

2020.03.24

10 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Social Security regarding the prospective widening of the eligibility criteria for Income Support during the Coronavirus situation: (OQ.92/2020)

Will the Minister agree to widen the eligibility criteria for income support in order to alleviate any hardship caused by the response to the coronavirus and the anticipated reduction in income for many families in the short and long term and, in particular, to prevent any threat of evictions caused by rent arrears; and if not, why not?

Deputy J.A. Martin (The Minister for Social Security):

I apologise to the Assembly in advance if I repeat, because we have had 3 questions and it is absolutely right that I repeat. The challenge of coronavirus is one that we can only deal with as an Island working all together. Our existing income support system helps Islanders with rent costs and will continue to do so. Costs may rise significantly in the next few months and you have heard 200 and [then another] 200 people, so that is in 2 days. New Government support is being designed to help workers and businesses cope with significant restrictions on economic activity and further details of the wage subsidy scheme will be announced later this week. The courts have announced that no eviction proceedings will be approved during this time. Statutory protection for tenants against evictions is also being actively considered, to ensure that nobody is put at risk of losing their home as a result of the coronavirus. Businesses have already played their part and will continue to do so. Banks have agreed to provide mortgage holidays as needed and letting agents have confirmed they understand there will be some disruption in rent.

The Bailiff:

Just pause, Deputy. I just want to make sure that we are quorate. It is quite difficult to conduct a count. Yes.

3.10.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Could the Minister inform Members what eligibility criteria have been changed, if any, for qualification for income support?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Deputy Southern is well versed in the very long form that we have at the moment and, as I say, it is a form that can be done on one side of A4: name? where did you work? Tick, and we can process. I think it may need a phone call to know that it is a person and not a computer and then we want to get the money out there.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister still has not answered the question, which is: what eligibility criteria have been widened, or changed, in order to produce this 2 sided A4 form?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

I am sorry if I did not understand. Eligibility is the same. What we will be asking for is speed, which is completely different.