



26th February, 2021

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is [REDACTED], and I'd like to offer my comments on the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Strengthening Income Support) Bill 2021. I can see that the miniscule proposed increase to JobSeeker has faced an intense backlash from professionals across every social service - from those working with the homeless, to at risk-youth, to specialists in domestic violence. I'm certain you have enough appeals to your collective humanity and sense of decency, and for this reason, I'm going to make this submission primarily about something else: economics.

I'm an immigrant and a brand new Australian; I left a dangerous and unstable nation, which is no longer able to provide basic social services. Seeking medical care can bankrupt someone, any support for parents and families is reliant on the generosity of an employer, and protection from daily mass gun violence is a matter of debate, while children are executed at their primary school desks. I left at age seventeen, hoping for conditions to improve after the 2008 financial collapse.

I wasn't able to finish the degree I came to Australia to study, but I was able to find gainful employment off the back of administrative and legal skills I gained at university. Once I applied for Permanent Residency, for the first time in my life, I could access healthcare without sacrificing other essentials like food, rent, or bus fare. Birth control which eliminated my PCOS symptoms, improved my professional productivity and mental health immediately.

It would be five more years, before I found out that the day my application for PR was approved, I already had cancer in the centre of my spinal cord.

I spent my twenties getting sicker and sicker, and no one could tell me why. I began to rely on Newstart, as it was the only way for me to survive when I couldn't keep up with a full-time corporate position anymore.

The years I spent on Newstart were a hell so unspeakable, I can only say that I would prefer my cancer come back than to face life on the payment again, as a spinal tumour would be far less dehumanising than the daily realities of 'employment services' providers and forced, gruelling poverty which Newstart perpetuates.

I couldn't afford decent food, or sometimes food at all, nor could I afford to go to any non-bulk-billed specialists, something which may have led to a diagnosis in time to save my legs. My capacity to work dropped to zero, and I didn't have enough to maintain basic office clothing, or transport to job interviews. After twelve months on Newstart, I had been rendered completely unemployable - a feat not even cancer had been able to achieve.

I was placed in fraudulent training by [REDACTED], which claimed that if I completed a week of 'unpaid on the job training', I was guaranteed a job - it turns out, there was never any job. I was threatened when I turned down work spinning signs on the street, and handing food samples out in shops over an hour from my home. When they finally did find me work which would be possible, I was verbally abused by the unstable woman who owned the business - she was then abusive towards the employment agency, who was forced to immediately drop her from their client list. No further action was taken, yet two others before me had left on the first day, citing abusive behaviour.

In 2018, I was finally diagnosed, and a successful surgery effectively cured me. On the morning before my operation, I told my doctor that I was worried, as I had no money to pay him, or for my hospital stay. He became visibly upset, and said only "We don't do that to people here.". I escaped with my life, but because the condition was allowed to advance to such an extent, the damage meant I had to learn how to walk, write, and care for myself again.

After beating cancer, I went head-to-head with insurance companies, and Centrelink to qualify for DSP. I was fortunate - Centrelink only took six months to process my application, and I needed to beg my Member of Parliament for help only once!

The Australian people paid into a common fund, so that I could see my 27th birthday. They cured my cancer, bathed my paralysed body, and taught me how to write my own name. They held me as a I wept, grieving losses no young person should sustain. The Department of 'Human' Services however, informed me that unless I was able to unhook myself from the machines and physically attend an interview for Sickness Allowance, not only would my application be denied, but Newstart would also be revoked.

January marks the third anniversary of my surgery - and it's a special one.

On November 1st of this year, I will become so wealthy, that all my future needs will be provided for. The additional few hundred dollars per fortnight given to DSP recipients, meant that for the three years it's taken to settle a suit against negligent doctors, I could pay for my medicines, transport, and even some decent food. Although the payment is still not a reflection of how much it costs to be disabled in an inaccessible world, it was at least enough for me to survive.

This settlement will pay the Australian people back for many costs related to my care while I was sick. It will ensure future costs are heavily subsidised, and that I have the accessibility accommodations I need to give everything I have, back to the community who caught me when I had nothing more to offer it but myself. Do not mistake my emotive appeals for that alone - they speak to an economic reality, pure and simple.

In an alternate timeline, one in which I'm left to wither and die on Newstart, this settlement does not exist. Any capacity for me to work, pay tax, buy a home, have a family - drops to zero. My story ends how many do, when the people condemned to unnecessary poverty finally give up, and are lost to deaths of despair.

Why do the Australian people so ubiquitously believe in my value as a human being, when their government fought to keep me in poverty?

Why do we pay wealthy representatives almost two hundred dollars a day to work away from home, if jobseekers need absolutely nothing to leave theirs to find a role?

Why do I know that one million job seekers don't fit into one hundred thousand available jobs, but the nation's top brass lacks the skill to reach the same conclusion?

Perhaps government could use some job training - I know just the people who can help.

Regards,
