

10 October 2017

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

**Submission on the Migration Amendment (Prohibiting Items in Immigration
Detention Facilities) Bill 2017**

My name is William Ho. I am a member of a group of volunteers called Supporting Asylum Seekers Sydney (SASS) who have been visiting the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre (Villawood) once a week for over 4 years. The main purpose of our visits is to provide emotional support to the detainees, and from time to time, to support them with practical matters including bringing them suitable clothing and personal hygiene items.

I am gravely concerned about, and therefore oppose to, the proposed Bill, in particular, that the Minister will have the power without seeking parliamentary approval to determine that certain items are 'prohibited things' and therefore cannot be taken into Immigration Detention Centres.

The proposed changes give excessive power to the Minister to determine what is prohibited without any checks and balances. The Minister should not be given the authority to deny detainees items that are necessary for their physical needs, such as suitable food, which may affect their physical and mental wellbeing.

Each week, our volunteers bring in food to share with the detainees. However, even though the bill is yet to be passed, from our experience with recent visits to Villawood, DIBP/SERCO already put in place policies banning the following items:

- certain type of food including fruits, breads, home cooked meals and food that are not 'Australian-made'
- paper, pens, notepads or any writing materials.

In addition, DIBP/SERCO officials arbitrarily determine the quantity of food visitors are allowed to bring into the centre each week. The same amount of food items deemed appropriate on one visit may be considered too much on another visit.

Through this submission, I would like to record my opposition to this unnecessary Bill which, if passed, will add great distress to a group of already desperate people who are merely seeking a safe place to call home.

Yours sincerely

William Ho