which was not universally applied around the country, where some people were including the promise of a payment of maintenance in the overall assessment of means of the income of a household. Promise my eye. We only deal in hard facts so if there is no payment, there is no disregard. One cannot have a disregard that is not coming into a household so the practice has changed.

Deputy O’Dea and I had a conversation last week about our own involvement with the Department in maintenance recovery. I am conducting a review, which is very close to being finalised, as to what our input should be and what the conditionalities should be in particular for one-parent family payments. I expect that to be ready early in the new year and then to make determinations on it. If we are in, we should be all in. If we are not in, then we should be all out. I would value Deputy O’Dea’s advice on that when we come back with the report, perhaps after Christmas.

I am not in a position to accept the amendment for two reasons. First, there is no such thing as child maintenance. When court orders are made for maintenance they do not apportion X amount for children. If a maintenance order is made for €200 a week, it is not stated that €27 is for the mammy and the remainder is for the children. A maintenance order is made against the parent that is not living with the children. It would be very difficult for me to determine the impact on child maintenance of what the Deputy is trying to do when there are no data on that.

Chairman: I must interrupt the Minister. Is Deputy Brady leaving?

Deputy John Brady: Yes, I have to leave.

Chairman: Is the Deputy leaving immediately? I wish to get clarity.

Deputy John Brady: I am leaving but Deputy Martin Kenny is stepping in for me.

Chairman: I will be putting the amendment in Deputy Brady’s absence and I require clarity. Deputy Brady withdrew a previous amendment to resubmit it on Report Stage because he wants a six-month period rather than one of three months. Do Deputy Brady and his colleague intend to press the amendment as it is or will they withdraw it to resubmit it with a change to six months? I wish to ensure there is clarity for when Deputy Brady is gone.

Deputy John Brady: If there is agreement that I can withdraw the amendment and resubmit it on Report Stage with a change to the timeframe from three months to six months, I will

do so?

Chairman: I am sorry for interrupting the Minister but I wanted to clarify the position with Deputy Brady as he was leaving in order to be fair to him.

Deputy Regina Doherty: That is fine.

Chairman: I call Deputy Penrose and we will then hear from Deputy O’Dea.

Deputy Willie Penrose: This is an interesting argument. As somebody who practices in the courts, I am a bit taken aback by what was said about maintenance. The payment has to be child related because if a spouse seeks individual support, it will amount to €80 or €90 and then the court will look at the children. That is what we have to do. I recall doing that when working on a judicial separation. That is what is involved in making proper provision. One would argue for €30 or €35 for a child. The maintenance payment is severable. The argument I have is about even getting a court order when everything is in place. The judge orders someone to pay a certain amount, but that collapses after a month or six weeks. If the man does not pay the money, the judge then tells his spouse to come back in. The process starts all over again but in four months’ time, the person will still not have a penny. The Minister should grab the ball now. She is innovative; I will say that for her. She should grab this ball and maybe in this review, she should make sure that is incorporated. They would say in Westmeath, which is not too far away from where she is from, that the head is not worth the wash in terms of going after this.

If we do this, it will cut out this nonsense and will keep this away from courts. The Minister is dealing with a social protection system. People in this position are vulnerable and are struggling, so this is important. If Deputy Brady wants to bring it even closer to home, he can leave out the word “child” and just include the “maintenance” and change it to six months. This would be a valuable report.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: I am inclined to take the same view as Deputy Penrose. If the Minister is prepared to bring in an amendment on Report Stage with “six months” instead of “three months”, I would support it.

Deputy Regina Doherty: If I have to do a report, I will do it. It is no big deal. Deputy Brady will need to remove the words “child maintenance” as Deputy Penrose suggested. It would be impossible for me to do it otherwise.

Chairman: Deputy Brady has heard the consensus of the committee. Is he prepared to withdraw and resubmit the amendment?

Deputy John Brady: I will withdraw it and resubmit on Report Stage.

Chairman: The Deputy needs to include the words “maintenance” and “six months”.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

SECTION 18

Chairman: Amendments Nos. 18 to 23, inclusive, have been ruled out of order.

Amendments Nos. 18 to 23, inclusive, not moved.

Section 19 agreed to.

NEW SECTIONS

Chairman: Amendment No. 24 has been ruled out of order.

Amendment No. 24 not moved.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: I move amendment No. 25:

In page 15, after line 31, to insert the following:

“Impact of Brexit

20. The Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection shall, when complete, share the analysis being conducted by her Department on the impact of Brexit on the reciprocal arrangements for social insurance schemes, social assistance schemes and child benefit between Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.”.

This goes over what we discussed at Question Time last week. The effect of Brexit is giving rise to some concerns in the social welfare area. There are many people, and I gave the numbers last week in the Dáil, who are Irish residents and receiving social security payments from the British Government and *vice versa*. The Minister has assured us that this problem is being considered in depth within the Department and that various scenarios, etc., are being looked at. I want to ensure that when that analysis and study is completed, we will all get a look at it.

Deputy Regina Doherty: That is fine.

Chairman: Does anybody want to comment?

Deputy Martin Kenny: Deputy Brady tells me that he has raised this on a number of occasions by way of parliamentary questions to the Minister. He said that these payments are to be protected according to the withdrawal agreement as is, and this is welcome, but we need absolute certainty on this. There can be no limits on this. Not only pensions should be considered here but secondary payments, additional payments, should also be considered. It goes without saying that this analysis will be shared. If the Minister can confirm that it will be shared, then we will be happy to take her word on it? This is something that can be sorted out pretty easily.

Amendment agreed to.

Chairman: Amendment No. 26 has been ruled out of order.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: Can I comment briefly on that?

Chairman: The Deputy can, but it is out of order.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: I will be exceptionally brief. The Minister will be aware that in some parts of the country, there are more Tús workers on schemes now than community employment, CE, workers. Some concessions and flexibility have been extended to CE workers for an extension of their time. It seems illogical now that those same concessions would not be extended to Tús workers. I know that, strictly speaking, the amendment is out of order because technically it puts a charge on the Exchequer but in the interests of fairness and keeping some of those schemes going, etc., one should be treated like the other.

Chairman: Deputy O’Dea recognises he is out of order, but does the Minister want to comment on the point he made on that amendment?

Deputy Regina Doherty: Not really. I am not sure how I can be of any help. The two schemes are different. If we had a whole load of schemes with exactly the same rules and potential outcomes, we would have to ask why we did. Tús has a particular remit and CE schemes have a different one and that is why they have different rules.

Chairman: The Deputy will have to find another way of dealing with that issue.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: It simply means that an increasing number of schemes which are reliant mainly on Tús now will not be able to continue. That is the reality of it.

Chairman: I am not unsympathetic to the issue, but it is not being dealt with in the Bill.

Amendment No. 26 not moved.

Chairman: Amendment No. 27 has been ruled out of order.

Deputy Willie Penrose: Can I say something-----

Chairman: On which amendment?

Deputy Willie Penrose: -----briefly because I missed out as I was delayed this morning? The Minister, Deputy Doherty, spoke to me in the Dáil about an issue I brought to her attention about pensions, that is, that persons born after 1 September 1946 would have a review of pension entitlements. The changes brought in under this Bill are welcome. The review will take place for people born after 6 April 1946 and not from 1 September 1946. I asked the Minister take cognisance of this and to come back to me and, in fairness to her, she always does so. The issue is 6 April 1946 versus 1 September 1946. That will only affect a small number of people.

Deputy Regina Doherty: Yes.

Deputy Willie Penrose: It will be a very small number. I ask the Minister to try to review it before Report Stage because we need to include it in the legislation in some shape or form. I apologise but I was five minutes late with the amendment.

Deputy Regina Doherty: It is no problem.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: It is a small number, but they are very hard cases.

Deputy Willie Penrose: Very hard cases.

Deputy Regina Doherty: Deputies Penrose and O’Dea raised this issue in the Chamber last week. The only reason I did not table an amendment is that I am not 100% sure of the dates yet. If what the Deputy said is true, we will bring in an amendment on Report Stage. The Deputies do not have to worry. If it needs to be fixed, it will be fixed.

Deputy Willie Penrose: I will leave the Minister a note from a woman who contacted me.

Deputy Regina Doherty: That is great. Be absolutely assured that if the dates need to change, we will bring in an amendment.

Deputy Willie Penrose: It will not cost an arm and a leg. That is the only good thing.

Amendment No. 27 not moved.

Chairman: Amendments Nos. 28 to 30, inclusive, have been ruled out of order.

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Amendment Nos. 28 to 30, inclusive, not moved.

Sections 20 to 24, inclusive, agreed to.

Schedules 1 to 3, inclusive, agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill reported with amendments.

Message to Dáil

Chairman: In accordance with Standing Order 90, the following message will be sent to the Dáil:

The Select Committee on Employment Affairs and Social Protection has completed its consideration of the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2018 and has made amendments thereto.

I thank the Minister and her officials for attending today.

The select committee adjourned at 11.30 a.m. *sine die*.