



Families Commission Amendment Bill Social Services Select Committee

The Salvation Army (New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory) Submission

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Salvation Army is an international Christian and social services organisation that has worked in New Zealand for over one hundred and twenty years. The Salvation Army is strongly connected to the families and communities we serve and work alongside. We have over 65 community ministry centres and churches (corps) across the nation, serving local families and communities for over 125 years in New Zealand. We are passionately committed to these families and 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
- 1.3 This submission has been prepared by the Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit (SPPU) of The Salvation Army. SPPU works towards the eradication of poverty by encouraging policies and practices that strengthen the social framework of New Zealand. The Unit provides solid social research and robust policy analysis, engaging with national opinion makers in politics, government, business, media and education.
- 1.4 This submission has been approved by Commissioner Donald Bell, the Territorial Commander of The Salvation Army's New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory.

2. THE SALVATION ARMY PERSPECTIVE

- 2.1 The Salvation Army's Positional Statement on Family affirms that:

...The family is a microcosm of the larger family of God, and the model for Christian community. It is the primary social relationship for the development of spirituality, intimacy, compassion, commitment and values. The Salvation Army, through all of its programmes and services, seeks to enrich family life while extending the services and support of a caring Christian community to all persons in need.²

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

² <http://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/about-us/position-statements/family/>

- 2.2 The Families Commission is currently undergoing a significant restructuring process. While we generally support these legislative changes, we also believe there are specific aspects of this legislation that need to be either clarified or adjusted.

3. RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC AMENDMENTS TO LEGISLATION

3.1 Clause 5

- 3.1.1 We believe that the move to add a new function for the Commission via cl 5 is a positive one.

- 3.1.2 However, we believe that this new monitoring, evaluating and research function is too broad. The social sector, in our opinion, is very large, complex and can encompass a huge range of areas and issues. For instance, SPPU focuses on five general areas of social indicators in our own research and social policy analysis: housing, crime and punishment, our children (and young people), social hazards, and work and incomes. Obviously, within these five areas, there are numerous other issues and sub-sectors that are all equally important and worthy of investigation. Subsequently, we believe that the term 'social sector' in cl 5 needs to be clearly defined in the principal Act to help define the parameters for the Commission in performing this new function.

- 3.1.3 We are also interested in how this monitoring, evaluation and research agenda will be specified by the Commission. Will there be opportunities for community groups like The Salvation Army to comment on or suggest research areas, topics or themes that would be valuable for our families and communities? Will there be opportunities for joint projects between community organisations and the Commission?

We wholeheartedly believe that research and evidence-based analyses are crucial for our future development as a nation. But too often research is confined to the work of universities and corporate groups; and grassroots and community research can sometimes be undervalued and marginalised by the Government and society. We believe that organisations like us can effectively contribute to this monitoring, evaluation and research agenda.

3.2 Clause 6

- 3.2.1 We believe the development and eventual publication of the Families Status Report under cl 6 is a positive move.

- 3.2.2 The Salvation Army has published our annual *State of the Nation* report since 2008. These reports are snapshots of social progress as we see it. In these reports, we review and measure the social progress (or regression) in our five key

work areas of social indicators to provide snapshots the social state of our nation, and to provide commentary on the issues and realities that we see our families and communities facing.

3.2.3 We implore the Government to continue to look at and consider **all** the information available to them. It is foreseeable that this Families Status Report will be comprehensive and heavily relied upon by the government in their development of social policy. But some community organisations already provide similar types of reports directly informed by their engagement with thousands of families across the country. While the Commission's report might focus more on its new functions set out in cl 5, it is unlikely that it will have the real life and community level data, stories and experiences that community organisations have access to. Decision and policy makers need to continue to value and analyse **all** available information.

3.3 Clause 7

3.3.1 We believe that the Commission must continue to engage with well-established organisations in the social sector as it outworks its functions set out in the new s 8A(a) to (e) under cl 7 of the Bill.

3.3.2 We believe that the functions in the new s 8A(b) and (d) must be performed in partnership with groups like The Salvation Army. We have a huge vested interest in ensuring that any research projects the Commission embarks on is truly relevant to both government agendas, but also directly relevant to the social situations that government and policy-makers might not be accurately informed of. Furthermore, we believe that any standard-setting by the Commission for monitoring and evaluation should have input from active and recognised organisations in the social sector that have long histories in contract management, delivery and evaluation.

3.4 New sections 18B and 18C

3.4.1 We are very interested in how this new Social Sciences Experts Panel is developed. Generally, we think this is a positive move.

3.4.2 In cl 18B(2) the panel's function is detailed. We believe that the membership of four experts (under cl 18C(1)) might not be a sufficient number of people to perform the possibly large workload that cl 18B(2) calls for. We call for a panel that might number between 6-8 people.

3.4.3 We also request greater clarity around the selection process of this panel. If, under cl 18C(2), the current Minister and

principal scientific advisor can recommend people for this panel, how can we ensure that this panel will be representative of the entire social sector and not just comprised of government officials or tertiary sector researchers? Will there be a process where groups or individuals can nominate people for this panel to the Minister? How will the voices and opinions of the social sector itself be represented during this process, particularly as this panel will be pivotal in framing the debate and discussion around the social sector and families in New Zealand?

4. CONCLUSION

We thank the Social Services select committee for the opportunity to comment on this Bill. We look forward to following the development and refocusing of the Commission, and also formulating ways to effectively collaborate with the Commission and its Social Sciences Experts Panel. Thank you once again, God bless.

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