



Social Security (Extension of Young Persons Services and Remedial Matters) Amendment Bill Social Services Select Committee

The Salvation Army New Zealand Fiji and Tonga Territory Submission

BACKGROUND

1. The Salvation Army is an international Christian and social services organisation that has worked in New Zealand for over one hundred and thirty years. The Army provides a wide-range of practical social, community and faith-based services, particularly for those who are suffering, facing injustice or those who have been forgotten and marginalised by mainstream society.
2. We have over 90 Community Ministry centres and Churches (Corps) across the nation, serving local families and communities. We are passionately committed to our communities as we aim to fulfil our mission of caring for people, transforming lives and reforming society through God in Christ by the Holy Spirit's power.¹
3. This submission has been prepared by the Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit of The Salvation Army. This Unit works towards the eradication of poverty by encouraging policies and practices that strengthen the social framework of New Zealand.
4. This submission has been approved by Major Campbell Roberts of The Salvation Army's New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory.

THE SALVATION ARMY'S PERSPECTIVE

5. In general The Salvation Army opposes the intent and much of the content of the Bill. The principle reason for this opposition is that the Army believes that is both paternalistic and somewhat contradictory to treat 18 and 19 year olds in the same way as 16 and 17 year olds. The Army believes that it is important to respect individuals' legal and civil rights ahead of particular policy objectives which may in themselves be of questionable value. It is the Army's opinion that the proposed extension of 'young persons services' and the associated obligation and sanctions, to 18 and 19 year olds is a clear example of the State placing its policy objectives ahead of the legitimate rights of citizens and that as a practice this is unwise and unfair.

¹ <http://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/our-community/mission/>

6. The Salvation Army accepts the value of the approach being taken in the existing legislation around the provision of additional support and supervision to 16 , 17 and in some cases case 18 year olds who are receiving welfare benefits from the State. The Army accepts too, much of the rationale behind such an approach which some would say is quite hands on. This rationale, at least as the Army understands it, is that younger adults may require more guidance and direction around life choices perhaps because of a lack of maturity and life experience or perhaps because of an absence of such support from within their family and wider social networks. Tying such support and guidance into the granting and receipt of a welfare payment can appear to be paternalistic and even overbearing, but to some extent this may be seen as a case of a greater good being served through the support being offered.
7. In The Salvation Army's opinion the balance of the good being served by offering support and guidance under the threat of obligations and sanctions fades as the age of the people concerned extends. At some point the paternalistic argument 'that the State knows what is good for you because you are too young and immature to what it is good for you' wears thin and begins to be seen as simply the State extending its powers of control and direction because it can. Extending a paternalistic argument such as that which is implicit in the Bill, to 18 and 19 year olds is in the Army's unjustified and excessive and we urge members of the Committee to reject this argument
8. The Salvation Army notes the inconsistency in the approach being taken in the Bill around the agency afforded to 18 and 19 year olds and the approach taken by Parliament (and the majority of Members of Parliament) when it came to reviewing drinking laws in late 2012. In the case of setting the minimum purchase age under the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012 the majority of members were happy to argue that 18 and 19 year olds were mature enough to make informed decisions around how they purchased and consumed alcohol. Some members of the Committee may recall that at the time that this Act passed into law, The Salvation Army was arguing for a split age of purchase – that 18 and 19 year olds should be allowed to purchase liquor in on-license premises but not in off-license premises. The basis of the Army's argument was that it was important to find a balance between the legal rights of 18 and 19 year olds as adult citizens and the demonstrated effects which harmful consumption of alcohol often had on the health and wellbeing of people of this age.
9. There is in The Salvation Army's opinion no such balance being achieved here by extending quite paternalistic conditions and obligations to 18 and 19 year old as a condition for them receiving basic income support which is afforded to other adult citizens without such conditions. This lack of balance, in the Army's opinion, is made worse by the lack of any evidence to suggest that problem identified in the supporting regulatory impact statement (of 18 and 19 years turning into long-term benefit recipients) will be addressed by the interventions being anticipated by the Bill.
10. In The Salvation Army's experience as a major national provider of social services and employment training services to young adults, it is opportunity to train and gain employment which reduces young peoples' reliance on welfare payments. The Army submits that the Government and Parliament should look at what it can do to provide 18 and 19 year olds with better opportunities to engage in second chance learning and tertiary education rather

than spending time creating up new ways to extend obligations and sanctions. In particular the Army suggests that Government should consider options for providing better financial support for 18 and 19 year olds to engage in tertiary education training opportunities.

SPECIFIC RESPONSES TO THE BILL

- 11.** As suggested above The Salvation Army sees little merit in the substantive measures proposed in this Bill and we suggest that it is abandoned entirely. We acknowledge that some of the clauses contained in the Bill are of the nature of 'machinery clauses' which are needed to clarify some of administrative mechanisms of the Social Security Act. The Army submits that such clauses could as easily be put in a subsequent, more limited Bill or be simply left until the promised rewrite of the main Act in 2016.

CONCLUSION

The Salvation Army would like an opportunity to present a verbal submission in support of this written submission if the Committee has time for this within its deliberations. To arrange such an opportunity or for further information on this submission please contact:

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