

**2.5 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Social Security regarding the exclusion of utility bills from special payments for those on Income Support:**

Will the Minister inform Members whether utility bills are excluded from special payments for those on income support and, if so, what justification can he offer for this exclusion?

**Senator P.F. Routier (The Minister for Social Security):**

The components that make up the regular weekly income support benefit already cover the cost of utility bills. In addition, income support provides for winter fuel payments to pensioners, families with young children and individuals with high personal care needs. There is therefore no need for special payments to be used to meet utility bills.

**2.5.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Can the Minister inform Members in which of the components the provision for utility bills is made, and can he say whether anyone having hardship with meeting a utility bill in winter months and ineligible because not being a pensioner or not being a household, where do they turn to if they are faced with a relatively large bill which they cannot immediately afford?

**Senator P.F. Routier:**

The amount of money for ordinary weekly amounts of money which people spend comes within the ordinary adult component. That is where the money would be found to pay that bill. I recognise that some people do have a difficulty with budgeting for bills which come on a quarterly basis or whatever, but the utility companies do have systems which enable people to budget for that. If there is a need for somebody to have additional help my department can help them budget across a number of weeks to help them to meet that. Also, the Parishes do still continue to offer cash payments to assist them in budgeting. I mean, we do have a number of Parishes who do manage cash payments for some individuals.

**2.5.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

If I may, Sir, a supplementary: so a person who finds themselves with a larger than expected utility bill in the winter for the heating and who is faced with a choice of either turning off their heating and becoming ill will not be paid by... is completely ineligible to claim for such a payment out of social security but instead is supposed to go along - and I see some Constables shaking their heads - to welfare to claim a cash payment. Is that the case? Is that what he said?

**Senator P.F. Routier:**

That is not what I said, no. What I was identifying was that the Parishes and my department both help people on a weekly basis to manage their funds. We do that... the point is that utility bills are covered within the weekly payment which is made to people. On top of that, pensioners, families with young children and people with high impairment component do receive an additional payment for additional costs for fuel bills during the winter months. I think the Deputy will be aware that when we debated the income support proposals, he is very aware of what was in the special payments because the...

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

I am sorry, I think that is getting a little long that answer.

**2.5.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

If I may have a final supplementary, Sir. Is the Minister aware that in previous times under the old welfare system, the safety net would, on occasion, meet a sudden unexpected high utility bill from Parish welfare and if people did go to welfare they could receive some payment, that has now stopped. Is that what the Minister is saying?

**Senator P.F. Routier:**

I am very well aware the Parishes used to pay one-off utility bills for some people. That was in the case in general terms when people would ordinarily qualify for quite a low level of welfare on a regular basis. The Parishes used to have a mechanism which would say: "Well, we will not pay you so much a week, come along when you have a utility bill and we will pay that for you." So what we have done with the new system is to ensure that those people who the Parishes were helping... the Deputy is laughing, I am not quite sure why.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

I would not worry about that. Just carry on with your answer.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

I am seeing Constables shaking their heads still.

**Senator P.F. Routier:**

Anybody that used to receive those sort of payments and that have been made aware to us, because we were not aware that there was not any sort of formal recognition within the Parish systems when people moved over to us about this, we have put in place a regular payment for any of those individuals to have a small amount of weekly payment, and we will assist them in budgeting for those utility bills.