

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
SOCIAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO
Inquiry into the Social Services Legislation Amendment
(Housing Affordability) Bill 2017

Topic: Implementation of an Automatic Rent Deduction Scheme

Hansard pages: 19 and 20

Senator Cameron asked:

Mr McBride: Once again, from our perspective this is an initiative that the states wanted and we were prepared to facilitate.

Senator CAMERON: You said that you weren't aware of which states were proposing this. Can you on notice—

Mr McBride: I can tell you which states now support it. But who the initiators were I would have to take on notice.

Senator CAMERON: Can you take that on notice and provide us with which states sought to initiate this?

Mr McBride: Certainly, Senator.

Answer:

In 2016, the then New South Wales Minister for Family and Community Services, Minister for Social Housing the Hon Brad Hazzard MP wrote to the Minister for Human Services, the Hon Alan Tudge MP seeking the Commonwealth's agreement to introduce an Automatic Rent Deduction Scheme (ARDS) for social housing tenants. Minister Hazzard noted that he was writing on behalf of New South Wales, South Australia, Queensland, the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Tasmania.

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Hansard page: 20

Senator Cameron asked:

Senator CAMERON: Is that an assertion that's been made by the government? Do you know if this has been looked at by Scrutiny of Bills or the Joint Committee on Human Rights?

Mr McBride: It says: Prepared in accordance with Part 3 of the Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny) Act 2011. It's been prepared in accordance with that, but whether it's been scrutinised or not, I don't think so.

Senator CAMERON: Can you take on notice and advise the committee as to whether Scrutiny of Bills or the Joint Committee on Human Rights has made any commentary on this? And, if it hasn't gone there, why not?

Mr McBride: Certainly.

Answer:

The Standing Committee for Scrutiny of Bills considered the Social Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2017 and had no comments on the Bill. Refer to Scrutiny Digest 12 of 2017.

The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights deferred its consideration of the Bill for the reporting period. Refer to Human rights scrutiny report 11 of 2017 (dated 17 October 2017). Please note that the next Joint Committee Report is due to be published on Tuesday 28 November but at the time of the hearing, they had deferred their consideration.

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Hansard page: 23

Senator Cameron asked:

Senator CAMERON: You say an extra layer of protection. Wouldn't that protection, in some people's eyes, be another layer of bureaucracy, and can you provide details of how the secretary will provide protection?

Mr McBride: In making a payment to someone, the Secretary would look to whether they had existing obligations to the Commonwealth, whether they were paying debts off. Then they would look to the obligation to pay rent. That rent may include arrears and repairs. They would make a determination as to whether those amounts should be made, mindful of the fact—

Senator CAMERON: I'll let you take this on notice. Can you provide details of how the Secretary, in practical terms, will do this? What resources does the Secretary plan to put in place to monitor this effectively, and what is the cost of the Commonwealth?

Mr McBride: Certainly.

Answer:

If a tenant is not able to resolve their concerns regarding an Automatic Rent Deduction Scheme (ARDS) deduction with their housing provider or a State based Review Body, they could approach the Department of Human Services (DHS).

If it is a matter where the Commonwealth has responsibility, DHS and the Department of Social Services would monitor such requests for review as part of their usual business operations.

The Secretary (or their delegate) has the power to intervene and make a decision as to whether a deduction is made and the amount deducted.

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Senator Rhiannon asked:

Senator RHIANNON: It might be covered by Senator Cameron's question that you took on notice, but I was very interested in the \$30 million. Did you seek clarification or details of the modelling of how that \$30 million was determined? It sounds as though it's across all states. Is that correct, that it's across all states?

Mr McBride: Yes.

Senator RHIANNON: Do you have information on the breakdown between states; and, if not, did you try and clarify how this figure was arrived at?

Answer:

This figure was provided in correspondence between the Department and State and Territory Housing bodies as part of deliberations on a proposed Automatic Rent Deduction framework.