

Submission in relation to Omnibus Bill

I'd like to start by giving a rundown of my personal circumstance. I am a sole parent to an 8 year old child. My child is diagnosed with autism, ADHD and anxiety. I have sole parental responsibility; and court orders where my child does not spend any time with the father. My child's father suffers significant mental health issues and I hold little hope of this improving. Consequently, my child's father is not employed; and is supported by a new partner leaving me unable to recover any form of child support.

My main issues with the Omnibus legislation specifically relate to the phasing out of Family Tax Benefit lump sum payments and Family Tax Benefit B ceasing at the beginning of the calendar year when the child turns 17.

Traditionally the lump sum payments of Family Tax Benefit A & B at the end of the year have always been part of a family's entitlement to that particular payment- they were just withheld to allow for Australia's lower income earners to work in low paid and casual employment; the amounts were withheld to allow for any overpayments to be recovered. Replacing the lump sum payments with a payment of \$20.02 per fortnight is shifting the responsibility back onto families to constantly engage with the Department of Human Services and update income estimates so that they do not get overpaid. The Department of Human Services have been for some time encouraging the use of self reporting via their website but the reality is a large cross section of society still have difficulty doing this. Due to a decrease in staffing numbers you can't just walk into a Centrelink office and have a staff member access your records and do this. They send you on your way with their call centre phone number; and unfortunately their call centres have also had staffing cuts so the standard wait times generally exceed 60 minutes; although their official data states that wait times are much less than this. I'd like to know the figures on their % of abandoned calls.

For someone in my situation with a child that suffers multiple disabilities, the lump sum payments at the end of the financial year allow me to access therapies such as psychology and occupational therapy appointments that cost in excess of \$120 per appointment. Usually a minimum of 8 appointments are required to see a marked improvement in the condition being treated.

Already the Department of Human Services reduced Family Tax Benefit payments to single parent families based on the amount of child support received. Any child support received over and above \$30 in a month sees a reduction of 50 cents in the dollar. Australia's outstanding child support debt exceeds \$1 billion; and that's only the payments the Child Support Agency have been unable to collect. Legislation already exists for the Child Support Agency to have a tougher line on collecting payments; if the department actually enacted internal policy to rely on their legislative powers and collected monies outstanding then the Federal Government would see a substantial saving in Family Tax Benefit payments; as the number of families claiming the maximum rate would significantly reduce. In short, costing stronger compliance with child support obligations may in fact save the Australian Taxpayer more in the long run than pushing these cuts through.

With removing FTB B altogether in the calendar year my child turns 17, means that I will lose this payment for all of his year 11 and 12 schooling. To recover this small payment may mean working an extra 3 or 4 hours a week or even 5 or 6 hours a week for a low paid

worker. For a child like my son year 11 and 12 are crucial make or break years. My son will be learning to drive and buying his first car. He will be completing the last two years of high school and with my help and support it could mean the difference between working in a minimum wage retail job for the foreseeable future or a place at university. With his diagnosis the earlier scenario of a minimum wage retail job is more likely if I am less available to provide support with the homework demands of years 11 and 12. There simply isn't anyone else in our household or family in a position to provide the kind of support a child with disabilities needs. And I urge to reconsider this measure and allow family tax benefit payments to continue until children finish secondary school.