

2015.06.16

5.11 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of the Minister for Social Security regarding the lone-parent component of income support:

Would the Minister consider amending the Income Support (Jersey) Law 2007 to allow single parents to continue to receive the lone-parent components of income support after their child turns 19, so long as their child is still in full-time education?

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

Members will be aware that we are in a period when States departments have been given a clear objective to limit any expansion to their budgets and, indeed, a target of achieving substantial savings in order to meet the demands of the next Medium-Term Financial Plan. At a time when all benefit expenditure is under review I do not think it would be sensible to pre-empt these challenging decisions by reviewing any one component of income support in isolation for the overall levels of support available to a household. At present, officers from my department are working hard to find proposals to meet our M.T.F.P. (Medium-Term Financial Plan) responsibilities. They are still a work in progress but details will be communicated to Members as soon as possible. I would like to thank Members for their patience in awaiting further detail of these changes. I can, however, confirm that a parent of a young child in full-time education on-Island is supported through the weekly payments of the basic adult component of £92.12 in respect of that young adult, as well as additional help towards their reasonable accommodation costs.

5.11.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

There was an aspect of that answer that frankly I was astounded by. Would the Minister agree that the current situation where it cuts off at the age of 19 is unnecessarily arbitrary and does not take into account individual families' different circumstances? Does she believe it is right that families with one parent will be the ones having to bear the brunt of a budget restraint, as she has suggested?

Deputy S. Pinel:

No, the lone-parent component was designed to offer increased financial support to single parents with a child or children. When a child reaches compulsory school-leaving age, which is the end of the school year in which they have their 16th birthday, they switch from receiving the child's rate of income support to the higher rate of adults. This increases the amount the parent receives for them from £63.98 to £92.12. Despite this, the decision was taken to extend the lone-parent component until a young adult's 19th birthday. This was done in order to maintain the additional support until the end of the secondary education.