



## National Council of Women of New Zealand

Te Kaunihera Wahine o Aotearoa

### Oral Submission to the Social Services and Community Committee on the Child Poverty Reduction Bill

By Judy Whitcombe and Helen Reilly on 9 May 2018

#### ***Social Services and Community Committee***

Chairperson: **Gareth Hughes**, Green List; Deputy: **Priyanca Radhakrishnan**, Labour List; **Ruth Dyson**, Labour Port Hills; **Judith Collins**, National Papakura; **Poto Williams**, Labour Christchurch East; **Simon O'Connor**, National Tamaki; **Greg O'Connor**, Labour Ohariu; **Maureen Pugh**, National List; **Louise Upston**, National Taupo.

Ata marie, Good morning, my name is Dr Judy Whitcombe and my colleague is Helen Reilly. We are a members of the Parliamentary Watch Committee of the National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ).

The submission we present has been prepared from a background of policy decisions and previous submissions on related matters, which have been written following consultation with the members of our organisation.

We welcome the opportunity to convey our organisation's views to the Committee and wish to record NCWNZ's support of the proposed Bill.

As our submission states, NCWNZ has made earlier submissions on Bills relating to Child Support and Children in Hardship. The situation of children in hardship and suggestions for ways to address this has been made in Resolutions passed at NCWNZ Annual Conferences in 2014 and 2017.

#### **Focus of the submission**

Our submission focuses on the importance of the child and that their best interests are given priority. Greater commitment by Government is needed to address the issues relating to child poverty. It is also important for Government to work in partnership with the community, agencies, parents, whānau and schools to achieve progress in child poverty reduction.

#### **Comments on the Bill**

**Part 2** of the Bill addresses measures, targets and reports.

Here the primary **measures** are specified in Clauses 10 to 13 and the Supplementary measures in Clauses 14 to 20. The measures listed were supported and should provide a comprehensive picture to the situation in the financial year timeframe specified.

The Persistent Poverty measure (Clause 13) is clarified in Schedule One Part 1 Clause 2. Here the measure is to be decided before the financial year commencing on 1 July 2025. NCWNZ considered this timeframe to be disappointing and suggested that international practice in this regard and further consultation within New Zealand could be explored with the aim of setting an earlier timeframe.

The **Target** settings proposed were supported and it would be important that the reviews outlined would be carried out.

**Reports.** (Clauses 30 to 36) These reflect the measures and will be important for monitoring and assessment of progress. However, our submission makes some points that:

- Reports should be communicated in formats and channels that can be accessed and understood by key stakeholders such as social agencies and NGOs.
- If statisticians could produce indicative forecasts in relation to persistent poverty, this could ensure wide community awareness and engagement.

**Part 3** covers the amendments required to the Vulnerable Children Act 2014

Here Clause 45 covers the new Part 1 which contains the important detail of the Government Strategy for improving children's well-being. A key component here is section 5 Interpretation, where there are definitions of the coverage of child, children's agencies and children's Ministers. Our submission recommends that additional supports will be needed to assist the agencies to work together to improve the wellbeing of particular groups of children. Levels of capability and capacity amongst agencies are varied and it is recommended that support, resources and assistance be available to agencies to ensure that they are best positioned to contribute to this work.

## **Conclusion**

This Bill is supported and it is hoped that it will have a positive impact on child health and wellbeing to enable children of Aotearoa to reach their full potential.

Recent media coverage of the Bill has been noted. The Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition have met with a view to achieving a cross-party consensus and other experts' opinions have received media coverage. Supplementary Order Papers have been lodged.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the views of our organisation on this Bill.

## **Questions**

**Louise Upston** agreed with Judy that it was good that the Government and Opposition had agreed to work together on the Child Poverty Reduction Bill. She drew NCWNZ's attention to the Supplementary Order Papers on the Bill introduced by Alfred Ngaro, National Party. A "whole Parliament" approach would help ensure the Bill becomes an enduring piece of legislation.

Judy replied that the Supplementary Order Papers had only just been received and that as they had not been considered by NCWNZ she could not comment. To which Louise Upston replied that she would welcome our comments when they were available.

**Ruth Dyson** agreed that "whole Parliament" approach was important as long as it did not eventuate in consensus being achieved by agreement at the lowest common denominator.

**Poto Williams** queried what the last point in NZWNZ's submission regarding gender meant. Judy explained that this referred to sole parent households. Poto asked whether NCWNZ was suggesting that solo parent households were extra vulnerable. Poto agreed with Judy that the term "sole parent household" should be clarified. Poto asked why it was important to identify the gender in sole parent households. Judy reported that the Department of Statistics had not responded to her query about the percentage of the female/male sole parent households there were. Judy commented that NCWNZ believes that gender should be flagged in all legislation.

**Priyanca Radhakrishnan** asked for clarification on Clause 1.5 of NCWNZ'S submission about the need for reports to be given in an accessible format. Did Judy have any examples to illustrate this? In her reply, Judy stressed the importance of all community groups having access to all the reports.

### **Some points made by the 2 representatives from Barnardos NZ.**

- They would prefer the Bill to be renamed and reframed. It should be called the "Children's Well-being Bill" and it should focus on policies that can achieve the change.
- The children's well-being strategy should take a holistic approach and be action-based.
- The current terminology in the Bill is not ideal.
- The policy should be assessed at the point of impact on children.
- In answer to a query by **Poto Williams**, Barnardo's staff believed that the Bill should take a universal approach to children, but, where necessary, disadvantaged groups should be targeted.