

AASW

**Australian Association
of Social Workers**

*Submission to the Senate
Community Affairs Legislation
Committee*

*Re: Social Services Legislation Amendment
(Youth Employment and Other Measures)
Bill 2015*

June 2015

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Introduction

Who we are

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) is the professional body representing more than 8700 social workers throughout Australia.

We set the benchmark for professional education and practice in social work and have a strong voice on matters of social inclusion, social justice, human rights and issues that impact upon the quality of life of all Australians.

The social work profession

The social work profession is committed to the pursuit of social justice, the enhancement of the quality of life, and the development of the full potential of each individual, group and community in society.

Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity are central to the profession and are underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and Indigenous knowledge.

Social workers work with individuals, families, groups and communities. Professional social workers consider the relationship between biological, psychological, social, cultural and spiritual factors and how they impact on a client's health, wellbeing and development. Accordingly, social workers maintain a dual focus in both assisting with and improving human wellbeing and identifying and addressing any external issues (known as systemic or structural issues) that may impact on wellbeing, such as inequality, injustice and discrimination.

Our submission

Social workers have an ongoing commitment to social justice for individuals, groups and communities. Therefore, we welcome the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry into the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Youth Employment and Other Measures) Bill 2015. While social workers work with people from every strata of society, we have a particular commitment to those who are most disadvantaged. Social workers are particularly supportive of proposals that will assist those who are unemployed to gain employment. Unfortunately, we believe that this Bill will not assist the most vulnerable gain employment and will indeed act as a further barrier. We are also concerned that many of the amendments included in this Bill are effectively aimed at unravelling the social security safety net for the most disadvantaged.

Responses

1. Concerns with regard to Schedule 2 : Age requirements for various Commonwealth payments

- 1.1 The AASW is of the view that the amendments in this schedule should not proceed because the rates of Youth Allowance are simply too low. The current rate for a single person over 18 who is living away from home is \$30.49 per day. This is approximately 55% of the pension rate for a single adult. This is a rate that is well below the poverty line. While there may be an argument for a differential between the pension rate and rates for those seeking employment, any differential should not force people into destitution. Once this occurs any benefit of the differential in encouraging people to look for work is lost. This is because factors leading to poverty such as lack of money for accommodation, subsistence food, clothing suitable to attend job interviews or insufficient funds for transport all interfere with people's ability to actually look for work.

- 1.2 The amendments in this schedule also identify young people in Australia for what is a worldwide phenomenon of rising youth unemployment rates. In fact, Australia is doing quite well by world standards though the rates of youth unemployment are rightly a matter of concern.¹ It is a view often published in popular media to perceive the 'current' younger generation as 'lazy' and less responsible than their elders. However there is no strong evidence to indicate that the current cohort of young people is avoiding employment more than any other segment of the population. These proposed amendments might influence the very small numbers of young people who are purposely avoiding paid employment, but they will negatively impact on the great majority who are not, and who simply cannot find a job.

2. Concerns with regard to Schedule 3: Income support waiting periods

- 2.1 The Parliamentary Library has produced a detailed and well reasoned critique of the proposal in this schedule which outlines issues associated with the rationale, as well as risks and unintended consequences of the proposed amendments.² We commend this report to Senators.
- 2.2 The AASW is further concerned that this measure will force into genuine destitution a number of young people who have little or no resources. This is effectively acknowledged in the Explanatory Memorandum associated with this Bill on page 10 of the Statements of compatibility with human rights in which it is noted that, "Around \$8.1 million in additional funding will be made available to Emergency Relief providers to provide assistance for those impacted by this measure."³ The AASW has a strong view that Australians should not be forced into receiving 'charity' because of Government policy.
- 2.3 This enforced destitution will further inhibit the ability of young people to look for work as noted in 1.1 above.
- 2.4 Finally, while the AASW welcomes the large number of exceptions that apply in this section, it is noted that this will have the effect of making the legislation more administratively burdensome and complex at a time when there is an acknowledged need to simplify the welfare system.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The AASW believes that one of the best ways to assist young people out of poverty is to help them achieve meaningful full-time employment. However we believe this proposed legislation will not help achieve this aim, and in many instances may hinder their attempts by forcing young people into destitution. We call on the Senate to reject the legislation contained in Schedules 2 and 3, and further we ask Senators to seriously consider raising the Youth Allowance rate to a just and humane level.

Submitted for and on behalf of the Australian Association of Social Workers Ltd

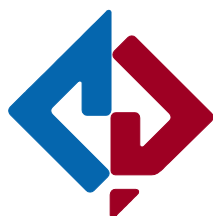
Glenys Wilkinson

AASW Chief Executive Officer

¹ OECD (2014) How does Australia compare? September 2104. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/australia/EMO-AUS-EN.pdf>

² Thomas M, (2015) Waiting period for young people to access income support, Budget Review 2015-16 Index. Available at http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/BudgetReview201516/IncomeSup

³ Explanatory Memorandum, (2015) Social Services Legislation Amendment (Youth Employment and Other Measures) Bill 2015. Available at http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/legislation/ems/r5467_ems_f2e5b475-4592-41f2-945e-71d91bdb9c5d/upload_pdf/502795.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22legislation/ems/r5467_ems_f2e5b475-4592-41f2-945e-71d91bdb9c5d%22 p.10.



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