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Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs  
Australian Parliament House  
CANBERRA

Dear Committee

### **WELFARE TO WORK**

There are many who believe that the proposals in the legislation now before Parliament will disadvantage some of the most vulnerable in the community. We would like to raise two issues of concern.

#### **DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION COMMISSIONER**

The Communication Project Group believes that there is an urgent need to ensure that there a Disability Discrimination Commissioner is appointed on a full time, permanent basis in order to help reduce that potential disadvantage.

The present situation of an “acting” Commissioner has been in place for more than five years. Research done by this group indicates that people feel unable to approach the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission with complaints due to a belief that the failure to appoint a permanent Commissioner indicates a lack of interest and commitment to the interests of people with disabilities.

The appointment of a permanent and full time Commissioner would, in terms of the overall government budget, be small but the potential value is immense. The cost of negotiation and conciliation will always be cheaper than the cost of taking an issue before the courts.

#### **NEED FOR INCREASED EMPHASIS ON OVERALL COMMUNICATION RESOURCES**

Research by this group also indicates that satisfaction with and efficiency ratings of government funded programmes could both be significantly improved if more emphasis was given to developing a greater understanding of the overall communication needs and difficulties of people with disabilities.

If the present proposals are put in place then the new demands on people with disabilities to access and understand information will require increased understanding of their communication needs and abilities. These can be complex and, because of the nature of the problem, are often ignored.

Such an approach will require increased and greatly improved non-partisan input from advocacy organisations. Research by this group suggests that many people with disabilities feel unable to approach advocacy organisations because of what is perceived to be a “politically correct” approach or ideology which is not in keeping with the aspirations and desires of the individual who is looking for assistance. The end result is that many people with disabilities feel that they do not have a voice and that there is nowhere to turn for assistance. Should the proposed measures be passed then there will be an even greater need to ensure that people with disabilities are not put at even greater risk of abuse due to a failure to provide adequate assistance to communicate.

It is suggested that much of this could be achieved through the direct participation of at least one organisation for people who have communication impairments other than a hearing impairment at the level of the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations. Again this could be a significant achievement for a small outlay.

Unless these measures are put in place there will be significant gaps in the provision of services to people with disabilities. This will in turn affect the capacity of the government to deliver effective programmes with the desired outcomes.

We hope that the Committee will acknowledge the importance of the issues raised here and that they will raise the matter of the appointment of a permanent Disability Discrimination Commissioner and the appointment of a person with the capacity to take a very broad view of the communication needs of all people with disabilities to the AFDO with the necessary persons as soon as practicable.

Should you require further information on any of the above matters please contact the Communication Project Group at the above address

Yours faithfully

(Dr) C Gunn  
Deputy Director