



9th January 2012

Dear Minister Burton,

We are writing to you regarding the recent budget announcement which states that income from weekly Carer's Benefit and Carer's Allowance will be included when calculating entitlement to FIS. The Special Needs Parents Association have been inundated with frantic calls, letters and email from terrified parents and family carers who are desperately worried that their FIS will be cut from January 2012. Family carers of children and young adolescents with disabilities and who are in receipt of Carer's Benefit/Allowance but who also get FIS, do so because they are already classed as the lowest earners in the State. Their monthly budget is heavily reliant on FIS to simply make ends meet.

The Special Needs Parents Association is very concerned that this further financial burden will result in more children with special needs and disabilities being pushed even further down the poverty line. The reality for these families is that they will no longer be able to afford medicines, therapies, mortgages, transport to name but a few of the difficulties that arise on a daily basis, when parenting a child with disabilities especially given the changes to some of these schemes in Budget 2012.

In reality, how can these families be expected to tighten their belts even further and forego paying essential supports for their child and their families when in some cases they are already living below the poverty line? We feel that it is a huge error to align conditions for calculating Carer's Allowance with FIS in the same way as other Social Welfare Payments. The Department may view this as establishing equality across the level of payments, but in effect this is not realistic given the confining conditions of those in receipt of Carers Allowance/Benefit v's Jobs Seekers Allowance. These families are already at a huge disadvantage where the carer in receipt of the allowance is not in a position to be in full-time employment or indeed a position to actively seek employment because of the demands on their time in caring for their children.

When the Budget was announced, Minister Howlin stated, "*I believe that we have a duty to protect the most vulnerable in society and to provide a safety net of social protection, in what are very extraordinary times*". The Special Needs Parents Association feels that the Government is not providing a safety net, but is failing in it's duty of care to this small portion of Carer's who already save the state millions by



Special Needs Parents Association
Bringing Parents Together
www.specialneedsparents.ie

caring for their children in their homes, with little or no help from outside agencies that should be providing services. While we appreciate that your Department has safeguarded the basic social welfare rates, the anomaly which affects 300 families (by your own estimates) will only save the Department on average €200,000, but consideration must be given to the cost incurred by these families that put them at a disadvantage from the outset. We must be mindful that we are dealing with families where other factors already put an undue level of psychological and financial stress on the parents.

We would appreciate a meeting with you to discuss these issues further on behalf of the families that have contacted us to date and to seek a resolution under what we appreciate are already constrained budgetary considerations within the Department of Social Protection.

Yours Sincerely,

p.p. Lorraine Dempsey
Chairperson

p.p. Patricia Houlihan
Vice Chairperson



Eoin Kelly

Secretary, Special Needs Parents association



special needs parents
association



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