

22 July, 2012

RE: Social Security Legislation Amendment (Fair Incentives to Work) Bill 2012

Dear Committee members,

I am writing to urge you to reconsider the Governments proposed welfare cuts that will have a negative impact on sole parents and our children.

By cutting sole parents off our (grandfathered) Parenting Payment when our youngest child turns 8 will simply further entrench our poverty and the stigma attached to being a single mother.

The Government is undervaluing our role as primary carers and sole providers.

Policy is ignoring the barriers we face as sole parents trying to secure employment whilst managing a household on our own. I also believe the government is playing a role in stigmatizing single mothers by implementing these punitive measures. Maybe because we are soft targets, we aren't seen as a strong lobby group, that would be because we are tired and busy raising our children, trying desperately not to burn out.

The fact that over 55 thousand sole parents are already reporting earnings and many more are in study signifies that these cuts have nothing to do with supporting sole parents back into the paid workforce. It has nothing to do with "fairness" but just a convenient cost cutting measure.

I myself am a 40yr old single mother of a fantastic 7yr old child who is high functioning, but with special needs.

The past couple of years I had been studying full time at TAFE. I have just been accepted into a Bachelor Degree at Victoria University. I plan to continue studying part time so I can be available for my child and work on getting myself back into good health and maybe attain some part-time work.

I'm afraid the new welfare measures will put my future studies in jeopardy because my son will turn 8 by the time the new legislation kicks in. This will leave us at least \$80 poorer in 2013, maybe more depending on if I'm still eligible for the Pensioner education supplement, pensioner health care card and utility concessions etc.

At the moment I can afford my son's uniforms, healthy lunches and excursions however this may change.

I already go without breakfast and lunch because it's hard to make ends meet and so I can afford to study.

I will have to seriously re-evaluate whether a higher education is affordable and accessible considering the costs involved in studying including computer equipment, Internet connection, software, hardware, books and transportation.

I also have health issues, which include otosclerosis (a bilateral hearing loss requiring me to wear hearing aids), Delayed Sleep Phase syndrome (a diagnosed sleep disorder), anxiety and IBS. These impact on my well-being and cost money to treat and maintain.

My hearing loss restricts my employment opportunities but no more so than being a sole parent. There is no support for parents with disabilities and I am too high functioning to be granted a disability support payment.

I have no car so a daily commute can take two and a half hours when studying.

I had been fortunate that my teachers were flexible to allow me to leave earlier so I could pick my son up before 6pm when childcare closes. I doubt many future employers will be so forgiving.

When I re-enter the workforce, I will be limited to the hours I can work simply because there is no flexible evening and weekend childcare.

I am worried that part time employment won't be viable on newstart because I stand to lose more than I would receiving a parenting payment?

I receive less than \$1 a day in child support.

I have no family support so there is no one to assist should my child or I become unwell. I have absolutely no safety net. The current centrelink sole parenting payments have allowed me to be self-sufficient and provides security and stability for my child and I.

It also gives us hope.

Study after study shows newstart allowance is too low and needs to be increased to a livable standard.

Sole parents should be supported and eased into work or study/training not penalized. Many single mothers have experienced years of social exclusion.

There must be special consideration to the barriers sole parents face securing employment.

Pensioner education supplement must be available to all sole parents.

Industries must be flexible and there must be more incentive for employers to hire single mums.

I urge you to consider my family's needs and obstacles and of those of all the other sole parents struggling. As a sole parent family, every cent counts.

Cutting sole parents off our parenting payment and pushing us onto newstart will entrench my family's disadvantage and do nothing to help me securing employment. It will make it harder in fact.

Increasing Newstart payments would be a far more appropriate option to make the welfare system fairer.

Punishing us is not a fair incentive to work.

May I remind you of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Article 25.

- (1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.
- (2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,