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3.10 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of the Minister for Social Security regarding the impact of the phasing-out of the lone-parent component of Income Support on single-parent households living in relative low income:

Can I thank Members for allowing me to take this question last; I was held up by a personal matter that I had not foreseen occurring. In the light of the figures revealed in the Jersey Household Income Distribution 2014/15 Report, what impact, if any, will the phasing-out of the lone-parent component of income support have on the number of single-parent households living in relative low income?

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

Phasing-out the single-parent component of income support is one of a package of measures approved by the States as part of the overall Medium Term Financial Plan. In all, benefit changes will release an extra £10 million to be invested in the key areas of health and education as well as supporting economic growth. Investment in local employment, both through the department's own Back to Work programme and the broader strategic priority, is aimed at creating job opportunities that single parents will be able to take up to help them to improve their total household income. At the same time, investment agreed as part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan will support new services within health and education, well-targeted at groups who need the most help. For example, growth funding in the M.T.F.P. will allow the Education Department to set up a pupil premium scheme. This will be introduced from the beginning of 2016 providing extra educational resources to individual pupils from low income families, including single-parent families. The impact of the growth in health and education provided through the M.T.F.P. will take some time to be seen in government statistics and will be reflected in many areas, not just that of household income. Overall, I am confident that the package of measures agreed through the M.T.F.P. will have a positive impact on local families, including single-parent families, over the next 5 years.

3.10.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

A supplementary. The figure itself from the income distribution survey is that 56 per cent of single-parent families are living in relative low income. Does she consider this number to be acceptable and, if she does not, does she accept that it is a failure of her department, given that most of these people, or at least a significant number of these people, will be relying on income support to help make ends meet? Does she not consider that to be a failure of her department and policy?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

No, I do not. What the Deputy is quoting is the 56 per cent of one-parent families and the percentage of income from employment. If he compares that with a couple with children with 93 per cent income from employment, a couple with no children 92 per cent income from employment and a single person with 86 per cent income from employment, the whole reason behind trying to encourage people back into work is to increase their income from employment not just to survive on benefits. **[Approbation]**

3.10.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Let me get this straight: the policy of the department is to take money away from the most vulnerable in society, those who probably require the most input from health and education, and use that money that we are taking away from them to pay for health and education rather than taking it from the most able-to-pay in our society? Is that a policy which the Minister is comfortable with?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

I think the Deputy would agree that everybody requires the necessity of health at some stage in their lives and also young people, which is totally pertinent to single parents, require education, and often increased help with that education, which is exactly where these savings are directed.

3.10.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

I do agree with that, but the Minister must surely say that if we need to increase money, not simply stand still in the vital areas of health and education, we do not do it on the back of the poor but we look to those in our society who benefit the most from economic growth who are at the top end of the income gap not the bottom end. That is where we should be seeking to get the buy-in so that we can improve services for all by doing it that way. Does the Minister not agree?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

As I said in my opening remarks, this is a complete package of savings which will be directed at health and education for the benefit of the greater society. It will have an impact but we will not know immediately what the impact will be on the lower income families. This survey has taken 5 years, so it will not be able to be assessed immediately. I think, as Deputy Mézec said in his opening remarks in the last question to the Chief Minister, you cannot adjust or appreciate a one-year trend.

3.10.4 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Can the Minister explain in very good maths: I am a single parent, I have 2 or 3 children, I work part-time and the Minister has just taken away £40 a week; can she tell me how many hours I have to work extra with the 23p disregard, to make up that £40, and where do I put my children at the same time?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

The Deputy is not correct in that the £40 is being removed immediately; it is being reduced over the next 4 years by £10 a week so as to avoid that immediate removal of £40 a week. The information has been published: a single parent with one child can attain £470 a week in benefits. A couple with one child can attain £522 a week; the difference being the adult component/2 single adult components. The child component is the same whether it is one, 2 or 3 children; each child will receive £64 a week. The household component is the same and the rent is the same for 2 adults with one child or one adult with one child.

3.10.5 Deputy J.A. Martin:

A supplementary. Figures do tell very different stories. Can the Minister please state for the rest of the Assembly and people listening, those figures quoted for the one parent/2 parents include the rent, which is probably over half of that amount?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

Yes, I can confirm that. For example, obviously, rentals for 2-bedroomed flats will differ, but an average of £223 a week, and that is, in most circumstances, paid to the landlord.

3.10.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can I say how disappointing it was not to see the Minister at the presentation of the income distribution survey, which 5 people have now attended in total from this Chamber. Notwithstanding that, if the Minister 6 weeks ago, when she came with her cuts package, had said to this Assembly: "The proportion of one-parent families has gone up over the past 5 years from 40 per cent to 56 per cent of those living in relative low income and therefore at risk of poverty."

[11:15]

What I propose to do is take £2,000 a year off those families to make them worse off, would Members have voted for that proposal? I do not believe they would in a month of Sundays. However, we did pass it because we did not have that information. The Minister steamrollered her proposals through without the evidence that we needed.

The Bailiff:

The question, Deputy?

Deputy G.P. Southern:

The question is: does she accept that that figure of 56 per cent less £4,000 might mean something like 80 per cent of single-parent families are now living in relative low income and at risk of poverty?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

May I please correct the Deputy? A presentation on the household income distribution survey, because it is so pertinent to Social Security, was made to Social Security. To say that the Social Security Department in the propositions for the M.T.F.P. removed £2,000 unwittingly from those lone parents, it is not beyond the wit of man to do the sums that if the lone-parent supplement or component is going to be removed by £40 per lone parent over 4 years, then that will come to £2,000. It is not £2,000 a year.

The Bailiff:

A final supplementary?

Deputy G.P. Southern:

A final supplementary, if I may.

The Bailiff:

Sorry, it is not your final supplementary.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can I have a supplementary then?

The Bailiff:

You may have a supplementary, Deputy.

3.10.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister made much of extra money going into education; the educational bonus is going to be occurring partly because of her savings. Does she not accept the likelihood that the best outcome of that is that educational bonus ends up getting paid towards providing a breakfast for each primary school child who comes to school because these families will not be providing breakfast because they will not be able to afford it?

Deputy S.J. Pinel:

I think the Deputy is referring to my remarks about the pupil premium and this is something that has been introduced into the U.K. to the tune of £2.5 billion a year. We cannot access that sort of funding but we can bring about a level of entitlement for those disadvantaged pupils in our schools in line with those identical disadvantages in the U.K. resulting in higher standards achieved. The whole range of methods that have been tested and evaluated to raise standards... the department from those will select these as appropriate, and it is likely to include the booster classes, one-to-one tuition, peer mentoring, teacher training and teaching assistants. Thank you.

The Bailiff:

A final supplementary?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

No, Sir.