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Committee Secretary
Community Affairs Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

16 November 2005

Dear Secretary

Re: Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Committee Inquiry into Welfare to Work legislation

The Council of Intellectual Disability Agencies (CIDA) is a peak body for non-government, not-for-profit agencies which provide services to Victorians with intellectual disabilities. CIDA members provide a range of services including Commonwealth Government –funded supported employment services.

CIDA welcomes this Inquiry into the Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and other measures) Bill 2005 and the Family and Community Services Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work) Bill 2005. It offers us the opportunity to provide comment in relation to people with a disability and 'the provision of employment services and other assistance'.

The time frame for this Inquiry

CIDA is disappointed that the Federal Government has nominated such a short time frame for this Inquiry and notes that the Government has opposed a Parliamentary motion to extend the duration of the Inquiry to February 2006. This not only puts extreme pressure on your Committee but also means that many in the disability sector, including ourselves, have not had sufficient time or resources to absorb the content of this legislation in order to make a detailed response.

Nonetheless we wish to raise two issues, namely: access to the higher rate of mobility allowance for those working in Business Services; and reinstatement of dual funding permitting people in Business Services to simultaneously access open employment services.

Mobility Allowance

According to Centrelink, Mobility Allowance 'provides assistance to people with disabilities who are in paid employment, voluntary work, vocational training, undertaking independent living/life skills training or a combination of paid work and training and who are unable to use public transport without substantial assistance'.

The supported employees employed by our member organisations rely heavily on Mobility Allowance, but generally find that the payment is insufficient.

CIDA has noted the reference in the Explanatory Memorandum to the Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and other measures) Bill 2005 that a higher rate of mobility allowance will be introduced. However the Senate Estimates transcript for 3 November 2005 – at <http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/committee/S8864.pdf> (pp.45-46) – quotes an officer from the Department of Family and Community Services as saying that the people who work in business services will not be eligible for the higher rate of mobility allowance. This is a concern to CIDA..

Given that the objective of the Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and other measures) Bill 2005 is 'to increase workforce participation', it seems inequitable that workers in Business Services should be excluded from the higher rate of mobility allowance.

CIDA recommends that the Federal Government amend the Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and other measures) Bill 2005 to grant supported employees in Business Services access to the higher rate of mobility allowance.

Dual Funding

On 1 July 2005 – around the time when some of the Welfare to Work provisions were first announced – the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) announced that it would discontinue funding arrangements that would permit a person assisted by a Business Service, funded by the Department of Community and Family Services (FaCS), to obtain simultaneous assistance from DEWR funded employment services. Thus to obtain open employment assistance a person would need to cease supported employment assistance. For many people with an intellectual disability this would be an extremely abrupt transition that may not be successful. They have much to lose – including the maintenance of very limited but vital social networks.

It is difficult to see how denial of access to open employment services – to a client being assisted by a FaCS-funded Business Service – accords with Coalition policy and election commitments, particularly given:

- the emphasis in Welfare-to-Work policy is to encourage more people into open employment. And the explicit policy in the Explanatory Memorandum to the Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and other measures) Bill 2005 that 'the design and delivery of services, for working age people on income support with capacity to work, should focus on assisting them into jobs (a work first approach)' [p.i];
- the Coalition's 2004 election policy, *Supporting People with a Disability and their Carers*, which states: 'The Coalition is committed to a focus on ability, supporting people with disabilities to provide *more opportunities* to participate in the economic and social life of the community and achieve better outcomes for individuals' [italics added];
- the Liberal Party's current policy platform which states that 'Liberals believe the best strategy for jobs and prosperity includes [to] *provide for the needs of special groups* in the community, including the disabled' [italics added]; and
- the statements by Prime Minister Howard in June 2001 that, 'Whole of government approaches, collectively owned by several Ministers, will increasingly become a common response.' And he gave the welfare reform package as a case in point. Furthermore the Prime Minister referred to minimising 'any limitations' associated with the 'Silo effect' between departments.

CIDA recommends that the Federal Government reinstate dual funding so that supported employees in Business Services can simultaneously access open employment services and improve their employment opportunities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in this Inquiry into Welfare to Work legislation. We appreciate the work of your Committee. If you would like to discuss this submission further, please contact me on (03) 8415 0155.

Yours sincerely

(Ms) Sue Jackson
Executive Officer
