

19 November 2020

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
By email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

Economic Justice Australia Submission to the Inquiry into the Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (Extension of Coronavirus Support) Bill 2020

Economic Justice Australia (EJA) is the peak organisation for community legal centres providing specialist advice regarding social security issues and rights. Our members across Australia have provided free and independent information, advice, education and representation in the area of social security for over 30 years.

EJA draws on its members' casework experience to identify systemic policy issues and provide expert advice to government on reforms needed to make the social security system more effective and accessible. Our law and policy reform work:

- Strengthens the effectiveness and integrity of our social security system;
- Educates the community; and
- Improves people's lives by reducing poverty and inequality.

EJA has commended the Government for the provision of additional financial assistance to many Australians financially impacted by COVID-19, in particular the introduction of the Coronavirus Supplement at \$550 per fortnight which effectively doubled the ordinary rate of payment for over 1.6 million people reliant on Job Seeker Payment.

There have been widespread reports of people's lives being transformed as a result of being able to cover the basics, like buying fresh fruit and vegetables, paying for safe accommodation and obtaining necessary medical treatment. Unfortunately, these benefits are diminishing with the reduction in the Coronavirus Supplement rate. Impacts of further reduction from 1 January will represent a stark return to poverty for people unable to find work.

EJA members have seen first-hand the impact of the low rate of Newstart Allowance and other non-pension income support payments on the lives of many people in our community; and the palpable impact of the boost to household income provided by the initial rollout of the Coronavirus Supplement at \$550 per fortnight. In light of these insights, EJA fully endorses the Australian Council of Social Service's (ACOSS) submission to this Inquiry.

Contact

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