

11 April 2018

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

Re: Social Services Legislation Amendment (Encouraging Self-sufficiency for Newly Arrived Migrants) Bill 2018

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) is the peak advocacy body for over 240 members representing ethnic and multicultural organisations, and is the voice of multicultural Victoria.

ECCV welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee on the *Social Services Legislation Amendment (Encouraging Self-sufficiency for Newly Arrived Migrants) Bill 2018* (the Bill).

ECCV believes that the Bill will have an adverse impact on many vulnerable members of the Australian community. The proposal to increase the New Arrived Resident's Waiting Period (NARWP) from two years to three, and therefore extend the period that many migrants must wait until they are able to access social security payments and concession cards, increases the risk of them experiencing financial hardship and social isolation. Furthermore, the introduction of a three year waiting period for certain types of social security payments (carer allowance, bereavement allowance, widow allowance, parenting payment, family tax benefit, parental leave pay, and dad and partner pay) that do not currently have a waiting period, will have a similar effect on those migrants who may due to unforeseen circumstances require such support for themselves and their families.

While the exemptions provided by the Bill for refugees and in other limited cases are essential to ensuring adequate support for these particular groups, ECCV believes that many new migrants will be at risk of significant hardship if required to wait an additional year until they are able to access social security benefits. Newly-arrived residents are as vulnerable (if not more) as any other Australians to changes of circumstance such as family breakdown, loss of employment or housing insecurity. As a result, the change of the waiting period could potentially lead to extreme hardship for individuals who find themselves in unexpected situations. ECCV is particularly concerned that certain vulnerable groups, such as families with young children, and women experiencing domestic

violence, are often most at need of social security support and will be at greatest risk of hardship and potential destitution if the amendments outlined in the Bill come into effect.

ECCV endorses the submission and recommendations made by the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee. In particular, we endorse FECCA's concerns that:

- Newly-arrived migrants, and in particular migrant women, face particular barriers to entering the Australian labour market.
- The Bill in its current form will disproportionately affect single parents and their children, women experiencing domestic violence, and children in households where the main income earner unexpectedly loses employment.

ECCV therefore recommends that the Bill in its present form be rejected by the Senate.

For further information, please contact James Houghton, ECCV Policy Officer, on (03) 9354 9555 or jhoughton@eccv.org.au.

Sincerely



Kris Pavlidis
Chairperson