

**Submission to the Community Affairs Committee, Department of the Senate,  
Parliament House Canberra ACT**

Re the Federal Government's plan to link welfare payments to school attendance.

While I appreciate the Federal Government's desire that all Australian children attend school, I am very concerned about the effect that the *Social Security and Veterans' Entitlements Legislation Amendment (Schooling Requirements) Bill 2008* will have on families. How will this help poor Australian families? Surely it will only bring about more suffering. How will families be able to pay for food, rent and other basic necessities with their basic income actually taken away? This will only lead to further disadvantage and suffering, homelessness and hunger from which poor families may never recover. Crime will be on the increase and so too will domestic violence.

Many families who have children now in the habit of not going to school will not be able to comply. Others will comply for a short while and then the effort will again prove too much so that they will again be in breach. How will 'a last resort' then be determined? How can any poor family survive for 13 weeks when poverty is likely to be a contributing factor to the non- attendance in the first place?

This is not the education revolution we were led to believe would be happening under this Government. Poor Australian families need positive support in these difficult times rather than punitive legislation.

In the NT this approach is to come on top of the suffering and disruption caused by the Intervention Income Management regime with so many Aboriginal families now displaced, being forced to remain in fringe camps in the larger towns. And of course that means their schooling will be necessarily affected. In the NT moreover there are not enough schools, classes, teachers or resources in the first place for children to be able to attend school. The Australian Education Union reports that 1,400 extra teachers are required immediately. The Government has recently made a commitment for just 50 a year.

What a sad day for our country which has prided itself on the principle of a fair go for all if this punitive legislation becomes law; their entitlements as Australian citizens simply able to be taken away.