

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs

FAMILY ASSISTANCE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (EXTEND FAMILY ASSISTANCE TO ABSTUDY SECONDARY SCHOOL BOARDING STUDENTS AGED 16 AND OVER) BILL 2019

PUBLIC HEARING 30 AUGUST 2019

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Family Tax Benefit

Question reference number: QoN 1

Member: Siewert

Type of question: Hansard page 14

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Number of pages: 2

Question:

SENATOR SIEWERT: Have you also made changes to be able to access FTB? Is that also an issue? I got the impression that's also been a problem.

Ms Mitchell: I'd have to take that on notice

Answer:

The Department of Human Services (the Department) has a range of ways for customers to claim Family Tax Benefit (FTB). This includes the online claim (which pre-populates existing customer information), using a paper claim form or claiming with the assistance of a Service Officer over the telephone or face to face at a Service Centre. During the 2018-19 financial year and the 2019-20 financial year to date, over 76 % of FTB claims were completed online and over 14% over the phone.

For customers located in rural and remote Australia, the Department has recently improved services at Agents and Access Points by delivering better internet connectivity, Wi-Fi access and telephony infrastructure. This assists customers with access to the Department's online and telephony channels.

In relation to the measure *Extend Family Assistance to ABSTUDY Secondary School Boarding Students Aged 16 and Over*, the Department will make changes to the Families system to allow access to FTB to continue when a student is paid ABSTUDY and studying away from home. From 1 January 2020, subject to the passage of legislation, customers' FTB payments will no longer be cancelled when ABSTUDY is granted.

Families currently receiving FTB will not need to do anything. System changes will be made so the customer's FTB payment will automatically include any child who is over 16, studying away from home and receiving ABSTUDY assistance. A letter will be sent to the FTB customer to confirm this change.

For families not currently receiving FTB, the Department will use available information to pre-populate the FTB claim and a letter will be sent confirming details of payment. If additional information is required, the Department will call the customer to finalise the claim over the telephone where possible. After two attempted calls, if the contact is unsuccessful the Department will send a letter.