

BUDGET ESTIMATES – MAY/JUNE 2011

ATTACHMENT 4

Section: Centrelink
Question: 10
From: Berwick Leader
Date: Wednesday 13 April 2011
Source: <http://berwick-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/parents-want-real-action-1/>

Parents want real action from Centrelink

13 Apr 11 @ 06:59am by Rachel Flaherty

Cranbourne resident Mairi-ann Macartney says her daughter Tess needs 24-hour care. VALERIU CAMPAN

CENTRELINK'S apology for upsetting mothers involved in Leader's Save Our Children campaign with "intimidating" phone calls has fallen flat.

Last week, mothers of children with type 1 diabetes said they felt bullied by calls from a Centrelink employee.

General manager Hank Jongen issued an apology (below) for any distress that might have been caused to families.

NSW mum Amanda Larsen said that to her, the words felt insincere. "There's just no heart in it and it never feels like they are speaking to a person," she said.

"They are absolutely not doing their job properly and these are the people making the decisions of these poor families with sick kids. I'm disappointed with the general manager's response."

Her barrister, Chris Branson, who is helping Ms Larsen with her case to win her carer's allowance, said he had written to Centrelink's legal department telling them that their staffer who made the call was in contempt of tribunal and called for further action.

"They haven't responded to me and this is a very serious matter," he said. "What they did was way out of line and repugnant behaviour. And their apology they've published to the families is pathetic and mealy mouthed."

Leader can reveal the Centrelink employee told the parents involved he was ringing on behalf of Minister for Families and Community Services Minister Jenny Macklin to file a report.

Ms Macklin's office has not responded to the Leader's question asked 10 days ago in relation to the call.

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Cranbourne's Mairi-anne Macartney said the apology had not made a difference to her situation as her application for a carer's allowance was rejected for a third time this week. "I still don't feel I'm getting any help from Centrelink," she said.

"I was surprised they rejected me again, it doesn't make any sense to me at all.

"This is emotionally very draining but I'm doing it because I feel they haven't got the right to say a 10-year-old can look after themselves."

Ms Macartney said she had filed for a social security appeal and was waiting for a hearing date.

>> SAVE OUR CHILDREN:

The Centrelink apology

IN response to your recent article ("We will not be silenced," Leader, April 6) about Centrelink contacting families in relation to a media article on their carer allowance claim, I want to reassure readers these processes are in place to make sure we exhaust every avenue within the law to help those in need.

Centrelink apologises unreservedly to the family for any distress this may have caused.

While it is important people understand the safeguards in place to protect customers' rights, including the right to have a decision reviewed, it is clear in this instance our processes exacerbated stress on the family.

This was not our intention.

We have acted promptly to remind staff, including those following up customer complaints in the media, of their responsibility to treat families and carers with compassion and respect.

Hank Jongen, Centrelink general manager

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee
Budget Estimates 2011-2012

Department:

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By: F. Field

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