

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

BUDGET ESTIMATES – 5-6 JUNE 2014 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Income support payments – average and median amounts paid to recipients and lowest and highest range paid to recipients.

Question reference number: HS 20

Senator: Cameron

Type of question: Hansard page 4, 6 June 2014

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 25 July 2014

Number of pages: 2

Question:

a) Senator SIEWERT: It is not just the profiles of individuals on certain payments; it is the profile of the broad base of the customers.

Ms Campbell: And of course those profiles change every day.

Senator SIEWERT: I understand that. But you could do some work on what you could consider would be the typical—

Ms Campbell: We will take that question on notice.

Senator CAMERON: What would be the most accurate analysis? It would not be average recipient; it would be the median recipient? Could you advise what the average welfare recipient gets, what the median recipient gets? Can you do any of that work?

Senator Payne: We can take that on notice, but when you say 'the median welfare recipient', the breadth of even that concept is quite phenomenal.

Senator CAMERON: I am not saying you can do it and demanding that it is done. I am just asking.

Senator Payne: In terms of what you want the officers to do, and the department to do, if we begin with the example that you used, which was the same as the one in the mid-year reports you have referred to, we will operate from that basis, using that as the point of reference; we will take that on notice and come back with the information that we can provide.

b) Senator CAMERON: ...I think it would be extremely helpful for the Senate, if we are faced with this type of attack—and certainly me as shadow minister faced with this kind of attack on my portfolio's clients, if you like, to have some idea—to know whether this is an issue that is spread right across the country. Tens of thousands of people getting \$54,000 is an extremely important thing for politicians to understand—if that is occurring—so they can stop the attack on welfare recipients. It would be good if we could actually see—and I accept that it changes all the time, but it would change within bands and ranges. You could give us some ranges of how much is paid out, from the lowest range to the highest range, couldn't you? Surely that is not beyond the width of the department?

Ms Campbell: We will take that on notice and consult with other agencies such as the Department of Social Services on the data they have as well.

Answer:

The information requested is not readily available and cannot be provided on the grounds that to collect, collate or prepare the information would be a substantial and unreasonable diversion of resources. The Department has consulted with the Department of Social Services and they have confirmed that they do not have this data readily available.