

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

Public Hearing – 31st August 2017

Question 4

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Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. When we had the departments in yesterday, they confirmed that the demerit process will apply across the streams, including stream C, which I'm particularly concerned about, because it is the most complex and most vulnerable members of our community who are on income support. I wonder, have you looked at the consequences through the streaming process and, if not, could you take on notice what possible amendments could be made to this particular schedule that could actually deal with those issues? I think I take from the evidence at the moment that there's overall agreement that the compliance system needs to be fixed, because we're seeing a lot of people in breach for eight weeks—No Show, No Pay et cetera—but that this is going to have unintended consequences and there are going to be people worse off. It seems to me that it's that most vulnerable cohort, in the end, that are going to be worse off. Would you mind taking on notice whether you think it is able to be amended to address the issues that you have?

Ms de Chastel: Yes, sure. We can take that on notice.

CSSA Response:

There needs to be some leeway to accommodate the diversity of issues facing the most vulnerable people who are unemployed and in Stream C. As a first step CSSA suggests that there be some allowance for initial wavers of noncompliance where there are deemed to be reasonable grounds. The current proposal does not allow for consideration of individual circumstances for the first round of wavers. The reasons for non compliance could be reasonable and lead to referrals for assistance to that person.

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Senator SINGH: ... I want to move to some of the impacts in this legislation on older Australians. Firstly, what barriers do older Australians face when looking for work?

Ms de Chastel: As Father Frank said, there are high unemployment rates at the moment. We know that workplaces often prefer younger people over older people, so I think accessing the labour market can be quite difficult. You're often seen as only having a few more years left of your career. Yes, I think it is a very difficult market for older people when there is very high unemployment but also a lot of underemployment in the workforce.

Father Brennan: We haven't given detailed consideration to schedule 9, but we'd be happy to take it on notice.

Ms de Chastel: Yes. We haven't looked at that in great detail, but we're happy to get it back to you.

CSSA Response:

Older Australians face a number of barriers in the employment market, including – currency of skills and training, knowledge of technology and ability to adapt to a new workplace area. The current unemployment rate is between 5-6% and underemployment is high so it is a competitive job market that can favour younger, more skilled workers.

Thanks and kind regards**Liz de Chastel**

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The national network of Catholic social services

CSSA acknowledges that we walk on the traditional lands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We pay our respects to them, especially to their elders past and present, and recognise the continuing gift of their cultures to the life and spirit of Australia.