



13 March 2026

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Committee,

Single Mother Families Australia welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Technical Changes No.1) Bill 2026

About Single Mother Families Australia

Single Mother Families Australia Incorporated, formerly known as the National Council of Single Mothers and their Children, has been an influential advocate on national issues affecting single mothers since its establishment in 1973. Serving as an unfunded national lead, we engage in productive collaborations with other specialised single-mother organisations, irrespective of their size, funding status, online presence, or grassroots nature. Presently, only Victoria provides funding for a Statewide service, and we aspire for other States to emulate. Simultaneously, through our active presence on social media, Single Mother Families Australia promptly addresses a wide array of concerns from mothers, systematically collecting valuable data and information to enhance our knowledge and reinforce the development of our purpose-specific website. This submission is presented from our advantageous perspective. See more in [About Us | Single Mother Families Australia](#).

Summary of Recommendations

1. Develop a communication strategy to provide to payees when new assessments are made by the registrar.
2. The Committee requires that the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) prioritise the lodging of tax returns for individuals who are party to a child support agreement.
3. The Committee seeks that the ATO utilise the current provisions to prosecute individuals who are party to a child support agreement and have not lodged their income tax assessments for more than three years.
4. SMFA welcomes the new legislation, which aligns with the longstanding principle of the child support scheme that parents with less than 35% care of a child should not be eligible for child support.
5. SMFA supports a legislative framework that facilitates the streamlined administration of Urgent Payments.

SMFA have a deep interest in the Australian Child Support Scheme. The child support scheme affects close to 1 million children whose care is overwhelmingly undertaken by mothers¹. The scheme’s failures are a significant driver of unacceptably high rates of financial abuse and child poverty in Australia. SMFA welcomes the current focus of the Federal Government’s [audit](#) on eliminating systems and policies that enable violence, and the commitment to make the child support scheme the first priority for this audit.

Swinburne University, led by Professor Kay Cook, conducted research in collaboration with SMFA, that has captured mothers' experiences. Our research indicates that the system is failing in its purpose of ensuring that children receive adequate support from their parents.



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Mothers have consistently faced significant challenges due to a system that has failed to fulfil its intended purpose of ensuring that children receive adequate support from their parents. This failure can be attributed to a variety of deficiencies, including, but not limited to, errors, unrealistically low payment transfers, substantial and growing levels of child support debt, complex regulations, inequitable gender-based approaches and outcomes, and reliance on estimated rather than actual income levels for assessments. Furthermore, the scheme facilitates vexatious behaviours by ex-partners seeking to undermine and harm mothers who are providing care and are entitled to receive child support.

Furthermore, the government has long treated transfers from private collections as factual, despite being aware of the erroneous practice. This decision not only disregards the real experiences of single mother families, but it also minimises the scheme's flaws, and this practice continued despite [parliamentary recommendations](#) (2015) seeking statistical oversight of Private Collect. Importantly, the Services Australia 2024-25 [Annual Report](#) now states that they have “assessed \$2.3B in Private Collect” previously; reports would state “collected and transferred.” SMFA welcomes this enhanced accuracy in reporting and shares the government's view and ambition to increase the scheme's efficiency through transparency and accountability. Therefore, we welcome the changes set out in Schedule One.

¹ Women comprise more than 4 in 5 (83%) of payees (those who should receive child support). 85% of payees have children in their care 65% of nights of the year or more. ([Child Support Program Data](#), June 2024).

Part One Schedule One - Child Support

Recommendations

1. SMFA understands that assessments made by the Registrar after the 15th day of a month will commence not at the start of the next month, but at the start of the month and that the change is to assist parents in managing the imminent changes to their financial arrangements. SMFA recommends that this change be accompanied by a comprehensive communication strategy, particularly for payees who are predominantly mothers providing the majority or all of the care.

In the circumstances surrounding delayed lodgements, payers, who are typically men, understand and choose the lodgement date to suit their purposes and are likely to have their financial affairs in order and operating from an informed position. In contrast, the payee - most often the mother - who has no agency and no visibility, will require a communication strategy to address the knowledge imbalance. As of September 2025, 583,795 child support cases of which 359,620 were determined with the accuracy of an income assessment raising questions about the accuracy of the remaining 135,445 cases². Furthermore, mothers with a Private Collect have additional financial considerations and concerns, such as the revised child support amount may not be transferred on time or in full. However, the interaction between child support and the Family Tax Benefit (A), known as the Maintenance Income Test, will result in a recalculated FTB A amount, mostly reduced, regardless of whether child support is received. Therefore, we propose a codesigned communication strategy that is not limited to but includes the following:

- a) A clear statement outlining the new child support rates, the revised Family Tax Benefit (A), and the effective start date.
 - b) Informing payees that they have the option to transfer to Agency Collect without requiring permission from the payer. Information that, despite clear documentation of an outstanding child support debt, any debt collected once transferred to Agency Collect will typically be no more than 3 months old.
 - c) Information on the Private Collect Partial Exemption
 - d) Information on what the Entitlement and Disbursement Method are, and that mothers can choose their preferred method.
2. The Committee uses this opportunity to require the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) to prioritise the lodging of tax returns for individuals who are party to a child support agreement. This priority should be communicated publicly and accompanied by action. There are a concerning and growing trend among male payers of child support agreements to fail to submit their income tax assessments to the ATO. Such failures constitute both tax and child support evasion, but they go unpunished, and nonlodging is an effective way to weaponise child support.
 3. The Committee seeks that the ATO follow its own direction to require an annual tax return, and when this does not occur for more than three years, that the ATO use the provisions to prosecute individuals who are party to a child support agreement.

The Australian Taxation Office [webpage](#), accessed on 11 March 2026.

Child Support (Liable and Recipient Parent)

If you are a liable or recipient parent under a child support assessment, you are required to lodge a tax return unless both of the following conditions apply:

² Child Support Program - [September quarter](#) 2025.

- *You receive government benefits for the entirety of the income year.*
- *Your income is less than \$29,842.*

Failure to lodge tax returns is classified as a criminal offence under Section 8C of the Taxation Administration Act 1953. The law prescribes increasing penalties for multiple offences, with a conviction carrying a term of imprisonment of up to 12 months. SMFA ask that the reevaluation of how the law is enforced by the ATO. It should be emphasised that payees, primarily mothers, are required to uphold an annual lodgement obligation or face penalties stipulated in social security law.

Why non-lodgement is a Problem: If men retrospectively lodge a tax return after failing to do so for many years, Services Australia automatically recalculates what they *should* have paid in child support over these years. This means Family Tax Benefit A payments should have been lower over these years, creating an FTB A debt for the mother. Often, the first time these mothers know about the debt is when they go to the ATM and see there is no or little FTB A. Child support can't reduce FTB A below the base rate, but that is +70% less than the maximum rate. Commonwealth Rent Assistance can only be paid if the recipient receives more than the base rate of FTB A, which means it is not payable for women affected by this rule.

Opening the Black Box found that the debt that women owed to Services Australia was, on average, just under \$3,500, whilst the same women were owed an average of \$12,000 in child support from their former partners³. According to section 7.2.1 on Debt Recovery in the [Guides to Social Policy](#), the government recovers FTB A. Concerningly, the guide does not acknowledge the coexistence of an FTB A debt (a debt owed by women to the government) and the child support debt owed to them. As a result, a mother may find herself, through no fault of her own, owing money that is vigorously and automatically collected without any consideration for the child support owed to her. Moreover, the FTB A debt that mothers incur due to a defective system will affect their credit rating. Conversely, a child support debt does not affect the payer's credit rating.

Part One Schedule Two - Child Support

4. SMFA welcomes the new legislation aligning with the current, longstanding principle of the child support scheme that parents with less than 35% care of a child should not be eligible for child support.

Schedule Two Urgent Payments

5. SMFA supports a legislative framework that facilitates the streamlined administration of Urgent Payments. This framework aims to remove the burden on women of having to justify their circumstances to access these payments. Eligibility criteria and access to Urgent Payments are clearly communicated for better understanding.

³ Opening the black box of child support: Shining a light on how financial abuse is perpetrated, page 72.
https://figshare.swinburne.edu.au/articles/report/Opening_the_black_box_of_child_support_Shining_a_light_on_how_financial_abuse_is_perpetrated/26983363?file=49631919

Should you require a Child Support briefing paper, please click on, [So Many Ways to Lose](#). We trust that our response will help the Committee in their work and deliberations. Please do not hesitate to contact SMFA for clarification. Moreover. SMFA would be happy to provide testimony.

Warm Regards,

Terese Edwards

CEO