

2016.12.12

6 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Social Security regarding the withholding of Income Support payments: [9758]

Will the Minister advise how many income support claims have been subject to the withholding of benefit paid through (a) sanctions, (b) overpayment charges, (c) Household Medical Account payments, and (d) loan repayments on special payments; and will she provide the total sum withheld in the first quarter of 2016?

Deputy S.J. Pinel (The Minister for Social Security):

While the Deputy has grouped these 4 individual areas of income support into a single question they represent very different aspects of benefit, each of which requires its own explanation. They are not directly comparable to each other. Even so, a detailed analysis of individual claims would need to be undertaken to fully answer each part and it is not realistic to undertake this volume of work within the timetable set for an oral question. As it is not possible to explain each of these 4 areas within the recommended time for an oral answer I am happy to circulate some written notes on these topics to Members before the next States sitting.

3.6.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is that written notes not answers? Are they going to contain the answers I requested in January? Is a month not enough time to do this work?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

As I said in my answer, it is a huge amount of work to undertake and with Christmas in the middle, with not everybody working at full capacity across the Island, then I think it would be quite reasonable to get written notes to the Deputy and also to the other Members of the Assembly before the next States sitting.

3.6.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

I find this a bit strange because if you have a fully computerised system which works, which we were led to understand existed down at Social Security, why is it taking so long to produce the figures?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

It was an oral question which we received on I think it was Wednesday or Thursday with ... and I have already spoken to the Deputy about it, I emailed him this morning to say that it was not going to be possible to give him all the information he needed. I do not want to make a stab in the dark at this sort of information. I never do. It needs to be concise and it will take that time to accumulate the information. The Deputy said that it should have been a written question in which case we would have had more time to have done it.

3.6.3 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

But a written question only gives you about 2 or 3 more days. If you have got a proper computer system you should be able to just have a search mechanism and get it quite quickly.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am sorry, was that a question?

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Does the Minister not think that?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

If it was that simple there would have been a short and concise answer to Deputy Southern's question. I have already explained that we cannot do it in that timeframe.

3.6.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I am reasonably happy to wait until 31st January. I am sure the team can get moving by then. But can I ask for a specific example on one aspect of that, which is sanctions? I am surprised to learn from her written answer to a written question that there are some 461 individuals who received a sanction for leaving work without good cause. This means that they do not get their personal component, £92 a week, for 13 weeks. Is she confident that assessment of these cases, which are effectively very serious - you lose something like £1,200 of your benefit over a period of time - the system she uses, these cases are rigorously and thoroughly investigated in each and every case and not just ladled out as and when?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

Of course I am completely sure that every individual case will be examined very carefully, but there has to be some sanctions when the Back to Work team spend so much time, effort, concern in finding people jobs and if there is not a good reason to leave them there has to be a sanction.