

Tues 16 Mar 2010

Senate Committee lacks rigour

Anglicare Australia's Executive Director Kasy Chambers described the Senate Community Affairs Committee report on the Australian Government's welfare reform legislation, released last week, as profoundly disappointing.

"This was an inquiry into a fundamental change to the welfare system" Ms Chambers said today.

It should have been the forum where the evidence for it was properly examined, the assumptions behind it were tested, and where its likely impact was judged against other available options."

"Unfortunately, the Committee's majority report skates over the surface of far too much of the evidence and the analysis that was presented to it and has too easily endorsed a risky initiative for what appears to be political rather than social purposes."

"One of the key questions that we, and many others, asked is how can we best help people on benefits to lead positive and independent lives, and whether these proposed laws are the best way to do it."

"Unfortunately, the Committee appears to have ducked that challenge. In many cases, rather than questioning, the report simply repeated the assertions made by the Department (FaHCSIA.)"

"Many expert and grass root organisations also questioned the efficacy of a broad brush stand alone scheme of income quarantining. Neither the Government, nor the Committee, could offer a rationale for such an indiscriminate and heavy handed approach."

"Anglicare Australia accepts that the majority of Senators on the Committee, may well be convinced of the value of some income quarantining for particular communities in Northern Territory. We are most disappointed that the more complex issues that surround that intervention, the strong arguments for a more individual approach, and the conflict with the principles of social inclusion that are inherent in this approach were not confronted.

"Democracy is only as strong as the rigour our parliamentarians apply to the business before them."

"Anglicare Australia acknowledges the important contribution to the debate made by Greens Senator Siewert in her dissenting report. However, in the context of a major refashioning of the social contract that government has with the most marginalised and disenfranchised members of our society, it is of great concern to Anglicare Australia that in this report, the Committee as a whole did not demonstrate the level of rigour that we needed and would expect" Ms Chambers said.

MEDIA CONTACT ROLAND MANDERSON

041 224 1379 (02) 62301775

THE VOICE FOR ANGLICAN CARE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN AUSTRALIA

This statement represents the views of Anglicare Australia, as the national peak body of the Anglicare network.
It may not necessarily represent the views of the Anglican Church of Australia
or the views of an individual member of the Anglicare Australia network.