

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**Finance and Administration Portfolio**

**Department of Human Services and agencies**

Budget Estimates 2006-2007, 25 May 2006

**Question: HS43**

**Outcome 1, Output 2**

**Topic: Child Support Agency - Tax File Numbers, Suicide**

**Hansard Page/Written Question on Notice: Written**

**SENATOR FIELDING** asked the Minister for Human Services, upon written notice:

- (1) Was legal advice sought or obtained by the Department with respect to the use of tax file numbers in the administration of child support legislation? If so, please provide a copy of the legal advice and a copy of the brief requesting the legal advice.
- (2) Has the Minister ever sought advice with respect to the use of tax file numbers in the administration of child support legislation?
- (3) Has the Minister ever been informed that the Child Support Registrar requires the Commissioner of Taxation to provide Tax File Number information for paying parents without first either requesting the information from the paying parent or obtaining a statement in writing from the paying parent authorising the Commissioner of Taxation to give the information to the Child Support Registrar, as provided in the *Child Support (Assessment) Act 1989*? If not, why not?
- (4) Is the Department aware of concerns raised that over 1500 fathers took their own lives in 2002-03 alone and claims that many of these deaths are linked to injustices in the child support system? Has the Department investigated these concerns and what was the outcome of those investigations?
- (5) Given the difficulty after separation of determining a just financial settlement to ensure that parents both support their children and can continue their new lives apart, would the Department please detail the process it follows to ensure that non-custodial parents have the financial ability to sustain a second household and have an incentive to continue to work hard for their future?

**Answer:**

- (1) Yes. The advice cannot be released at this time because the legal proceedings for which the advice was sought has not concluded.
- (2) No
- (3) Yes, the Minister has recently been briefed on this issue.

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- (4) CSA is aware of the concerns, and acknowledges that family separation is very emotional and that suicide has complex causation. There is no evidence to suggest that male suicides have increased since the introduction of the Child Support Scheme.

CSA has developed a suite of products and services to support parents through the emotional and financial difficulties of family separation, including;

- an initiative that puts parents in crisis in direct contact with a counsellor;
- clear procedures to ensure that parents who may be at risk of self-harm or harming others are appropriately supported;
- *Staying Connected* program that supports separated dads in the workplace to stay in touch with their kids and the *Being Connected* program which supports newly separated unemployed parents back into work;
- the *Me and My* suite of products helps parents to support themselves, to manage their emotional, financial and parenting issues and to rebuild their confidence;
- an interactive CD-ROM *Dealing with Separation* which provides parents with practical hints and tips on how to manage after separation.

- (5) The Child Support legislation provides the Change of Assessment process that allows separated parents to have assessments varied to account for changed circumstances after separation, eg. extra money earned after separation for the benefit of a resident child.

CSA also provides a range of products (see Q4 above) to assist with financial planning and accounting for child support, as well as to help parents remain positive about their futures.

To prepare this answer, it has taken approximately 4 hours at an estimated cost of \$226.