



**National Council of  
Women of New Zealand**

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Wahine O Aotearoa

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7 July 2015

\$15.18

## **Submission to the Social Services Committee on the Support for Children in Hardship Bill 23**

### **About NCWNZ**

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella group representing 288 organisations affiliated at either the national level or to one of our 21 branches. In addition to our organisational membership, about 260 women are individual members of branches. 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 Economics Standing Committee and the Parliamentary Watch Committee after consultation with the membership of NCWNZ.

### **Summary**

In general, NCWNZ members welcomed the extra money for beneficiary families with dependent children but most thought that the amount was not enough and would not make enough of a difference. It would be difficult to find suitable work, and the work test would just add extra stress to families. If the proposals are to go ahead then there would need to be much better access to more flexible childcare. Members suggested several other measures for supporting children in hardship, such as a universal child benefit, which is supported by NCWNZ policy.

### **Increasing support for beneficiary families with dependent children by \$25 per week (Clause 10 Amendments to various schedules – Schedules 6, 9, 26)**

NCWNZ members recognise that extra money will help families on benefits. The increase in the benefit would make more of a difference in small families than in large families. However many members felt that \$25 would not go far enough, or that it would make a negligible difference. One member said, "It will buy a bottle of milk and two small grocery items each week or help pay WINZ back for an advance the beneficiary has had for an essential item that WINZ has paid for and they must pay back in small amounts each week."

Many members were concerned that rising rents would wipe out the value of the increase, especially when the increase does not take effect until 1 April 2016.

### Requiring beneficiaries to seek part time work (Clause 4, Section 3 amended)

Most members were concerned about the availability of jobs. It was recognised that people who had education and skills would be better placed to find work, but people with low skills could find it very hard to find suitable work, especially in rural and regional areas. The work that was available was likely to be low paid and possibly only available seasonally. Requiring sole parents to seek jobs in these conditions was more likely to cause additional stress to families, rather than result in any material change.

### Childcare

Members suggested that in order for beneficiaries to be able to work in paid employment, there would need to be much greater availability of inexpensive child care. School holiday care would also be needed, as most jobs do not allow parents to take enough time off in order to care for school aged children during school holidays.

Childcare would need to be available for shift workers and weekend workers, as well as being available during the standard work week.

Increasing subsidies for childcare was welcomed, but members were concerned that even with increased subsidies, there might not be enough childcare places available, especially in rural areas. In other cases, families might not be able to afford childcare, and the burden of caring would fall on other family members. Often this would be difficult to manage, especially if those family members had their own jobs. While in some cases grandparents would be able to help, often grandparents are in paid employment themselves and so are not available to provide childcare.

Members were divided in their assessment of the value of childcare. In some cases, attending childcare could be beneficial for children, especially those in difficult family situations. However, many children would be better off being with their parents or caregivers, rather than being forced into childcare because their parents had been forced into paid employment. This was especially the case for sole parent families. To quote a member's response:

*"[The legislation] gives no recognition of the huge parenting demand placed on sole parents. For these parents there is no other adult to share the load when you are getting children ready in the morning or when you return home at night. Yet there is still the same amount of work to be done. An exhausted parent cannot be expected to be an adequate parent all the time. ... Requiring a parent to find work when the youngest child turns three is setting up for failure a group of vulnerable women."*

## Supporting children in poverty, including families in paid work

Members felt that more should be done to assist families in poverty, suggesting measures such as an extra \$25 per week for each child in a family, a universal child benefit for all children, and a universal basic income.

NCWNZ policy supports a universal child allowance for all children between the ages of 0 and 18 years inclusive, replacing all present government living allowances for children, linked to the Consumer Price Index and paid to the main carer of the child.

Other measures that were suggested included:

- Free counselling, budgeting, cooking, gardening and parenting advice;
- Ensuring that WINZ gives clients information on financial entitlements;
- Better access to education and training to support job prospects;
- Mentoring and buddies for families in poverty;
- Using vouchers to provide extra support, such as supermarket and fuel vouchers.

## Oral Submission

We request the opportunity to make an oral presentation to the Select Committee on this Bill.



Rae Duff  
National President



Deborah Russell  
Convener, Economics Standing Committee