

Senator Rachel Siewert  
Senator for Western Australia  
Committee Chair  
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Sent via email - [community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au)

Friday 3 March 2017

## **RE: SOCIAL SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (OMNIBUS SAVINGS AND CHILD CARE REFORM) BILL 2017**

Dear Senator Siewert,

The Parenthood welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the *Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017 (the Bill)* and contribute to the Senate Committee's inquiry.

The Parenthood considers this inquiry a chance to demonstrate to Senators **once again**, and to the Parliament more broadly, the devastating consequences of this legislation if it's passed.

The Parenthood is Australia's leading parent advocacy and campaigning organisation with more than 58,000 parent members across Australia. We seek to ensure that the voices of parents, especially those who will be directly affected by the current proposed changes, are heard.

That is why we have once again asked parents to join us by becoming signatories to our submission as they did with our previous submission to the committee. You will see their details at the end of this submission.

**THE PARENTHOOD STRONGLY ADVISES COMMITTEE MEMBERS NOT TO SUPPORT THIS BILL AND TO DEMAND THAT *CHILD CARE REFORM BE SEPARATED FROM WELFARE CUTS AND DEBATED ON ITS OWN MERITS.***

While there is a pressing need for child care reform and relief for families from the ever-increasing burden child care places on their budgets, parents do not want this relief to come at the cost of those least able to afford it.

We urge Senators not to support the multiple cuts presented in the Bill. The Parenthood has long opposed cuts to Family Tax Benefit (FTB) and Paid Parental Leave (PPL) – these cuts will be the focus of this submission.

However, we want to also note our concern over cuts to Newstart access for young people and the cuts to energy supplements for pensioners.

Parenthood members understand these cuts will impact the most vulnerable Australian families. These changes will hit the lowest paid the hardest and are simply unfair and wrong.

Parents are well placed to understand the importance of managing budgets. We appreciate the government's need to explore ways to balance our nation's budget. However, our spending priorities as parents reflect the importance we place on the things we buy.

For example, parents will go without new shoes to ensure their child has the right uniform, we go without birthday presents to save the money for a school camp – and some parents go without meals to ensure their children don't go hungry.

Just as we do with our household budgets, we implore the Turnbull Government to get the priorities right. Savings that directly hit the living standards of families who can least afford it, is in our view a very misguided savings priority.

We have written many submissions with facts and figures – the evidence that supports our viewpoint. You can ask the Committee Secretary for copies. However, the government keeps introducing the same Bill, with the same divisive cuts, so we're not entirely sure the facts and figures matter in this context.

We believe the Senate needs to hear from the people who would feel the pain of these cuts. Those parents whose lives will be changed and made more difficult.

These are not an abstract 'thousands of parents' – **these are real Australians with real families whose family budgets should not be used to repair the national budget.** Don't just take our word for it – below are parents in their own words.

**Kirsty from Campbelltown in South Australia** is a single parent to a 14-year-old boy. Her son attends a selective high school and after his father passed away, Kirsty uses the FTB supplement to pay her electricity bill. She suffers from seizures and is concerned that she won't be able to keep her son in his school. She has made sacrifices and cut her budget to bare bones after cuts to her benefits but she has no idea how she can make this one work.

**Kellie from Mildura in Victoria:**

I am a single mother of 1, living in public housing. I DID NOT chose to be the first or wish to rely on the second, I am also on DSP which I also did not wish for. Unfortunately, circumstances have put me in this position. I am trying to better my daughter's life and also trying to improve mine as I work toward lessening my burden on the tax payers of Australia of which I was one of from the age of 15. I and everyone else rely on the FTB EOFY Supplement as a means to catch up on bills, buy extra nonperishable foodstuffs, clothing for our child/ren who are growing up way too fast, also keeping up with school expenses ETC..... Please do not take that away from us as well. Despite what everyone thinks we are not bludgers, some of us are trying VERY hard to get out of this hole, but it is not easy when everyday living expenses cost a lot more than we get from Centrelink. We are always in debt or so far behind in payments we cannot pick ourselves up from the gutter the Government has put us in by giving us payments that are way below the poverty line. **I for one am sick of being labelled something I'm not, and sick of getting nowhere**

**Simmone lives in South Australia:**

"I have two children to support financially. I am a single parent - the kids are 13 and 16. We have no support financially from their father – he has a child support debt of \$49,000.00. Family Tax Benefits help a lot. The supplement payments of \$729.00 per child and \$350.00 per family in July really helps buy necessary essentials for my children, such as winter jumpers, jackets, and socks and update tech for educational needs at school. Fix things that have broken, new shoes for sports pay bill that have amounted through year and have some nice foods instead of home brand all the time.

**Laura lives in Ipswich, Queensland:**

Our family receives Family Tax Benefit Part A it and these cuts will mean that we're around \$200-a-year-per-child worse off. We have three children. \$600 in a year might not mean much to a politician on \$200,000+ but it means a lot to us. We chose for me to stay home to look after our children because our second son has autism and needs a lot of support. My work with him saves the taxpayer in the long run because early intervention means he'll need less support during the school years. And I'm rewarded with a pay cut? I'm worth so much more than the FTB I get now, don't punish me because I'm poor. Poverty is simply a lack of money, not a character flaw.

**Barbara from Tasmania:** *I had planned to use the government funded 18 weeks PPL and an additional 8 weeks PPL from my employer to give me 6.5 months to spend with my newborn. I may be able to extend my time using annual & long service leave entitlements.*

*If these PPL changes were to take place I would only be able to take 4.5 months off with my newborn. This will impact not only the amount of quality time with my newborn, my ability to breastfeed bub past 4.5 months, I would also have additional stresses placed on my family including finding suitable childcare.*

*I don't think the impact of this change is understood by our government and the stress which will be caused by pushing parents back into work faster, not to mention what our children will miss out on.*

**Rebecca from Melbourne in Victoria:**

*I am a degree-qualified kindergarten teacher and I am currently on parental leave with my first child, who is 4 months old. I am very concerned about the government's proposed cuts to paid parental leave.*

*Having worked in early childhood education and care for 14 years, I have seen first-hand the impact of returning to work too soon for the parents of newborn children. I have seen how mothers do not have the time necessary to physically and emotionally heal from the process of carrying a child for 9 months and then giving birth to them. I have seen, sadly, how this can escalate into post-natal depression as mothers are forced back to work far sooner than they are ready to, and I have seen the devastating impacts this can have on mothers, on their partners and on their small children.*

*From a logistical point of view, **it is difficult to access early childhood services with a small baby**- many long day care providers will not enrol children less than 3 months old, yet many parents are needing care for their babies at a younger age than this because they simply cannot afford to stay at home any longer and may not have the support of family or friends to assist them. The answer most certainly is not to enrol younger children in long day care services, it's to improve the paid parental leave offered to the families of newborns.  
(continued over page)*

**Rebecca continued:**

*Cuts to paid parental leave means that everyone loses.*

*The children lose out on important time they should be spending with their family.  
The parents lose out on important time they should be spending bonding with their child.  
The mothers lose out on important time they need to allow their bodies to heal from giving birth.*

*And workplaces lose out because the parents returning to work would much rather be at home, nurturing their young babies.*

*Like I mentioned, I'm a parent of a small baby.*

*I want to spend as much time as possible with my newborn without worrying about financial strains and being forced back to work earlier than my body or my baby are ready for. My baby is 18 weeks old this week. I had access to 14 weeks of paid leave from my employer and 18 weeks paid leave from the government. **I am not a "double dipper"**, I am just fortunate to work in a profession with strong commitments to looking after the welfare of parents.*

*When my baby was born, I had an emergency c-section. I had mastitis and extreme difficulty establishing breastfeeding. My baby needed surgery when he was a few weeks old. I have ongoing medical issues resulting from the birth which will take a significant operation and time to heal from. This is a difficult situation which is still taking a large emotional toll on my mental wellbeing. However, this is not an unusual situation and I feel would be common to many new parents.*

***The proposed cuts to paid parental leave are going to affect nurses, teachers, ambos and cashiers at supermarkets.*** *These are not people in well-paid jobs. These are people already possibly struggling to meet their financial needs and may not have large savings accounts to fall back onto if these cuts to paid parental leave are passed. Nurses, teachers and ambos are notoriously underpaid for the value of the work they contribute to society. Everyone in Australia benefits from the caring work of people in these occupations, so proposing cuts that will affect their time to be able to care for their own babies is a cruel irony. I spend every day of my working life caring for, nurturing and teaching young children as well as providing support and advice for their families. It is desperately unfair that the government is trying to prevent me from doing the same thing for my own baby.*

*Experts recommend that mothers and babies need at least 26 weeks together for their health and wellbeing. If the government wants the very best for the next generation of children (and the current generation of parents) then paid parental leave must improve, not become worse. Christian Porter wants to make paid parental leave "fairer" by stripping the best conditions away. To make it "fairer", the conditions should be improved for everyone.*

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Parenthood again thanks Senate Committee members for the opportunity to provide input and feedback to contribute to your review of the *Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017*.

**THE PARENTHOOD REJECTS THE GOVERNMENT'S CUTS TO AUSTRALIA'S FAMILY TAX BENEFITS, REJECT THE GOVERNMENT'S CUTS TO PAID PARENTAL LEAVE AND WHOLEHEARTEDLY REJECTS THE GOVERNMENT'S RELENTLESS ATTACK ON PARENTS (PARTICULARLY MOTHERS) AND THEIR CHILDREN.**

Child Care Reform is long-awaited and necessary. Delaying it further affects parents, their children and the sector more broadly. If we want to increase workforce participation, this reform must be debated separately and as a matter of urgency.

We urge Committee members to listen to the parents of Australia. The powerful stories above are such a small sample of the stories that Parenthood members have told us. We especially urge Committee members to hear those sole parent families, struggling to give their kids the best they can and who simply cannot afford any more cuts to their incomes.

This Bill, if passed in its current form will have devastating consequences for thousands of Australian families. The Parenthood urges you to reject this Bill and recommend to the government that they separate Child Care Reform from proposed savings. We also urge that you recommend they seek budget savings elsewhere – not by asking those who can least afford it pay for it.

We should not be expecting family budgets to repair the national budget.

Kind regards,

Nicole Lessio  
**Principal Campaign Manager**  
**The Parenthood**