



St Vincent de Paul Society
NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc. *good works*

3 July 2023

Committee Secretary
Community Affairs Legislation Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary,

RE: Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Safety Net) Bill 2023

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council ('the Society') welcomes the opportunity to provide a letter supporting passage of this Bill.

The Society is a lay Catholic charitable organisation that comprises over 45,000 volunteers and members and 6,000 employees who provide on the ground assistance across Australia. Our members and volunteers work directly with those in need by giving them a hand up, so they can achieve their full potential.

The Society provides over \$50 million each year in emergency relief assistance to cover people's basic needs. While this assistance makes a difference, it is not a long-term solution to lifting people out of poverty. We believe there are clear policy choices available to the Australian Government that can reduce inequality and support the most vulnerable. The Society supports this Bill because it goes some way towards addressing the current cost of living crisis.

The Society supports

- expanding eligibility for parenting payment (single) to single principal carers whose youngest child is aged under 14 years
- increasing the rates of certain working age and student payments, including Jobseeker payment, Youth Allowance, Parenting Payment (partnered), Austudy and Disability Support Pension (youth), by \$40 per fortnight
- expanding eligibility for the higher rate of Jobseeker payment to recipients aged 55 years and over who have been on the payment for nine or more continuous months, and
- increasing the maximum rates of Commonwealth rent assistance by 15 per cent.

The Society's 2022 Federal Election Statement, [A Fairer Australia](#), called on the Australian Government to make significantly larger increases to working age payments, increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 50 per cent and increase the earnings threshold for income support recipients (by \$150 a fortnight). In 2022, the Society commissioned the ANU to [model options for a fairer tax and welfare system](#) and the model is currently being update.

While we support this Bill, we call on the Australian Government to:

- outline how recommendations made by its Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee are being considered by the Treasurer and Minister for Finance
- increase the earnings threshold for income support recipients by \$150 a fortnight
- drop the stage 3 tax cuts
- review the taxation system with the outcome being to reduce inequality and increase fairness across the tax and welfare systems
- use the better-than-expected budget surplus (around \$20BN) to assist those on income support during the cost of living crisis.

Yours sincerely

Toby oConnor
Chief Executive Officer