



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF NEW ZEALAND

TE KAUNIHERA WAHINE O AOTEAROA

13 April 2012

S12.09

Submission to the Social Services Committee on the *Social Security (Youth Support and Work Focus) Amendment Bill*

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (**NCWNZ**) is an umbrella organisation representing 51 nationally organised societies and national members. It has 23 branches throughout the country attended by representatives of those societies and some 150 other societies as well as individual members. NCWNZ's function is to represent and promote the interests of New Zealand women through research, discussion and action.

This submission has been prepared by the NCWNZ Justice and Law Reform Standing Committee and the Parliamentary Watch Committee after consultation with the membership of NCWNZ.

Introduction

NCWNZ has express formal policy on Domestic Purposes Benefits being paid to solo parents with dependent children, and women required to care for an infirm or sick person and those whose previous domestic commitments have affected their ability to obtain employment.

There is also express formal policy on Family Allowance, Unemployment and Widows Benefits.

NCWNZ has previously made submissions on numerous related Bills and in particular the Social Assistance (Future Focus) Bill in 2010. Specific concerns in the latter submission were raised around child rearing, lack of available meaningful employment – both full and part time, the removal of individual circumstances and needs being taken into account, lack of budgeting advice and support available. There were also concerns around devaluing the role of parenthood and also the loss of people available for voluntary work in the local communities.

NCWNZ supports the Social Security (Youth Support and Work Focus) Amendment Bill in principle.

Comments on specific clauses:

Part 1

Clause 18

New Sections 123E to 123G inserted

NCWNZ supports the encouragement of young persons to education, training and employment; and the information sharing agreement with the Ministry of Education and other agencies.

Clause 19

New Sections 125a to 125G inserted

NCWNZ on the whole supports the contracting with service providers, so long as there is resulting cost effectiveness and efficiency.

Clause 20

New Part 5 inserted

New Section 170 inserted

NCWNZ supports the specified obligations of young people in receipt of support payments.

Part 3

Clause 30

Section 21 amended (Widows' benefits)

The majority of NCWNZ members support the requirement to comply with obligations arising under section 60Q and the work test. However there are reservations as to the availability of reasonable jobs, especially in rural areas, and the need to take into account parental care, the high cost of child care, school holidays, and sickness/health issues. Consideration should also be given to the ability of the beneficiary to cope with the stress of applying for a job compounded by the cost of clothing and transport.

Clause 32

Section 27C amended (Domestic purposes benefits for women alone)

The majority of NCWNZ members support the work test requirement with the same reservations as for clause 30.

Clause 34

New Section 60GAE inserted (Beneficiaries having additional dependent child: general)

Some members are concerned that the proposal regarding an additional child aged 1 or over is punitive and penalises the child. Instead, it was suggested that there should be positive recognition of the first 1000 days being the most important in a child's life.

A member suggested that the age of 16 is more suitable than 14 to define a dependent child, 16 being the school leaving age.

Clause 35

New Section 60Q inserted (Certain obligations may be placed on beneficiaries and their spouses and partners)

The majority of NCWNZ members support the obligations but there are reservations because 'one rule fits all' is fraught with practical difficulties. In particular many will encounter difficulties with transport and the additional hardships because of living in a rural location.

Another impact could be the reduction of voluntary work undertaken by beneficiaries especially at schools.

There has been an observation that in Auckland, WINZ offices require an applicant to attend at a particular WINZ office because of the zoning, even though it would be more practical and easier for the applicant to attend a different office which is closer to her home. There was also an observation that the WINZ officer appeared to be directing the applicant to apply for a work position because the officer had an unduly close relationship with the employer.

Another concern is that employers are able to take advantage of an applicant by offering to take the applicant on trial basis for a short period in the expectation of, say, a future production contract coming in, and at the end of the period saying that the contract has not eventuated and that a permanent position is not available.

Conclusion

NCWNZ supports the aim of alleviating poverty, poor health and many other poor social outcomes. NCWNZ believes that access by women and children to adequate income support when they are in diminished circumstances is critically important to achieve the social health and wellbeing of the community.

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