

Senate Finance and Public Administration Standing Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES – 21 OCTOBER 2008

Human Services Portfolio



Department/Agency: Department of Human Services
Outcome/Output Group: Outcome 1/Output Group 2
Topic: Child Support Complaints

Senator: Boyce

Question reference number: HS1

Type of question: Hansard F&PA 116

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 5 December 2008

Question:

HS1: Senator BOYCE—There have been a number of media reports about sole parents, particularly single mothers, who have received less through family support than they did in under the old system. I would have thought that they would have been the ones most vociferously objecting or complaining. Is that the case?

Mr Miller—I do not have a breakdown as to whether those complaints were from receiving or paying parents.

Senator BOYCE—You must break them down into some sort of subsets for analysis purposes—is that correct?

Mr Miller—I would need to take on notice whether we do break them down.

Mr Sutton—Yes, we do break them down into receiving and paying parents.

Senator BOYCE—Can you give me any information about the level of complaints that came from each group?

Mr Sutton—Not at this moment.

Senator BOYCE—If you could take that on notice that would be good. Also, if you could categorise the complaints and objections by type, I would find that useful.

Mr Sutton—Yes.

Answer:

HS1: Between March and June 2008 all 1.5 million child support customers received notification of the new assessments that would apply post 1 July 2008. The Child Support Agency (CSA) has no access to Family Assistance Office data and hence is unable to identify those customers who are receiving less through that payment stream

Information on customer complaints and objections received by CSA for the period October 2007 to October 2008 is provided below. Information on complaints received 1 July–1 October 2008 is also included together with comparative data for the same periods in 2007 and 2006. CSA complaints reporting is not able to split the data between paying and receiving parents at this time. For objections, the data can be broken down into receiving and paying parent.

**TOTAL COMPLAINTS RECEIVED OCTOBER 2007–OCTOBER 2008:
14,479**

TOTAL COMPLAINTS RECEIVED 1 JULY–31 OCTOBER

2008	5,595
2007	3,576
2006	3,635



CSA's complaints reporting counts each customer interaction as a complaint regardless of the number of issues the customer raised. This approach is consistent with that used by other organisations.

The top 3 issues raised by customers in 2008 and 2007 were the same across both years:

- **Amount of child support** -these complaints concern the amount of child support customers are paying or receiving. There may be care issues affecting the assessment, dependent children or other factors which the customer believes are affecting the amount of Child Support they receive or pay.
- **Decision making** - the majority of these complaints concern dissatisfaction in relation to the outcome of a CSA process, most notably Objections and Change of Assessment.
- **Inaction** – these complaints from both paying and receiving parents reflect customers' perceptions that the CSA has not taken action, either administrative action on their child support case or collection action. Complaints about inaction are not complaints about a lack of timeliness or delay by CSA staff.

The top three issues in 2006 were:

- **Affordability** the majority of these complaints are from paying parents who believe that they are unable to pay the assessed amount of child support and or any amounts outstanding
- **Amount disputed** – as defined above
- **Decision making** – as defined above.

OBJECTIONS

Objections can be lodged only on a number of specified grounds, and directly relate to a decision made by the CSA. Unlike a complaint, the grounds under which a customer can object are specified in legislation, based on the Act under which that decision occurs.

Objections may be received from either receiving or paying parent. The other parent has the opportunity to comment on the grounds of the objection and both parents' comments are given equal consideration in the decision making process.

The ground that most closely aligns with customers affected by the new formula implementation on 1 July 2008 is '*Particulars of Assessment – other*'. The ground that relates to care is '*Particulars of Assessment – Care*'.

Objections received 1 July – 31 October

	Particulars of Assessment - other		Particulars of Assessment - care	
	Receiving parent	Paying parent	Receiving parent	Paying parent
2008	455	832	715	1013
2007	262	501	348	530
2006	567	838	341	476



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