

To the Senate

As a sole parent, I am very concerned at the devastating impact the government's proposed legislation will have on my son, myself and others.

I became a sole parent in a cloud of domestic violence, this is something that I thought would never happen to me. As a consequence most of my friends (who I thought would support me as least emotionally) have disappeared. My small family has blamed me for my situation & constantly abused me for not enduring an abusive relationship, until I could take no more from my family and now have no contact with my mother & sister (my father is dying in a nursing home with advanced dementia & no longer recognises me). I am raising my son by myself with out anyone else's help.

My 6 year old son has experienced more rejection in his short life, than most adults experience in their whole lives. He is becoming increasingly aware of the fact that I am the only important adult in his life that has not abandoned him. I have told him that the government wants me to do paid work and he begs me not to leave him to go to work. He has now become very insecure and is constantly asking how he can look after himself when I am not allowed to. I have told him that he would have to go to after-school care & he now constantly begged me not to make him go to after-school-care because he hates it. I have nobody that I trust that can look after my son when I cannot. This school has no before-school-care & I am very concerned about being forced to abandon my child when no child care is available in school holidays, public holidays, sick days etc. I have no idea what I could do with my son as this is a area with a limited supply of childcare, and many children are already roaming unsupervised.

I am really worried that this legislation is another step in punishing already vulnerable children. He hates after-school-care & he has asked me why he is going to be punished with it. Other children will be able to go home and be children, he will have to endure care he hates. Also I would have to stop the after school activities my son does (like swimming lessons) or just fill his days with school, paid carers and activities then get a burnt out child.

I would like to point out that I am not unemployed, I have a more than a full time job raising my child by myself. As a solo parent I now work between 168 hours and 138 hours a week. At most I get 30 hours a week off during the school term, on the rare week that there is no sick days, curriculum days, public holidays or the school special event days, etc. I now spend at least one morning at the school as a parent helper (which my son looks forward to) but would have to stop it when I am forced into paid work in the little time I get off from parenting. I strongly resent losing the little time I get off from parenting responsibilities to do another job as well. When exactly would I be getting some respite from responsibilities from fulltime parenting and paid work??? Will the government be adding more hours to the day??? The lack of acceptable child care means I will some how have to find a way of looking after my son while working. And I can forget about any time off from any responsibilities of work... I now have a max of 30 hours a week off, working a min of 15 hours & travelling time means that I am guaranteed to burn out. I do not want to be forced to have my son adopted to someone else because that is the only way I will be able to get respite. I am terrified of what may happen to him if I am forced to put him into foster care & as my only real option for some time off. I know of no other job in society that has the importance of raising children, yet the government wants to punish me for taking this role seriously and dedicating my life to it. Denying me a little time off is cruel & forcing my child into care he hates is child cruelty, in years to come will we have a 'stolen generation of children from solo parent families'?

All the sole parents that I know that do paid work are the ones who have a good support network, all the sole parents that I know that do not have a good support network are the ones who raise their children full time. Paying strangers to raise vulnerable children is not providing loving & nurturing child care & is not in the best interests of child care. Also child care is

expensive, how am I going to afford to pay for this, or am I expected to work simply to pay someone else to raise my son?

I have no idea how I could get secure and meaningful work that still allows me to be totally available for my son, he has nobody else to turn to. Such a job has to be during school hours, local so I have quick access to my son, time off for around 12 weeks of school holidays plus sick days, special event days, curriculum days, and give me time off for respite. I can not imagine how I am going to find any extra energy & time to work another job. It is simply cruel to increase my participation to more work when I am already burnt out from constant parenting.

I do not go out in the evenings, I cannot afford childcare, my son gets too tired if I take him out. What little social life I have happens when my son is at school, but because of my circumstances I have few friends. I am in a catch-22, the only way I can fulfil the governments paid work requirements, is to neglect the needs of my child and myself. There is nothing reasonable in the government forcing me into paid work & some how fit the demanding needs of my son around that, while giving me no time to myself.

This is a program of saving money on welfare spending, why else would this legislation reduce the amount of money the parents of the poorest children live on? I already struggle everyday to provide the essentials, my son has recently outgrown his school uniform & I simply don't have the money to get him a new one, so he is badgered daily by his teacher why his 'out of uniform' until I can get the money to buy a second-hand one. The housing boom has meant that I pay half or what I receive simply keeping a roof over our heads. The rest is usually spent in the following order bills, car maintenance & petrol, groceries, treats like second-hand clothes or toys. I am really struggling to keep my car, maintenance & petrol are getting so expensive that I will be selling it in the next few months. Reducing my income further makes no sense. The government plans to punish for working?? for more than 6 weeks is insane will only make things worse. We are already very socially isolated as I simply cannot afford outings that others take for granted when they socialize. When my income is reduced further is too depressing for me to think about. I already account for every cent I have & am really struggling now, I don't know how I can raise my child on even less. How Can we live with any dignity when our poverty is increased? Please do not experiment with our lives, testing what is the financial breaking point that will turn a just surviving family onto the streets.

I have no doubt that a direct consequence of this legislation is that carers of children to think twice before leaving a destructive relationship, choosing to care for their children in a toxic environment rather than pay someone else to raise their children. The government's message is clear...get a \$3000 bribe to have children, then quick go out and find someone to dump your children on because paid work is more important than raising children.

The government is only right on one account, that is solo parents should not be on welfare...because they are already the hardest working members of our society, they should be paid a real wage for doing the most difficult job in the world under incredibly difficult circumstances. As a sole parent and regular volunteer I already participate in society, and do more than my fair share to it's betterment. Forcing further participation when I do not have the resources to do so, is cruel. If my work as a solo parent was valued by our society, I would not have to beg you to not punish my son and myself with this financially and physically crushing legislation. I beg you to seriously consider the lives that will be devastated by this program, and the children that will be damaged from this act. Future generations will pay the consequence of the children that are seen as an inconvenience to making money.

Lily Morgan