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5 March 2021

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



By your side

By email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Re: Social Services Legislation Amendment (Strengthening Income Support) Bill 2021

The Australian Services Union (ASU) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the *Social Services Legislation Amendment (Strengthening Income Support) Bill 2021* ('the Bill').

The ASU is one of Australia's largest unions, representing approximately 135,000 members in every state and territory. The ASU's has members in many industries and occupations in the public, community and service sectors. Relevantly, we represent workers in the social and community sector, including employees of employment service providers.

We support an increase to the Jobseeker payment, but fear that the new rate proposed by the Federal Government is too low to make a meaningful difference in the lives of the unemployed. The proposed rate of \$615.70 per fortnight is still not enough to meet the basic needs of people receiving the payment.

Our members in the community sector work with jobseekers and the long term unemployed. They know from direct experience that the constant financial stress from living on \$40 dollars a day has a significant impact on a person's physical and mental health.

In turn, this affects their ability to comply with the strict obligations placed on jobseekers to actively search for work. People on income support, struggling to meet basic needs like food or shelter, often lack the resources to invest in looking for work. When a person is struggling to put food on the table, they are cannot afford the mobile phone, the new clothes or even the petrol that will help them secure employment.

During the COVID-19 pandemic the number of Australians living in poverty fell because of the combined impact of the COVID-19 Jobseeker supplement and the Jobkeeper scheme. Through the COVID-19 Jobseeker supplement the government placed unemployed people in the best position to find work again when the lockdowns ended. Morally, this was the right thing to do. But the moral choice to support unemployed people also had broader economic benefits. The fall in poverty stimulated consumer spending and supported our economic recovery.

We are of the view that the proposed increase to Jobseeker is inadequate. Our government should ensure that people are not living in poverty and support a greater increase to Jobseeker.

Yours faithfully

Emeline Gaske
ASSISTANT NATIONAL SECRETARY