

To: the COMMUNITY AFFAIRS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

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RE: Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and other Measures) Bill 2005 Family and Community Services Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work) Bill 2005

Mandy MacNight

Personal Submission To The Inquiry Regarding Disability Support Pension (DSP) Changes

I do not consider myself disabled but for a number of years I have been working alongside people struggling with disadvantage and disability and sometimes assisting them to make the decision to apply for the pension, I would say that the proposed bill has stripped one of the few remaining pieces of dignity from huge numbers of people, many of whom had taken solace in the in the dignified term 'pensioner'.

In my experience very few people WANT to be a Disabled pensioner. Most have to swallow their pride to even apply, but the reality is that for many the constant hounding of the welfare and jobsearch bodies and the deprivation of income means that people are sometimes forced to apply. Can you imagine when they say no, can you imagine what it's like to even be 'rejected' from being disabled? Under the changes they become - 'Newstart enhanced' not quite sick enough for a pension but not well enough for fulltime work, and they remain in limbo with ever increasing complexity in rules about eligibility for services and concessions.

Many people think there is this thing called 'relative' poverty in Australia meaning people don't have a TV or DVD player. Make no mistake, there IS this kind of poverty; but there is also the kind where you don't have enough to eat, and cannot afford to live anywhere or have a phone or buy a travel ticket. We have REAL poverty and this is only going to be amplified by cutting people's income and suspending payments when their lives are getting difficult and they prioritise this rather than attend their meeting with Centrelink. Just before you justify stopping

someone's payments remember it costs around \$13000 to keep a welfare recipient on payments and \$40 000 to keep them in jail because they've committed a crime to stay alive or housed.

FORCING PEOPLE TO 'DO THE RIGHT THING':

I believe when you force someone to do something on pain of losing their livelihood they will not appreciate it. They will fight it, then they will probably submit, but you have just taken away their independence and made them dependent on you to make their decisions. This increases the very 'WELFARE DEPENDENCE' this bill is supposed to address. Ultimately the sad thing is that if you made the services available without the compulsion, many people would like to take up the opportunities gladly. Most people do not want to stay on the dole, most people strive and push to get rid of Centrelink, many people have REAL issues they need to sort out before they can move forward, but with opportunities I believe most, if not all people want to change their lives for the better.

GETTING RID OF 'WELFARE' DEPENDENCE:

1. Spend real amounts of money on advertising to employers the benefits of employing a person with disability (as you have done the 'work choices' campaign)- removing stigma and discrimination is the first step towards assisting people with disability back in to the workforce.
2. Increase funding to the TAFE sector and bring back the capped fees for disadvantaged people (people with a health care card and those on Austudy). The reason there is a 'worker shortage' is because of a mismatch between the skills available and the ones required – this is easily fixed with training.
3. Introduce/enhance prevocational labour market programs such as the Personal Support Program that emphasise participant choice, that maximise people's decision making power over their own lives and stop forcing people to jump through hoops!
4. Accept that it is marvellous that some people are contributing to society in ways that cannot be measured by paid employment, appreciate the unpaid labour that entails and the diverse and rich society it brings.
5. Stop hounding people but never give up on them , never put anyone in a 'too hard basket', always offer opportunities for self development and improvement based on what individuals want and what they decide they can handle. Trust that people know what's good for them and when they have the resources they can build their own future.