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Australia 3800.  
25<sup>th</sup> November 2005

Community Affairs Committee  
Department of the Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600.

Thank you for your email of 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2005.

I enclose a submission for the Inquiry into Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and Other Measures) Bill 2005 and Family and Community Services Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work) Bill 2005.

**In regard to the Terms of Reference, this submission relates to the matter of:**

**‘reducing welfare dependence of parents ... through**

**b) a responsive compliance system that encourages and rewards active participation.’**

I am affiliated with the Centre of Policy Studies and the IMPACT Project, Monash University, but submit this as a private individual.

Judith S. Willis.  
Honorary Researcher

## SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and Other Measures) Bill 2005 and Family and Community Services Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work) Bill 2005**

- 1) The majority of sole parents who receive the welfare payment termed 'Parenting Payment Single' (previously known as the Sole Parent Pension), are women. In January 2005, this payment was received by 420,836 women compared with 35,691 men<sup>1</sup>.

The proposed legislation appears to coerce sole parents who receive income support into paid employment, study or approved activity. There is no similar legislation in this regard for female parents in a married or de facto relationship. The legislation thus appears to discriminate against female sole parents on the grounds of marital status.

- 2) In an analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics' Time-Use data, Bittman (2004: 158) found that

'The households with the longest hours of total work, paid and unpaid, are those with preschool children, while those with the shortest are childless couples. Couple households with children at school occupy an intermediate position'.

Sole parents, compared with the 'couple households' described above, have a greatly increased burden of 'total work'. Despite this fact, the proposed 'Welfare to Work' legislation appears to force sole parents into more 'total work' work, irregardless of their personal health and circumstances, or the health, temperament or circumstances of their children. There is a lack of free will in regard to a sole parent being able to choose a balance between their paid work and unpaid work according to what they consider to be the optimal wellbeing of the family. This mitigates against the best interests of the child.

- 3) The Senate's Poverty Report of November 2004<sup>2</sup> noted that '...female sole parents are overrepresented in groups living on low incomes'. However, coercion of sole parents into part-time employment is unlikely to solve this problem, for the Senate's Report (2004, p. xviii) also states:  
'This report has challenged traditional assumptions that joblessness is often a sufficient reason for the presence of poverty. **The committee has**

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<sup>1</sup> Willis 2005:13

<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth Government 2004:211

**heard that over 1 million Australians are living in poverty despite living in a household where one or more adults are in employment'.<sup>3</sup>**

- 4) It is submitted that the provision of income security (without harassment, compulsion, anomaly or maladministration) is the mainstay of a healthy, productive nation.
- 5) A basic principle in a fair and democratic nation should be that each child, woman and man, irregardless of environmental or genetic luck, is entitled to an adequate income as a basic human right.

**6) RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- a) **Instead of following the UK and US models of social welfare, the Australian Government develop a model of social welfare which suits our unique cultural and economic heritage, and meets the aspirations, values and priorities of the community.**
- b) **As an alternative to the UK and US models of social welfare, the Australian Government examine the concept of various forms of a Universal Basic Income.<sup>4</sup> This policy has been introduced into Brazil, and, following the publication of the government's 'Green Paper on Basic Income' in September 2002, is under serious consideration in Ireland.<sup>5</sup>**
- c) **That a Summit be called of key parties across government, business, the community and academia, for robust debate about the concept of a Universal Basic Income. That the aim of the Summit be to produce 3 - 5 models of a Universal Basic Income - for consideration as a new direction in social and economic policy in Australia.**

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<sup>3</sup> The writer's emphasis

<sup>4</sup> Willis 2005:23-27

<sup>5</sup> Healy and Reynolds 2004:2

## REFERENCES

- Bittman, M. 2004. 'Parenting and Employment – What time-use surveys show'. In *Family Time - The Social Organization of Care*, eds. N. Folbre and M. Bittman. USA & Canada: Routledge.
- Commonwealth Government, Senate Community Affairs References Committee Secretariat. 2004. *A hand up not a hand out: Renewing the fight against poverty. Report on poverty and financial hardship*. Canberra: Senate Printing Unit, Parliament House.  
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- Healy, S. and B. Reynolds. 2002. *From Poverty Relief to Universal Entitlement: Social Welfare, Minimum Income and Basic Income in Ireland*. Paper presented to 9<sup>th</sup> Basic Income European Network (BIEN) International Congress, Geneva, 2002.  
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