



3 November 2023

Standing Committee on Community Affairs
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Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600
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Dear Chair,

Inquiry into the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Bill 2023

Single Mother Families Australia, previously the National Council of Single Mothers & their Children, welcomed the establishment of an Interim Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee. We believe there is potential to contribute to the economic inclusion and well-being of the Australian Community.

Moreover, we acknowledge the extensive report produced in a tight timeframe. I particularly thank the Committee that identified the ParentsNext Program and the Activity Test for the Child Care Subsidy as examples of where the social security rules and the system reduce rather than enhance economic inclusion - a reality experienced by women that causes additional hardship and disadvantage for children.

I further welcomed the Committee's recommendation to remove the Maintenance Income Test from calculating Family Tax Benefit Part A for child support customers. A practice that negatively affects over 1 million children but is often treated as a marginal issue. I highlight these matters as they also speak to established structures that reduce individual agency and choice whilst enacting ever-increasing burdens and controls with inherent gendered disadvantages. Moreover, at times, the system embodies the hallmarks similar to a family and domestic violence dynamic; it is particularly paralysing for victim-survivors of gendered violence.

Furthermore, SMFA fully supports the recommendation to increase Jobseeker and understands the critical urgency surrounding the inadequate payment levels. However, the recommendation arrived with an implied assumption that Jobseeker was suitable for current and future claimants. We at Single Mother Families Australia oppose this assumption, and a superior policy approach for parents is access to a Parenting Payment but at a level that protects women and children from poverty. Our position grants visibility to the motherhood penalty; it is embedded in the needs and ambitions of single mothers

1 | Page



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and with the explicit intention to interrupt contemporary policy approaches that, for too long, have been underpinned by stigma, prejudice and control.

SMFA feels that the heavy representation of economists in the Interim Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee obscures the lived experience of economic exclusion and engagement with the benefit system, such as is experienced by single mothers. This is particularly the case for people with intersecting disadvantages, including experiences of family violence, English as a second language, disabilities, and indigeneity.

SMFA remains grateful that strides were made to enhance single mothers' financial security, which was featured in the May 2023 Federal Budget. Our analysis shows that the last time a Federal Budget invested in single mother families was in 1989.

With the small opening commentary, we affirm the tremendous opportunity that can be achieved through an Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee. Still, we also believe there is capacity for enhancement.

Recommendations.

1. The Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee is supported to continue and to perform the roles prescribed in the Terms of Reference and as expected by the Australian Community.
2. Review the composition, structure and processes of the Committee to ensure that people who live without economic inclusion inform the deliberations and influence the recommendations.

Thank you for allowing us to express our views, and we wish you well with your deliberations.

Warm Regards,

Terese Edwards

Chief Executive

