

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

July 2023

Dear Committee,

Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Safety Net) Bill 2023

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre) supports the passage of the Strengthening the Safety Net Bill, so that Australians on low and very low incomes who rely on government financial support can receive the benefits of the slightly higher proposed payments.

The Centre is the peak body for child and family services in Victoria. For over 100 years we have advocated for the rights of children and young people to be heard, to be safe, to access education and to remain connected to family, community, and culture. Our member organisations work closely with children, young people, and their families, many of whom are experiencing economic disadvantage and rely on the Australian Government's financial support.

For Australians experiencing economic disadvantage, such as those receiving JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Parenting Payment Single and other forms of financial assistance, the increases to payments through the proposed legislation is welcome. However, the increases are minimal, and will not provide the much-needed resources that children, young people, and families need to relieve the effects of living in poverty.

For the 1.1 million Australian's receiving income support in the form of JobSeeker payments, an increase of \$40 a fortnight is a beginning, but unfortunately it remains significantly shy of the fortnightly \$256 rise recommended by the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee. We will be hoping to see a more substantial amount offered to these young people and families in the future. The slightly smaller increase for those receiving AusStudy and Youth Allowance payments is similarly welcome, but it is vitally important that families relying on these payment supports be able to meet basic costs of living, such as food, transport, and housing payments. The Centre advocates strongly for welfare reform that recognises the widespread effects of poverty and disadvantage and aims to build equity for all Australians.

An increase to the maximum amount of Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 15% for low-income earners will make a difference of \$31 extra per fortnight, and though it is the first increase to this subsidy for more than 30 years, it will not alleviate the anxiety many families face, with housing affordability proving an ongoing challenge in this economy. For Rent Assistance to be impactful and support families appropriately, it must be in line with the rising costs of rents in the private market. The Centre would recommend the Australian Government regularly reviews the payment amounts offered, to make sure they are meeting the needs of those low-income Australians most likely to be experiencing housing stress.

The Centre looks forward to seeing the passing of this legislation and will continue to support the Commonwealth Government to meet the needs of all Australians experiencing vulnerabilities and economic disadvantage.

Warm regards,

Deb Tsorbaris
Chief Executive Officer