

July 8, 2012

Dear Committee Members,

I urge your committee to recommend a complete overhaul of the system of welfare payments to "single" parents. The current system encourages inter generational welfare dependence, allows parents to abdicate their responsibility to financially support their children, encourages teenage pregnancy and results in children living in poverty. Surely payments to parents who chose to parent alone should only be a temporary measure to assist in the transition phase to single parenthood? Being a parent doesn't take away a person's ability to work. The proposed changes are only a small step to discouraging welfare dependence.

My experience of single parents ranges from those with severe mental illness who shouldn't be allowed near children, let alone be their sole carer, through to selfless, hardworking parents (usually no longer welfare dependent) who put the needs of their children first. So many single mother's I've met seem to think parenting payment is an inadequate reward for the "work" that caring for their children entitles them to. All parents care for their children; I see work as what you do to provide for the needs of your family that can't be met personally (housing, food, education etc). Most custodial parents complain that the non-custodial parent doesn't provide enough support and most non-custodial parents complain about how much they have to pay. Single parents never seem to acknowledge the non-cash benefits (gifts, expenses paid direct, experiences provided during access visits etc.) the non-custodial parent gives to the child. They also rarely acknowledge the range of lump sum payments received from Centrelink as part of their income - perhaps these should be spread out throughout the year so they are included in the annual budget for everyday expenses instead of being seen as a "bonus"?

As the survivor of an abusive single mother I hope that someone can find a way to protect young children from controlling women who isolate their children from their fathers and society and see them as a way of securing an income. Unfortunately I have also seen the current system lead single mothers to perpetuate the abuse on future generations by encouraging them to seek custody of their grandchildren to ensure their income.

The lifestyle choice to have a stay at home parent is a privilege most working families cannot afford...why is it a tax payer funded luxury for "single" parents?

Cost of living pressures, especially housing and childcare affordability affect all families, I suggest single parents fare better than working families through their access to other benefits such as rent assistance, utility rebates, public transport concessions, free medical care and pharmaceuticals etc.

I believe each case should be assessed on a needs basis; the teenage mother living at home with her parents doesn't have the same needs as someone fleeing domestic violence or rebuilding their life after the death of their partner. I believe all payments should be non-custodial parent and extended family means tested and time limited.

As a society I think we should expect more from parents, it takes two people to conceive a child and those two people should be held responsible for the wellbeing

of that child. It also takes two people to maintain or destroy the relationship that conceived the child. The breakdown of that relationship shouldn't absolve the parents of the responsibility to support their children. Being a parent is a lifetime commitment, separating a child from its other parent shouldn't lead to a lifetime entitlement to an income many working families struggle to earn.

I hope a system can be developed that puts the needs of children first and encourages parents to be responsible for their children whatever their relationship status. I hope for a system that discourages long term welfare dependence, one that offers support and encourages self sufficiency and values children and parents.

I request that my name and address be withheld.

Sincerely yours,